

Managing Yourself

Introduction

In the previous session we looked at the meaning of management and at the nature of a manager's job. We saw that a manager is someone who gets things done through people.

An important aspect of managing people effectively is to make sure that you are managing yourself effectively. Managing yourself is the focus of Study Session 2. We will examine some of the challenges which managers face and suggest some ways of dealing with them, including:

- stress management
- time management
- delegation

These could also be called *management survival skills!*

MANAGING PRESSURE AND STRESS

The impact of stress

You will inevitably encounter pressures and stresses in your work. Some people "... find a degree of pressure [to be] positively motivating. They are able to respond to it energetically. Stress, on the other hand, does not produce a positive, energetic response. It is debilitating. It deprives people of their strength, their vitality, and their judgement. Its effects are negative ..." (MESOL, 2000: 47) It is important that managers should be able to distinguish between pressure and stress, both in themselves and in their staff, so that they can avoid stress while making the best use of pressure.

The following extract from Handy illustrates the potential effects of stress on a manager:

"... Stress heightens the dilemmas:
Stress shortens time-horizons, polarizes issues, exaggerates the importance of the present, makes difficulties into crises and inhibits creativity. Stress in fact is the one thing a person, and especially a senior

manager, should be without. And yet, for many a manager, stress is almost a battle honour. To succumb to it is weakness, to be without it is dishonourable. In a way, a heartless way perhaps, it is not the physical and mental outcomes of managerial stress that are the worries. If a man has a heart attack, develops an ulcer, has a nervous breakdown, he is himself a victim, but he is also incapacitated as a manager, prevented from causing hurt to others. It is the less respectable symptoms of stress, the general impairment of judgement and the tendencies listed at the beginning of this paragraph, which can really foul up organizations and the lives of others. Managers, as a social duty, must manage stress, not court it ...” (Handy, 1994: 334)

Another important point to recognise about stress is that:

“... Under excessive pressure managers are not the only ones to suffer. Managers experiencing stress may have little time to spend with their families and, when they do find time, they may be irritable and unable to relax ...” (MESOL, 2000: 47)

We will now look at some signs of stress, then at some of the causes of stress, and finally at ways of managing stress.

Recognising stress

A simple way of differentiating between pressure and stress is to think of pressure as something that comes from outside of yourself, and stress as the response you have when you are subjected to too much pressure.

“... Between these two extremes is a large intermediate area in which pressure merges into stress and this is the danger area. This is where you need constantly to be on the look out for tell-tale signs.

Some of the more obvious signs of stress are irritability and short temper, panic reactions, heavy reliance on tobacco, alcohol and other drugs such as tranquilizers, over-busyness, insecurity, an unwillingness to delegate. People may become difficult to talk to, morose, confused, unable to relax, insomniac. These can all be signs of other problems, but their presence should make you suspect stress, and should suggest the need to find relief before the stress leads to more damaging effects for the individual and the organization ...” (MESOL, 2000: 47)

TASK 1 - Looking for signs of stress

Are you displaying any of the signs of stress above? Now think about two of your colleagues: are they showing any signs of stress?

FEEDBACK

Simply by recognising the signs of stress and acknowledging stress as a reality, you have taken the first important step in the management of stress. The next step is to look for the causes of stress

Causes of work-related stress

There are many potential causes of stress in the workplace. We will examine these in two groups: role stress and other sources of stress. Role stress may also be part of other sources of stress, but as it is a very important problem in the workplace we will examine it separately first.

Role stress

We have already seen that a manager's job involves fulfilling a number of different roles. These roles and the way in which they fit together (or don't fit!) can be a significant cause of stress. This is called *role stress*. Some roles, such as being responsible for the work of others, are obvious causes of pressure, but depending on the capability and motivation of your staff, they may or may not cause stress.

FEEDBACK

- a) Role strain refers to negative pressure or stress resulting from tensions within or between the role/s we play.
- b) Role strain arises from:
 - Unclear role expectations (role ambiguity).
 - Too many roles being expected of you (role overload).
 - Too few roles being expected of you (role under-load).
 - Being unable to carry out the various roles which are expected of you in the same situation (role conflict).
 - Your expectations of your role being different from the expectations of the organisation (role incompatibility).

The concepts in brackets are some of the key concepts of Role Theory. Changes in the health system and poor relationships are not role stresses - they are situational stresses.

Now that you have clarified the concepts in Role Theory, apply this knowledge to your own situation:

TASK 3 - Identifying role stress

Think of some of the roles in your job and those of your two colleagues. Tick those role tensions (stresses) which you experience and those which you think they may experience. Write down an example of each.

| Role variables which lead to stress | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Do you experience it? | Does person B experience it? | Does person C experience it? |
| Role ambiguity | | | |
| Role incompatibility | | | |
| Role conflict | | | |
| Role overload | | | |
| Role under-load | | | |

FEEDBACK

By considering role stress as a possible source of overall stress, you have taken another constructive step in managing stress. Once you have identified role stress, you would need to try to address it with the individual and within the organisation. This will be discussed further later in the session.

Other sources of work-related stress

We have seen that issues surrounding roles are a potential source of stress. There are however other sources of work-related stress.

TASK 4 - Identifying the causes of your own stress

Besides the role stresses you have already identified, think about any other stresses that you are experiencing in your job and jot them down. Now compare them to the table below and use the empty rows to add any that are not mentioned here.

Use column A to tick the causes of stress in your job. Again think about the stresses faced by two colleagues and use columns B and C to identify their causes of stress. The categories are explained in the Handy extract which you have just read (Reading 1b). The situations marked with an asterisk are explained below.

| Some of the situations which lead to stress: | A | B | C |
|---|----------|----------|----------|
| Responsibility for the work of others | | | |
| Inadequate resources | | | |
| Lack of control over work | | | |
| Innovative functions* | | | |
| Integrative or boundary functions** | | | |
| Relationship problems | | | |
| Career uncertainty | | | |
| Sociability/unsociability | | | |
| Emotional sensitivity | | | |
| Flexibility/rigidity | | | |
| Constant change in the work environment | | | |
| Fill in any additional causes of stress below: | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

- * Innovative functions are functions where the manager is responsible for new, experimental programmes or functions, which therefore risk not working.
- ** Integrative or boundary functions are the functions of a manager which have to do with ensuring that the activities or functions of different groups or departments are integrated.

FEEDBACK

There are many potential causes of stress, but it will be helpful for you to be aware of some of the common causes of stress in the workplace, so that you can help both yourself and your staff to manage stress.

Dealing with stress

This section focuses on what can be done to assist in reducing stress levels, both in yourself and in those you manage. It also provides opportunities to practise your problem-solving skills. We will first look at Role Theory analysis as a strategy for organisations to use to reduce stress. Then we will examine strategies which individuals can apply to their jobs and lives.

TASK 5 - Finding ways of dealing with stress

Study this list of ways of dealing with stress. It should help you to think about how to help both yourself and others in whom you may have observed signs of stress.

Managers or staff under stress need to:

- Understand the value of co-operative solutions.
- Create stability zones for themselves.
- Get a better perspective on their problems.
- Be clear about their roles.
- Be clear about the activities which their roles demand of them.
- Balance the competing demands of their various roles.
- Have a range of responsibilities which matches their competences.

As a manager, you can influence the way in which your colleagues and staff deal with stress. Another important strategy for reducing stress is to manage your time more effectively.

TIME MANAGEMENT

For many managers, it seems that the work to be done just will not fit into the time available. This can lead to considerable stress and may seem almost impossible to change. The only way to deal with a situation like this is to put some time aside to review your time management practices and to find ways to use the time available more effectively.

On the other hand, you may be skilled in managing your time, in which case this section may provide you with a strategy to teach to your staff. Start off by assessing how well you manage your own time.

TASK 6 - Assessing how well you manage your time

- a) Is time-management a problem for you?
- b) Do you feel that you sometimes waste time?
- c) Do you feel that other people sometimes waste your time?
- d) Write down three examples of problems related to time?

FEEDBACK

If time management is a problem for you, you may have noted issues like being called upon to deal with minor issues, or never having enough time to concentrate properly on one important matter. You may have mentioned that even when you do plan the use of your time, you are unable to keep to the plan because of interruptions. You might have difficulty in dealing with things that compete for your time and attention. It is however important to identify the cause of your time management difficulties.

When you cannot see any way of completing what you have to do, you may feel helpless and overwhelmed. You may feel that this signifies a failure on your part: this is not necessarily true. Many managers have similar problems. Once again, identifying the problem and analysing its causes, are the first steps toward a solution.

The long-term tasks versus the immediate

Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.

Goethe

Many managers find that they are frequently distracted from work that needs a more long-term view by dealing with people and events that need immediate attention. If you do this often, there will be some important matters that you rarely have time to deal with and that can be neglected. The difficulty is in balancing the immediate matters with the long-term matters to make sure that you give enough time to both.

A time-management strategy

There are some practical ways in which you can help yourself to improve your use of time. One way is to start monitoring how long it usually takes you to do typical tasks in your job; then plan to include only the tasks that will fit into the time available. In other words, do not set yourself up for failure by planning to do more than is realistic.

Many managers would say that such planning seems almost impossible because there is no such a thing as a *normal* day: “How ever well you plan, additional things always crop up.” Although this will probably always be a problem for managers, it *is* possible to improve your control over your time.

You just need to find a way of managing your time which fits with your personality and your job. Start by trying out some of the well-used strategies described below.

You can develop your own approach to time management by following these steps:

- Analyse your current use of time at work and then reflect on the difference between your current time-usage and how you feel you should be spending your time.
- Decide what you want to change in your time management and how you will go about changing it.
- Implement your new time-management plan.
- Review your progress at intervals to ensure that your approach is still working
- This process of collecting information, planning, implementing (taking action) and reviewing the results is one that managers use for many of their activities.

Another way of looking at these four steps is to ask the questions:

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to go?
- How will I get there?
- How will I know I have arrived?

This series of steps is often referred to as *The Planning Cycle*.

Where am I now? (Analysing and reflecting)

Where do I want to be? (Planning)

How will I get there? (Implementing)

How will I know when I get there? (Monitoring/Evaluating)

DELEGATING EFFECTIVELY

Delegation is a key skill for managers. In reflecting on your use of time, you may have realised that you could delegate more. Delegation is the art of giving work to your staff in such a way that they are accountable to you for it. Although you have overall responsibility for the work, effective delegation makes it possible to reach objectives as a team in less time and with less stress.

Perhaps you may think that delegation is not appropriate in your situation or that it causes so much trouble that it is not worth trying. There are challenges associated with delegation, but there are also distinct advantages.

Advantages of delegation:

- Delegating some decision-making saves time for other duties.
- When work is spread over a large area, as in rural health work, the health workers on the spot must be able to make decisions according to circumstances.
- Delegation of responsibility saves long delays that occur when awaiting decisions from a central office or other distant authorities.
- Health workers who are allowed to make decisions enjoy their work more and become more knowledgeable and skilful i.e. It facilitates staff development.

Disadvantages:

- A leader who does not delegate properly may pass all the work on to the team members, leaving very little for her or himself to do.
- A leader may delegate decisions to people with insufficient experience or without sufficient explanation.
- Some staff may make it difficult to delegate by resisting delegation and this can cause interpersonal stresses.

There are a number of factors which make delegation successful:

- Deciding which tasks can be delegated.
- Deciding to whom a task can be delegated.
- Appropriate support.
- Appropriate monitoring.
- Delegating tasks at the right time.

SESSION SUMMARY

This session has highlighted a few issues you will face as a manager. You will inevitably encounter pressure and stress in your job, but it is possible to find ways of reducing stress, both for yourself and for others.

Managing time effectively is one of the most important skills a manager should develop. Poor time management all too commonly leads to stress. Analysing the way you are using your time now and planning how you will use your time in the future are both important aspects of developing time management skills.

Delegation is an essential element of management. It is a strategy for managing your time: it gives you more time for other activities. It is also an important means through which you can develop the capacity of your staff. However, when you delegate, you need to select the right person for the job, be absolutely clear about what you expect and how you will support and follow up. Remember that the final responsibility still remains with you.