CHAPTER 7

WORKER STRESS: A PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

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In the past, when workers -- whether manual, office, managerial, or professional -- have organized associations, unions, or clubs to provide mutual occupational assistance, they have traditionally paid attention to issues affecting their working conditions as well as to job security and salary. Yet, it is only in recent years that stress has surfaced as an issue affecting workers at every level and in every occupation. Even though intuitive awareness of stress in the workplace is virtually universal, the definitions and formal concepts of "stress" are still tentative and evolving. Hopefully, those of us who are concerned with workers and their stress problems can expect to see considerable evolution of programs and practices as these groups become more aware of the additional dimension that stress adds to traditional workplace concerns and as we all come to better understand what helps and what is needed.

This paper, addressed to those who work on stress problems, consists of observations derived from my efforts to design, implement, and evaluate stress education, action, and research projects. As I have tried to learn from others and from my own experience, these ideas and assumptions have seemed useful and important. They are offered here as hypotheses intended to stimulate discussion and further experimentation that will give us a fuller understanding of stress in the workplace and how we can identify effective ways to help workers deal with it.

The paper has three sections. In Section I, I raise questions about prevailing practices I think we should be addressing. These questions focus on the content and process of current stress programs, the way we are delivering services and dealing with clients, and, more generally, on the field and how we see ourselves. Section II is a brief case study of one project I worked on and some observations and learnings from that experience. In Section III, I offer some suggestions for or about possible next steps and invite more collaborative action.

CURRENT PRACTICES

CONTENT/PROCESS

What Should The Emphasis On Self-Responsibility Be?

I have found that many stress programs tell their participants implicitly -- and often explicitly -- that, "The stress lies in you and your reactions, not in your job (or other, external factors)." In

these workshops, participants are urged to believe that they are the sole creators of any stress they experience and that they have the power and capacity to control or eliminate "their stress".

Certainly, some stress is "internally generated", a function of the individual's values and emotional dynamics, or it is the immediate consequence of that person's voluntary behavior. And, we know that some effective psychotherapies put great emphasis on the acceptance of self-responsibility as a requisite for individual change. But, I believe that this position is blaming the victim, often inaccurately and usually dysfunctionally. Responsibility for stress is more complex a matter. "You cause your stress" is, at best, only a partial truth that leaves out important aspects of the issue, and there is real harm to people as a result.

The assertion that "people cause their own stress" ignores, for example, the body of research demonstrating that workers with little control over job demands will have greater stress than those with more control over events. And, that assertion obscures distinctions between the kinds of stressors that can be controlled by the individual and those that lie well beyond the control of the specific individual or the range of individual capacities to mediate stress effects. My concern is not about theoretical inaccuracy; the strategies for dealing with stressors beyond individual control can be quite different from what works with stressors that are controllable. The participants in our programs need accurate, balanced statements from us, especially about the interactions of individual perceptions with external reality.

Consider, for example, the cases of an autoworker who loses her job in a plant closing, a manager who is fired when his company is purchased by another, or an executive whose subordinate commits suicide. These people are experiencing major stressors, yet, in these cases, say, they are not essentially responsible for causing their situations. We know that it is virtually certain that they will experience feelings of guilt, and we know they must begin to understand the limits of their own responsibility before they can accurately assess and effectively deal with their respective situations. What is the effect of telling these three that all stress they experience is their fault? Any workshop that ignores the reality of external power may well be undermining its participants' efforts to develop realistic coping and change skills.

Blaming the victim for the problem is often unfair; blaming the stress victim is also often highly counterproductive in securing needed changes.

How Do We Identify The Sources Of Stress?

Stress is a significant issue and an increasing problem; as the rate of change in the world increases, individuals experience more and more stress. In the "right" circumstances for the "right" person, almost anything could be a source of stress. How should we categorize the varieties of internal and external experience that can be stressful? Clearly we cannot list everything but, how do we avoid omitting stressors of significance to the people with whom we work?
Part of my concern about this issue arises from my sense that there are at least two categories of stressors that many programs fail to adequately address: background stressors and stigmatized stressors.

We live in a time of high and increasing background levels in our personal and work stress situations; there is a lot happening that affects our sense of well-being. Because stress is a cumulative process, "background stressors" such as international tensions, socio-economic pressures, high unemployment, intergroup tensions, racial and sexual discrimination, objective concerns about aging, and the like form a baseline stress arousal level to which day to day job, family and individual stress adds. My guess is that we give these background stressors short shrift because we know relatively less about how to help people with these legitimate concerns.

The second category, stigmatized stressors, originate in taboo issues that many individuals either prefer not to think about or reasonably hesitate to raise in any but the safest or most intimate contexts, which only rarely will include relatively brief, occupational stress programs.

And, if these issues are difficult for participants to discuss, they are no less problematic for the practitioner. There may be many reasons why an external consultant, hired only to conduct a half-day stress workshop for a company, does not raise such volatile issues as, say, the labor-management climate, the effect of corporate work norms, or how to reduce the stress of sexual harassment. But we know that continuing evasion of such issues will further neither individual growth nor corporate productivity, and the existence of substantial hidden issues in a workshop undermines its effectiveness and can produce considerable stress for the workshop leader.

My concern is not only that certain categories of stressors are omitted from consideration and that, when they are left out, our efforts lose relevance, effectiveness, and, ultimately, acceptance. My concern is also that we may frequently fail to validate individual participants' stressors. Think back on the questions you've been asked during a workshop and recall how often people are, in effect, inquiring, "Is this issue that bothers me a genuine source of stress? Is my situation actually difficult or am I just not adequate?" The government worker whose agency faces a reduction

in force (RIF) and the corporate secretary who is a solo parent with young children deserve a better analysis of their stress situations than is possible if we do not help them recognize the issues.

We all share a responsibility to design programs that allow and help workers to develop a realistic understanding of all the elements contributing to a stressful situation. How do we best help program participants link their individual concerns to the complex nature of the world we live in if we collude, even unintentionally, with evasion of critical sources of stress?

How Do We Identify The Strategies For Dealing With Stress?

One way to classify the strategies for dealing with stress is to identify them by the kind of change that is their primary objective: "personal" strategies attempt to make changes in the individual, "interpersonal" strategies would change the relationships between individuals, and "external" strategies aim to change aspects of the environmental or organizational situation. Most of our current stress programs focus almost exclusively on coping skills and thus target "personal" changes first and foremost. Some attention is given to the "interpersonal" area but "external" change is rarely even mentioned . Moreover, we usually deal with change strategies for individuals to effect and give little attention to collaborative efforts.

To be sure, individual self-change seems to be the handiest place to start dealing with stress. But, it seems to me that changes in individuals occur more readily and with greater effect when there are also supportive changes taking place with others and in the general situation; and, that the interaction of these efforts is highly synergistic. In view of the difficulty that our current programs are having in achieving sustained improvements, we cannot afford to neglect whole categories of strategies and the need to use all three categories interactively.

Moreover, our choices of which strategies we teach program participants have psychological, legal and "political" implications that many of us may not intend; some of these issues will be examined below.

How Can We Effectively Reduce Self-Blaming?

My experience is that an extremely high percentage of our program participants tend to blame themselves in some fundamental way for the problems they are experiencing. ("If only I had listened to...If I had been a more serious student...If I just hadn't...If I were smarter...etc....then I wouldn't be in this fix.") This self-blame undermines self-esteem and can block learning and change.

We who provide stress services didn't create this situation but I think we sometimes unwittingly contribute to it. Our assertions about "...taking personal responsibility" are likely to significantly reinforce this victim self-blaming for many program participants and undermines the skill-learning processes we propose. Our almost exclusive focus on individual self change as the strategy for dealing with stress also conveys a powerful message to many that "If you were only better, you wouldn't have all this stress." We may mean "better" in terms of skill; we may be heard to mean "a better person".

There are two ways in which I would like to have more effective skills for helping people reduce such self-blame so they can increase their clarity about their stress situation and how to improve it. First, I would like to be better able to help workshop participants identify "external" stressors and collaborative change strategies without their feeling overwhelmed. Second, I wish we had better techniques for empowerment and building self-esteem that could be used with small groups and general audiences.

Are Our Methods Too Often Incongruent With Our Objectives?

Stress is a consequence of the perception of change; yet, our programs would have participants initiate additional change to modify some aspect of their stress situation. My impression is that we rarely advise participants that stress programs are stressful, nor do we obtain their informed consent before involving them in potentially stressful activities. I believe we could build more supportive and recuperative measures into the stress program itself.

Moreover, the changes we seek to help people make are rarely superficial or trivial to accomplish. Typically, our programs' participants want complex, interrelated changes in all three strategy areas. Such changes usually take time and the development of a variety of skills. Also required are the belief that change is possible, a commitment to staying with the learning/change process, and the adaptation of general learnings to one's own situation.

These factors indicate the need for self-directed learning, for workshop dynamics based on peer-consultation, for "discovery" techniques, and for us to take "facilitative" rather than "expert" roles. We are needed to help people become empowered at self care, to build on what they already know how to do, as they add skills that they choose from needs that they have assessed. Do we often think that we have to change -- rather than help them examine -- their priorities and lifestyle choices?

SERVICE DELIVERY

How Often Are Our Programs Oversold or Overly Ambitious Efforts?

I would like to see a greater contrast between the way consumer commodities are sold and the way that professional stress programs are marketed. Sometimes it seems that many stress programs are marketed like the products of fast food franchises, with promises of easy appetizing answers served up in quick fixes. Of course, many program sponsors are more careful with their language and stay within the hyperbole that is accepted for selling management training programs. But generally, I am uneasy that the language of "stress management" marketing efforts frequently implies results that are not achievable given the time and resources available. Consequently, stress programs are seen as a passing, largely past, fad in many circles, or -at best- as one component in health/fitness education, even while carefully research is adding weight to the issue.

The other side of this coin is the well intentioned effort to include too much. My experience is that many of us are frustrated by the contrast between program participants' needs and the results we can achieve in the time available to us. Apparently I am not alone in feeling a strong pressure to cram, to plan to do more than is realistic which, in turn, can make me try to rush the pace of learning activities, and thus turn experiential exercises into exhortatory lectures. I think that when this happens, learning is reduced, not increased, and program participants experience even more stress.

Can Stress Programs Have Negative Side Effects?

The stress response directly links individual personal experience to changes in group dynamics and institutional effectiveness. I am concerned that programs seeking to change the way people operate in these influential activities can be expected to have potential side effects. For example, I have already identified my concern that our programs will increase some participants' stress (even though we may decide that this effect is an acceptable consequence when the workshop significantly increases most participants' skills for dealing with stress).

But, what about other possibilities? Does the victim-blaming effect, when it occurs, reduce participant self-esteem or otherwise impair learning? To what extent does the selection of instructional approach affect individual empowerment? What are the specific consequences when organizational practices are a major source of distress and we provide a workshop to get individuals to change themselves instead? As professionals, we need to investigate the answers to questions like these, and to make necessary trade-offs consciously. And, when there are risks of significant consequence, we should have the informed consent of program participants before we proceed.

Is Access To Stress Services Too Limited?

My impression is that occupational stress programs are mostly available to the relatively affluent; this has two consequences I would like to see more widely examined. First, because we know that there is as much, if not more, stress for those further down the occupational ladder, access to stress programs must be improved if we hope to increase individual and organizational outcomes like health and productivity and to decrease those like accidents, and alcohol, drug and mental health disorders in the workplace.

Second, our approaches to designing and implementing stress programs seem skewed in both overt and less obvious ways. For example, existing programs place moderate to heavy reliance on pencil and paper exercises that are most useful to people who are used to working with written, standard English. Or, the language or imagery of the print and audiovisual materials used in the program may significantly miscarry with participants from some socio-cultural group. Such sensibilities are directly related to the self-identified stressors that significantly affect many people. Educational programs in both the academic and vocational spheres have already learned the necessity for recognizing and respecting such issues in seeking to be effective.

Do Our Programs Have Limited Functional Utility?

We who see stress as a significant issue and would help others deal with it have both the opportunities and drawbacks that accompany the initial stages of any important effort; there is adventure in being a pioneer but there are no roadmaps on how to proceed. We need not be defensive about the fact that our efforts are initial, exploratory, and experimental; but, it would help to be clear about where we are and how far we've gotten. For example, most psychotherapists require months of hour-long individual interventions to secure individual change, so half-day stress workshops can hardly be faulted for not being able to make 12 to 30 people "all better" or "all effective". As we acknowledge that our current efforts have limited functional utility we will be able to identify and specify what we can do that works in helping others secure changes that they need to deal with the stresses in their lives. As professionals, we need, at least, to build research/evaluation efforts into our program presentations.

SELF-IMAGE

Is Stress More Than "Health Promotion"?

In the marketplace of programs, stress is becoming a subject within health promotion, included in the list of other topics with nutrition, exercise, and the like. If stress were simply a matter of individual coping skills, this conceptual structure would be reasonable. But, in many stress situations, the appropriate change objective is to

eliminate the stressor, not to adjust to it. The strategy for making required changes then provides both a defining context and necessary elements for coping and, when needed, for increasing coping skills. If we limit "stress programs" to what can be called "health promotion", we may omit important issues about stress and create problems for practitioners as well as participants.

Consider, for example, stress due to racial/sexual discrimination in employment. The range of "remedies", depending on a myriad of factors, might involve elements of private and public protest, self-help, governmental assistance, and legal action. These activities paradoxically can provide the individual with more support and additional resources while increasing the need for personal help and greater resources. Moreover, such activities provide a context for the individual's life, defining the ends and values of adjustment, the goals and means for coping.

The practitioner who tries to teach internal coping when external change is required may be judged by others to be expressing a position of hostility and/or opposition to needed changes. Specifically, the consultant hired by management to conduct a stress workshop may well be viewed as anti-worker and/or anti-labor if he or she presents stress as originating in the individual solely without reference to working conditions, rules and th equality of supervision; the practitioner's actual motives and attitudes will be moot.

How Do We Deal With Stress As A Workplace Issue?

Stress practitioners recognize that stress is not simply about psychological concerns, that the stress response integrates mind, body and behavior. Then many of us attempt to use stress programs in the workplace as though we were conducting value-free efforts that should be welcomed by everyone. But stress is a contentious issue, especially in the workplace. Should not stress programs intended for workplace use recognize and be designed to deal with essential issues, such as safety and health and the quality of management for example?

Stress creates safety and health hazards. National policy expressed in federal law requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Both employers and employees have specified rights and responsibilities that are supposed to be enforced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the courts. In recent years, in a growing list of states, the courts have awarded settlements and/or worker's compensation to employees for the effects of stress on the job and knowledgable observers expect such litigation to grow rapidly. Similarly, further research can be expected to more directly link specific supervisory practices with needless stress and certain work rules with unnecessarily decreasing worker control, thereby increasing stress. So, actionable stressors may occur in working

conditions, terms of employment, or the skills and practices of management. Stress programs for such workplaces will have to deal with these issues.

In this context, a program teaching workers only coping (but not change) skills could be construed, variously, as incomplete (leaving out strategies to change workplace conditions rather than workers), incompetent (unaware of workplace realities), biased (systematically placing the burden of change on the employee rather than on the employer), and/or illegal (making workers "correct" conditions that are the employer's responsibility). Of course, the validity of these charges depends on the specific situation... and the perspective of the observer. But, the validity of such charges would not depend on the intentions of the practitioner nor on the excellence of the program in teaching coping skills.

The point here is that each workplace must be approached as a complex "society" with a variety of subcultures each having its own perceptions and interests with respect to what stress means, what problems it poses and who should act to deal with it. And that our efforts to help must take a systems perspective of the full reality of that workplace/society.

Are Professionals Viewed As "Helpers" In The Workplace?

My experience is that many in the helping professions (not just stress practitioners) have an image of themselves and their practice that is considerably different from the way they are viewed by many workers on the lower ranks of workplace hierarchies. This discrepancy impairs communication, increases interpersonal distance, and reduces the effectiveness of persons and programs. Two stereotyped comments may help to illuminate the cross cultural problems involved:

The professional: "My purpose is to help people, to do good. Of course, I also want to do well, but I've a right to it, earned with years of expensive study. My field is constantly improving because of our commitment to quality, and we police ourselves pretty well. By and large, people get what they earn; merit pays. I like winners and I work to think like one. I"ll help those who try."

The blue collar worker: "I turn to professionals only when I have to, when there's sickness or legal trouble or some kind of problem. If you get a good one, that's ok but most of them... you just take a chance they can help. If not you're probably out of luck, because they stick up for each other. They make more money in less time than anybody I ever knew. (I work hard but I'll never make that kind of money, not from working.) People like that don't know much about life around here and I guess they don't think much of people like us."

Professionals delivering stress programs and services must expect to work with diverse groups of people and will require considerable cross-cultural skills and sensitivities to be able to function effectively. "Workers" here meanS all people who earn their living regardless of the nature of the work they do or the social status their work has. The case study described in the next section illustrates some of the points raised in the previous section and offers some observations and learnings from the experience.

THE JOB STRESS PROJECT: A CASE STUDY

Background

The Job Stress Project grew out of efforts by the Graphic Arts International Union (GAIU) to develop a safety and health education program for its membership, a cross section of the more than one million men and women who work in the U.S. and Canadian printing and publishing industry. GAIU began this five year curriculum development and pilot testing project in 1979 with a survey of interests and concerns about safety and health expressed by a sample of workers, local union leaders, and employer representatives. This survey identified "mental health in the workplace" as a major concern and a unit on job stress was developed and became one of the eight 3-hour sessions that now make up the course, Safety and Health Awareness and Action Program for Employees and Employers (SHAPE). During the pilot testing of SHAPE, and in subsequent presentations, participants requested that more time and attention be given to the topic of job stress and asked for more specifics about what could be done about stress within their industry.

At that time, the issue of job stress was a new one for both labor and management decision-makers. Neither labor, GAIU and other unions, nor management, the Printing Industry Association (PIA), had adopted policy statements or undertaken action specifically addressing job stress as an industry-wide problem. There was no industry-specific assessment of the stress situation, no clear sense of how the industry's policymakers--both labor and management— viewed the situation: Did they see stress as a significant issue? What information about stress and its effects would they need to have to make policy and take action to improve the stress situation? And, what would foster joint labor-management consideration of the issue?

Of course, there were a variety of efforts related to stress -- such as employee assistance programs — that were initiated by various local unions and/or employers. But, these programs, however valuable, did not add up to anything like a comprehensive stress program applicable to the industry as a whole and adequate to the problems that seemed present. Neither existing programs nor professional guidelines offered the SHAPE staff much help answering the questions

that workers were posing: What are the levels and sources of distress in our industry? What abatement action and educational programs will be most useful and relevant to workers from the shop floor to the executive penthouse? What steps will increase awareness of stress issues and encourage management and union leaders to deal with the prevailing stress situation? What practical help can "stress management" courses offer individuals beyond relaxation techniques and sermons on lifestyles?

The Job Stress Project was conceived to achieve several objectives simultaneously: to assess the stress situation in the graphic communications industry; to identify next steps necessary to improve the current situation; to increase the leadership's awareness of stress issues and needed action; and, to increase the SHAPE program's ability to support stress evaluation, planning and action. The project received financial and intellectual support from Elliot Liebow, then Chief of the Center for Work and Mental Health, National Institute of Mental Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

Project Plan

The Job Stress Project was designed with the long range goal of improving the industry's stress situation and the specific purpose of encouraging action to that end. The basic premise of the project was that the people responsible for action needed answers to two questions: What is the current job stress situation in the industry and what can be done about it? Accordingly, the planned outcomes were to: 1) identify the stress information needs of workers, union leaders, and managers; 2) assess and call attention to the job stress situation in the industry as perceived by workers, union, and management; 3) test the feasibility of labor-management cooperation in dealing with job stress; 4) provide labor and management policymakers with relevant options for action based on workers, union, and management views; 5) increase the GAIU's capacity to plan and implement activities that help people deal with both industry-specific and general job stress situations; and, 6) increase the number of persons actively dealing with the industry's stress situation.
The action research paradigm -- an ongoing replication of cycles of evaluation, planning, and action -- offers a strategy for acting and for learning; so the project was structured as action research to simultaneously initiate improvements in the stress situation while learning from the process how to improve future efforts.

1) To test joint participation from the outset, a Project Advisory Group composed of the industry's labor and management leaders was to be established in each of the two cities designated as project sites; a third, National Advisory Group was also established in Washington, D.C. made up of elected officers of GAIU, corporate representatives, and PIA (Printing Industries of America) officials.

2) Individual interviews were to be conducted with the members of these three groups to determine their awareness of, interest in, and views on stress and stress issues within the industry. Also, each Project Advisory Group's members nominated the participants for a stress workshop series conducted in that city.

3) A series of six workshops was to be held over a one month period in each of the project's site cities; the participants made up a five-way cross section of the industry in that city (consisting of representatives from each of the three major production areas, from the union, and from management). The six,three-hour workshops had dual objectives: to test an experiential approach to educating workers about stress and how to deal with it, and,simultaneously, to involve these participants as researchers to help identify work-specific information about the extent, nature, and effects of stress and the action needed to foster both performance and satisfaction in their respective workplaces.

4) The original project plan was to reinterview the industry leadership about their reactions to the ideas surfaced among the leadership as a whole, their peers, and obtained from the workshop participants, their constituents. Actually, this step was never taken because the available funding would not reach to this effort and federal support for this kind of inquiry became unavailable at that time.

Action Research Strategy

The action research model provided the strategy for simultaneously starting both efforts, the effort to assess the stress situation and the effort to initiate useful, planned change in that situation. The strategy consisted of identifying key figures in the industry's "power structure" in each city, and at the national level, and interviewing them about their perceptions of the situation and what is required for action. Because there was no acknowledged stress problem to start with, it is extremely unlikely that the industry's top leadership would have attended a meeting on the subject. But none of them refused the request for an interview, and the interview allowed them to informally explore the subject of stress while providing the interviewer with clear information about what would be required to increase their individual and collective interest.

The action research model differs significantly from other research models which appear to rely heavily upon outside researchers who come into a workplace setting to measure, tabulate, and report on phenomena--all too often without even the informed consent of the workers being studied, let alone the active participation of the research subjects. In this project, the ongoing participation of the

population being studied was actively solicited, encouraged, and supported from the inception to the conclusion of the effort.

It was hoped that by involving workers (including management workers) as action researchers, the study or project would be more likely to produce insights into the stress situation in the industry, more likely to identify practical remedies, and more likely to result in "ownership" of the findings thereby increasing commitment to take action to improve the stress situation. Moreover, by this approach, the external researcher/change agent would model the behaviors needed to create and extend the collaborative, integrative, and mutually supportive structures that are needed for stress-ameliorative changes.

This action research project used the series of experiential, equal-status workshops simultaneously as a research and instructional mechanism both because of GAIU's experience and the researcher's approach and concerns (indicated by the preceding sections of this paper). The SHAPE staff and the Vice President in charge of SHAPE had already concluded that: 1) Prevailing approaches to "stress management" were inadequate and often objectionable because little or no emphasis was placed on the action needed to bring about environmental and organizational change, 2) Such approaches tend to "blame the victim" by focussing largely on the individual's ability, or lack of ability to handle work situations. Then, when the worker reacts in a less than adaptive manner to the presence of stressors in the environment, he or she is blamed for the inability to function properly and bears all the burden for change.

To get a fresh, less limited perspective on the situation the researcher and the Union wanted to look through the eyes of those who make up and lead the industry; to carry out an assessment, those in the industry would both need to know about and, therefore, learn about stress. This suggested the sequence of workshops which were conducted.

Interviews and Workshops

The Job Stress Project's primary activities consisted of forming the advisory panels, interviewing panel members, recruiting the workshop participants, and conducting the workshops.

The national-level advisory panel was made up of all the nationally elected officers of Graphic Arts International Union (GAIU) together with representatives from the Printing Industries Association (PIA) who were suggested by GAIU; PIA interviewees added additional names to the list. Similarly, the presidents of GAIU Local Unions 289 in Detroit and 285 in Washington were asked to form advisory panels

representing the industry locally. The members of the three advisory panels of influential labor and management leaders were queried on three aspects of job stress in the industry:

> The Current Situation: Is job stress a significant issue in the industry? What causes it? What is the nature of it? How do labor and management view it?
>
> The Preferred Situation: What are desirable goals for long range improvement? What next steps would be useful? What will affect labor-management cooperation dealing with stress?
>
> This Project: What do labor and management representatives need to know about stress? What questions would you like this project to answer? What would you, personally, like to know about stress?

Participants for the workshops were nominated by the advisory panel members in their respective cities and were invited by letter from the SHAPE office. The participant lists were formed by the Director of the Graphic Arts Institute in each city; these Institutes are jointly trusteed, training facilities operated by labor and management to provide the highly skilled workers needed for the local industry. The 15 to 20 participants in each city were selected to comprise a five-way cross section of the industry: some of the advisory panel members made up the union and the management contingents; three groups of workers came from the preparatory, the press and the bookbinding/finishing components of the industry.

Six workshops were conducted in each city, arranged as three pairs of workshops held on consecutive days with some two weeks between the pairs. Participants were asked to commit themselves to attending all six in their invitation. The workshops were held in the facilities of the Graphic Arts Institutes. In one city the workshop was held in a classroom; in the other, the tables were arranged between two commercial presses (not then in operation!).

Workshop I, a three-hour evening session was largely devoted to two topics, reviewing the project's origins, plans, and intentions, the expectations of and for participants; and an introductory review of the dynamics and consequences of the stress reaction. The purpose was to clarify the project as intended, recruit wholehearted participation, modify plans as initially required, and begin with some shared understanding of basic stress facts.

Workshop II, another three-hour session, was held the following night. Participants worked in plenary and in small groups to plan how they would study and observe, in themselves and among colleagues, the existence, process, and effects of stress in their respective workplaces. The purpose was for each participant-researcher to

develop a plan that would be both realistic and comfortable for him or her to implement; sector-groups met to help each other, but no one was asked to modify his or her plans to fit with others'.

In the following two weeks, participants carried out their data collection plans. Some had opted to interview coworkers, others to observe. Some chose to openly collect and record data about critical incidents, interviewee comments, personal observations, and the like; others chose to collect and record their findings unobtrusively. Some developed specific questions, topics for lunch table discussion, or checklists of issues; others prepared for a more informal process.

Workshop III was again a three hour session, held on a Friday night, and devoted entirely to participants' reports of their experiences, the data they had collected and the conclusions about stress conditions they had drawn. The purpose was to develop a detailed assessment of the stress situation in the industry as reflected by the worksites they had sampled.

Workshop IV occupied the better part of the next day, and was devoted to strategies for dealing with stress. "Samplers" were presented to simulate the ways that the popular coping techniques are taught, from relaxation exercises to assertiveness training. Strategies for interpersonal change and for "external" change (in environmental/institutional conditions) were introduced in addition to the usual, self change strategies; the discussion topics included brief reviews of contract provisions that affect stress conditions and some techniques for social change. The purpose of this workshop was to introduce participants to the wide spectrum of approaches to eliminating stressors, reducing effects, or recovering from strain.

In the following 10 to 12 days, participants were asked to consider the applicability of these approaches and to look for opportunities that would test their utility on the job or at home. Of course, participants had only been introduced to a sampling of tools, so the question posed to them was not "Which of these tools will work in your situation?" but rather, "Which do you think merit a further look, possibly a try?"

Workshop V was another three-hour, weeknight session focussed on participants' observations about strategies/tools for dealing with stress and their possible relevance to the workplace and to workers' lives. The purpose of this workshop was to assess which approaches to stress seemed relevant for the industry, which seemed inappropriate, and what more might be useful.

Workshop VI concluded the workshop series the following evening with a three hour discussion of the participants' conclusions about stress conditions in the industry and their recommendations for its

amelioration. The purpose of this session was to formulate the participants' conclusions for presentation to the industry's union and management leadership.

Results

Individual interviews proved a successful means for creating initial awareness and interest in the topic of stress among the industry's leaders. None of those who were asked declined to be interviewed, even several who objected to the project. (One manager said it was a waste of money because "stress cannot be studied scientifically"; a union officer believed the project defamed workers by implication. "Our people aren't crazy.") Virtually all verified that they would not initially have attended a meeting called to discuss the topic.

The most intriguing single finding was the almost unanimous agreement that stress is a significant issue in the industry. But each of the union and management leaders also believed that he or she was virtually the only one who would "admit" it.

One union staff member initially denied that there was any significant stress and, some time later in the interview, paused abruptly while talking about another topic, sat quietly for a moment, and then said, "You know, as we've been talking, I've been remembering the people I worked with when I was a shop steward. And, as I see their faces, I remember the specific problems and concerns they had. I can't believe I told you there was no stress."

The manager of a plant operating around the clock, seven days a week also initially denied that stress was a problem. "Oh no, we've got good working relations here." Later in the interview he said that several times a week he would go out on the plant roof where he could privately hold onto a chimney and scream "to relieve some tension".

Although the industry's leaders believe the problem is significant, they believe themselves to be isolated in this perception and view the issue of stress as stigmatizing and as an unavoidable aspect of work. They are individually hopeful that unions and management could work together on the issue, at least initially, but, anticipate that stress raises difficult issues and, potentially, significant differences in vested interests, so far as those interests are now recognized.

The original plan to feedback the results of the interviews to the advisory panels and then reinterview their members were not implemented; adequate funding was not available and other activities in the SHAPE program had higher priority.

In the absence of models for large scale, comprehensive stress programs that can deal with workplace issues, and given the absence of

peer, professional, and public pressures to deal with the issue, it is hardly surprising that the institutional leaders of the industry generally have no agenda for action.

The workshops proved to be educationally effective, productive for stress assessment purposes, and a useful process for initiating joint labor-management activity.

As an exploratory effort, the project was useful. As a stress consciousness raising process, it produced results and showed promise. However, as the initial step in a self-generating, sustained dynamic to develop an industry-wide stress services program, it proved insufficient.

The project elicited data about stress, shows the potential for involving workers as researchers and for using research as an empowerment process. It provides a foundation that can be built on to get both leadership and rank-and-file attention and involvement with stress issues. It operated as a mutual labor-management effort without compromising the collective bargaining process.

The project planners underestimated the time, attention and resources that this effort would require so that reasonable threshold levels of results were not achieved and key questions remain unanswered about the project as a way to begin a larger, more comprehensive program. Consequently, the project is only of academic and intellectual interest.

IDEAS TOWARD IMPROVEMENT

Many times when I read formal papers, I suspect that a report of the author's speculations after doing the work could be more useful and interesting to me than the more certain, formal conclusions. In this section I identify some suggestions, speculations about improving stress programs and related professional practices derived both from my experiences and other people's work. I have not attempted to identify formal research that would justify or invalidate these specific conclusions although I know there are general findings that provide mixed support for these ideas. For me, these conclusions represent working hypothesis that merit discussion and testing.

CONTENT/PROCESS

Clarify The Physical Aspect Of The Stress Response

Many people, men especially, seem to think of stress as though it is the consequence of inadequate emotional control. In this view, experiencing stress indicates at least weakness in the individual, perhaps even mental illness. Because of this, I started including in introductory workshops a brief, but detailed, description of the

physiology of the stress response, the range of anatomical structures involved and some initial consequences. In this presentation, I point out that it is not necessary to remember any of these specific details to recognize that: the stress response is a physical fact (not "just" a set of feelings), that it is involuntary, that it has widespread effects throughout the body, and that its consequences are simultaneously physical, mental, and behavioral.

Of course, this cognitive information will not, by itself, modify highly socialized values about "strength", improve popular attitudes toward mental illness or change participants' behaviors of self-care. But it does appear to command attention, to be persuasive in making stress "real", to be required information for understanding stress, and to validate the importance of learning more about stress and of dealing with it.

Validate The Stressors Presented

Of necessity, we deal with stressors in categories, either very general ones like "objective" or "subjective" stressors, or more specific issues, like "problems with my children" or "lack of appreciation from my supervisor". Stress assessment instruments also must deal in categories, using representative examples to cover the range of potential individual concerns. I have become concerned about some effects of discussing stressor categories and, as one result, have decided, tentatively, not to use stress assessment instruments in introductory workshops.

My concern arose as I worked with an increasingly wide range of people. I became aware of a pattern that had no apparent relation to the education or social status of workshop participants: when participants were asked to discuss the major stressors in their lives some would identify a very specific, obviously stressful situation and ask whether that could be a source of stress.

This frequent phenomenon puzzled me because I have never met an adult who needed a definition of stress or lacked an answer to the question "What are the major sources of stress in your life?" So what were these people really asking? The conclusion that makes most sense to me is that these people needed to have validation of their concerns, to be assured that their stress is significant stress. This validation appears to be a prerequisite for many people learning how to deal with stress; it is as though they were choosing between two conclusions: "This should not be an issue, the problem is some flaw in me, and because this is my fault, I'm stuck with having the problem because I'm not a better person." or "This is a real problem, so there might be something that can be done about it, something that I can do about it."

My belief is that this is a subtle but pivotal issue for most people. After all, we are dealing with affective not cognitive concerns where the specifics have great significance to the men and women involved.

So, why not use stress assessment instruments for general distribution or for introductory workshops? My sense is that, until program participants have made a conscious, informed decision relatively free of self-blaming to deal with stress in a manner different than they were before, and have begun to identify and accept their own concerns as significant, they are more likely to have their perception of their stressors invalidated by not having these particular stressors appear on the printed list of questions than they are to appreciate the sampling subtlety involved. There are useful stress assessment instruments available; I prefer to introduce them to people who are actively working to improve their stress situation rather than to use them as a warning or awareness tool for "beginners".

Use Adult Education, Discovery Techniques

Learning to deal with stress is learning to deal differently with life. Clearly, there is no single starting point, no specific path that will work for everyone, not even for many. We each have individual concerns and awareness, varying goals and priorities, and different strengths and resources, including learning styles. Also, our clients will choose their own change strategies almost regardless of the value of our professional advice or the dramatic quality of our exhortations. Significant change in emotionally charged areas will rarely result simply from rational planning and cognitive instruction even when we are technically right about what others should do and how they should do it.

So, it appears clear to me that stress programs will be most successful to the extent they are individualized, experiential in training design, and approach the participant as a self-directed learner while enhancing his/her capability to function in that manner.

My experience in learning to use such adult education approaches is that vastly more is involved than learning some new "techniques" or organizing learning activities in a different way. In addition to learning new practices, I was -- and still am -- required to reconsider my role in facilitating other people's learning, to reevaluate my expectations about what can be accomplished and who is responsible for what in the learning process, to become aware of my behavior and learners' behaviors in new ways, and to change some of my own "teaching" practices that would be accepted, indeed, taken for granted in most instructional programs focussed on cognitive learning.

Model Desirable Behaviors

One method that I use to improve my workshop designs and facilitation is to require myself to model the most essential behaviors that I understand the program participants to want. The difficulties I then encounter help me appreciate what, specifically, the participants face and provide me with an assessment of what assistance and support from me might be useful to them. Of course, there are other advantages of modelling behaviors: the workshop outcomes are clearer; participants have a standard of comparison for their own skills; and the learning experience has greater sensory richness.

Some of the behaviors that I attempt to model in stress programs seem to be generic; the following are illustrative: being a learner; being open to others' experience of gender, "race", age, and the like; and maintaining and acting in collaborative and equal-status relationships. Because we are still learning how to improve stress situations, I openly approach each workshop or consultation as an opportunity to learn from participants or clients about what works for them, from them. My experience is that people are generally pleased to cooperate and many report they find this approach helpful in a variety of ways: they are reassured that their experience is an appropriate source of learning and has wider applicability, that an authority figure sees them as capable of making significant change, and that they retain control of the pace and direction of any changes.

Because human experience is such a rich source of useful learning and because interpersonal conflict and intergroup tensions are important factors in so many stress situations, I openly explore with program participants the variations in their experience due to individual differences such as gender, "race", and age. My experience is that people are interested in each other's experience and can derive important insights for themselves from personal sharing especially when a safe, non-defensive climate is created and maintained .

Stress demonstrates the general, subtle, yet pervasive ways in which we influence each other. Specifically, it shows that there are important, tangible effects on each of us if we do not feel connected to and included with others in a valued and supported manner. Yet our society places great emphasis on being individual and on solitary accomplishment and rarely affirms cooperative effort and interdependence. So I work to create and maintain collaborative and equal-status relationships with all persons involved in a stress workshop.

Specifically, in a workshop, this means a myriad of specific behaviors like: taking time to have everyone present introduced; openly identifying my interests and objectives and asking others about theirs; reviewing the proposed agenda and contracting on time matters; adopting an empathetic perspective toward any participant's

contribution; using small taskgroups as a basic design element; incorporating consensual decision procedures and allowing adequate time to use them; explaining the rationale for each and every activity as part of giving the group directions; and respecting participants' needs that lie outside the workshop; to name but a few. My experience is that actions like these are rarely commented on by participants but that their cumulative effect is profound and can set the stage for dramatic and effective learning.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Ethical Marketing Requires Client Education

Most people are used to educational programs which identify the correct answers and best ways to proceed. Many of our prospective clients believe that competent professionals will have a "cure" for stress. I take it as my responsibility to determine whether this is the case and I believe I am protecting my own interests when I clarify with the client what can and cannot be done at the level of effort being considered.

In addition to overestimating what can be achieved, some clients may want a stress (coping skills) workshop as a way to deal with what I would consider an organizational or personnel issue or as an attempt to circumvent the collective bargaining process. Sometimes the solution the client wants to buy doesn't match my view of the problem. Again, I actively seek to clarify these issues because I cannot afford to be identified as a provider of ultimately ineffective services. And, as a person seeking to reduce human distress, I am unwilling to act in any way that impairs the collective bargaining process. In my experience, it is usually necessary for the practitioner to take the initiative to clarify the outcomes the client seeks, say, by sponsoring a workshop and what other expectations the client may have about the content or approach to be taken. Depending on the complexity of these expectations, I have found that I may need to gather data about the situation which will be fed back to the prospective client. The process of contracting to provide stress services to or through an organization may need to be an educational or planning intervention in its own right.

Use Client-Driven Strategies

I have felt the considerable impatience of some workshop participants and organizational policy makers with our inability to "cure" stress; I understand the pressure that exists to exercise professional responsibility by using our expertise to diagnose problems and to use client-driven strategies.

I have felt the considerable impatience of some workshop participants and organizational policy makers with our inability to "cure" stress; I understand the pressure that exists to exercise professional responsibility by using our expertise to diagnose problems and to prescribe a regimen that helps. Yet, my experience is that we are rarely able to obtain significant and lasting changes in the stress situation of persons or organizations and institutions simply by directive techniques. Such changes occur only when the principal actors have great ownership of the idea, a personal investment in the outcomes, and sufficient skill and resources. We cannot and need not "give" these to our clients. But, we can support their efforts and help them obtain skills needed to learn from and change their situation.

Take A Systems Approach

Stress is a complex dynamic simultaneously involving each person at a number of levels including being an ethnic group member, a family member, a worker, an individual, a spiritual being, and a constellation of bio-physical processes. Thus a systems approach is required to change stress situations; e.g. a multi-level scope of effort is required, the change objectives must be derived from a data-based analysis of the current situation and a coordinated strategy for starting and completing the project must be agreed to by all the major stakeholders involved.

Work With Joint Labor Management Efforts

I have two, interrelated reasons for suggesting that, to the maximum extent possible, we should undertake our pilot, experimental, developmental, and research projects in worksites with the active involvement of both management and labor representatives. One reason is that I believe this situation contains the best potential for successful projects and useful outcomes and the second is that I believe this situation reflects significant values for stress work.

My experience in working with organizations and groups on both action and research projects is that the more my clients are clear about the outcomes they want and committed to achieving results, the more effective my work can be. In practice, this means that there is a body of people in the client system who are interested in the project, stay current with and support it, lending assistance and/or follow up in both formal and informal roles. I get clearer data about what help people want, what is possible, how best to implement ideas in that specific situation/climate, greater interest in my suggestions and participation, better feedback on my actions, and there is more likelihood that my work will be useful. I believe this clarity and involvement are most likely to occur in a workplace where labor and management have a mutually respectful relationship and where there is a high level of worker participation in the local union.

For me, helpful stress programs are based on some intrinsic values such as: people can change and grow, learning from their own experience; people can identify their own interests and needs; people can learn to work together to satisfy mutual needs; and the like. When workers organize in mutual efforts to deal with critical issues in their lives, they are taking important steps to improve their stress situation because they are simultaneously increasing their personal support systems and affirming values that support self-care. These steps support both personal and social change.

Look Into The Action Research Approach

The action research or action learning approach appears to me to be a first candidate to consider in designing stress programs. This approach provides a structured way to work collaboratively with clients in tailor-fitting the project to the specific needs and realities of the audiences involved, while supporting the application and assessment of models for problem solving. It organizes the collection and progressive application of data about the situation and efforts to change. And, it integrates action steps and research components in mutually supportive roles.

The most frequently used formal structure for planning and managing projects calls for a sequence of milestones for preplanned tasks. By contrast, an action-research project consists of three stages that are repeated until project objectives are achieved; task requirements are re(identified) as the project proceeds. The three stages are assessment, preparation, and action.

Initially, the project starts with an assessment of current state: what is the current situation, who is involved, what resources are available, what would the optimal, changed situation look like, which options for "next-step" action appear indicated, what likely consequences can now be identified,...? The assessment phase can be considered as making an informed choice about how to begin or how to proceed with the next step.

Preparation consists of moving from the choice of steps-to-be-taken to readiness to act. Resources may need to be obtained, support rallied, allies informed, staff trained, and the like. The action step is intended to produce a preplanned outcome that supports achievement of the project's objectives. The action step, completed, is followed by assessment again. Did the action produce what was hoped for? Where are we now? And so the project proceeds, organically, in response to changes in both the situation and refinements in understanding what helps.

The concept of action research is especially useful as a paradigm for exploration, a way to learn what is required to accomplish desired ends when there is little or no useful precedent that would support the more conventional approach of preplanning the whole process.

Moreover, action research offers a natural way to integrate action steps and research components in mutually supportive roles. Research can help answer essential questions and action tests the predictability of research-based theory.

I have found an action research model very useful for designing and carrying out stress projects because the relative newness of the field usually requires exploratory efforts (rather than standard approaches). Moreover, the action research approach can be viewed as an "action learning" model for how we can derive learnings about how to deal with stress situations that have wider applicability than the immediate project from which they come.

The case study described earlier is one example of an action research approach and illustrates some of the major features of this conceptual structure for organizing interventions intended simultaneously to achieve practical results, increase knowledge, and foster learning.

As a practitioner, I would like to know what works and how to get specific results more elegantly. Aside from measuring cognitive learnings in workshops, there seem to be few inexpensive, readily applicable techniques for assessing the behavioral and attitudinal changes that are achieved. So I would like to see a larger and more accessible body of evaluative techniques that can give me the feedback I need. Similarly, I imagine that researchers also can benefit from increased linkage to programs that will permit not only evaluation, but also experimentation with evaluative methodology.

My impression is that there is too little such linkage between research and action projects dealing with stress. Action programs (such as brief work- shops for employees) are too often ad hoc, short-term efforts for which there are no stated change expectations. Researchers can appear to be more driven by their methodological concerns than by any sensitivity to client/consultant issues and relationships. Certainly, funding is not readily available for either. And, there are additional factors that contribute to this problem. I do not believe this will be an easy area in which to make improvements but I am convinced that it is urgently necessary for us to bring these inherently related processes into greater coordination.

STRESS MANAGEMENT IN WORK SETTINGS

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