

THE DANISH  
INSTITUTE FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS

# STRESS POLICY

ADOPTED SAM

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# CHAPTER 1

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the stress policy is to reduce excessively demanding working conditions as much as possible and to ensure clarity as to how the Danish Institute for Human Rights prevents and manages stress. The stress policy has been approved by the Collaboration Committee.

The stress policy also contains guidelines for when and how the Institute can support employees suffering from stress and ensure a gentle return to work following a period of absence caused by stress.

## CHAPTER 2

# BASIS OF THE POLICY

Stress can have many causes. For example, inadequate clarity at work on structure and guidelines as well as unclear roles and allocation of responsibilities can contribute to stress. Equally, lack of dialogue and confidence in management can also cause problems.

Since 2011, the Institute has been working to reduce stress, among other things by conducting stress courses for management and staff and by introducing stress-management tools, most recently as part of the 2014 workplace-assessment (APV) action plan. This has contributed to establishing common basic knowledge about stress and its symptoms, a shared conceptual structure, and thus a strong foundation so that the Institute can take organisational responsibility for managing stress.

This policy is built on experience from previous practice in the organisation and more recent input from Maiken Matzau, Thomas Milsted and others (see extract in annex). The policy has resulted in guidelines on stress management for the entire organisation, both reactive and proactive.

# CHAPTER 3

## POLICY

### **PREVENTION AND OPEN AND RESPECTFUL MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYEES SUFFERING FROM STRESS**

The Institute has constant focus on promoting factors that prevent and reduce stress. We are aware that work seems stressful for one person may not seem stressful for another, and we accept and respect the differences.

Once a year, the works council discusses what factors in our organisation could particularly provoke stress reactions. We compare these with workplace assessments / measurements of wellbeing, and then prioritise focus areas for work for the upcoming period at the annual health and safety discussions between management and health and safety representatives.

Preventive work is combined with specific initiatives for employees who are experiencing stress.

There is follow-up for all employees at employee development interviews and mini employee development interviews. Moreover, daily dialogue and personnel management in the departments also focuses on a developing and targeted working environment which does not impose unreasonable demands on staff.

### **ROUTINE PREVENTIVE WORK**

The immediate manager is responsible for routine preventive work.

#### **The individual manager**

The individual manager should have constant focus on:

- clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.
- clarity regarding expectations in relation to goals, tasks and cooperation.
- balance between demands and resources.
- working hours and accumulated flex hours for the individual employee.
- a healthy psychological working environment at the department.

### **The individual employee**

As far as possible, individual employees themselves should be aware of signs of stress and report to their managers about overload and other aspects which could affect their work and wellbeing.

Employees can:

- approach their manager and say clearly YES/NO to assignments
- ask their manager for help to prioritise or reduce work tasks
- ensure that roles and tasks are clearly defined

Furthermore, it may be a help to:

- reserve time in your diary and insert buffer zones for planning, follow-up and emails.
- separate work and private life (turn off your computer and work phone at home).
- reserve time to recuperate after particularly busy periods (talk to your manager if there is constant work pressure and you feel that this is affecting your health or similar).

Managers and employees can reduce excessively demanding work by:

- ensuring there are breaks during the day (go for a walk, talk to colleagues about something other than work, etc.).
- adapt your workload to your own resources (clarify for yourself what you can cope with, and tell others (managers and colleagues) about what you can and can't deal with).
- avoid long days at work and work less in your time off.
- structure your day at work (perhaps start by making a list of what you realistically can and must do; prioritise tasks and at the end of the day, possibly in connection with registering hours, take stock of what you have done).

# CHAPTER 4

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

### **IN GENERAL**

It is often hard to deal with your own symptoms of stress because often you are not aware of how overworked or seriously stressed you are, once the situation has got that far. Therefore, management has a particular responsibility in the event of an employee suffering from stress. The same applies with regard to overload which could lead to stress.

The Institute has hired an external stress coach who can be brought in, in the event that an employee needs coaching or a personal action plan focussing on both structural aspects at the workplace and/or personal factors.

Initiatives by the Institute are summarised in the 'Stress Ladder' at the end of this document.

### **INITIATIVES AT THE FIRST SIGNS OF STRESS - OVERWORKED EMPLOYEES**

#### **Manager:**

1. Notices stress reactions or signs of overload
2. Holds an interview with the employee about resources, tasks, responsibilities, health and level of energy
3. Secures mutual matching of expectations
4. Clarifies whether there are other factors which may influence the level of stress
5. Coaches about solutions and draws up agreements and action plans to re-establish flow and balance (see the 'Stress Ladder'). Solutions may include: reduced working hours, work-at-home days or reorganisation of work tasks
6. The manager follows up regularly and works to ensure the return of flow and balance.

#### **HR**

1. Supports managers and employees so that the process is completed as agreed.

- a. Advises employees and managers about how stress situations can be managed
  - b. With the manager and employee draws up a long-term plan to reduce stress factors
  - c. If necessary, brings in professional help.
2. Advises the management group about stress and demanding work conditions.

### **Staff representatives**

In circumstances in which employees suffering from stress feel that there is a need for additional assistance, health-and-safety and union representatives are also available for informal interviews or as observers.

### **External expertise**

1. If there is a collective assessment that professional help could help avoid escalation of stress overload, the employee will be offered such help.
2. If the employee accepts the offer, an agreement will be established as follows, for example:
  - a. The Institute has an agreement with an expert on stress management and psychological help is also available.
  - b. If the employee has some other requirement, the management and HR will make a specific decision on this on the basis of information submitted about the initiative, price and terms.
  - c. If the stress overload is primarily caused by conditions during a foreign posting to especially exposed areas, referral to crisis-psychological expertise is also possible. Read the relevant travel guidelines and safety guidelines on supplementary stress prevention or remediation initiatives in connection with foreign postings to especially exposed areas or risk zones. For example, there is an option for consultation with a psychologist before and after foreign postings to war zones and risk zones.

## **INTERVENTIONS FOR STRESS - COLLAPSE**

### **Employee**

1. Report sick ([link](#))
2. OoO (Out-of-Office function in mail system)
3. External expertise from the Institute's stress coach, offer of psychological assistance or other assistance as required or following a referral from own physician



4. Interviews on possibilities and declaration pursuant to legislation and guidelines.

### **Manager**

1. Transfers work to another employee and ensures that there is a response, e.g. by email, without involving the sick employee
2. As far as possible, informs the other employees in the department and health and safety representatives about the matter
3. Collaborates with HR on offers of professional help and follows up with the employee
4. Maintains contact with the employee during sick leave, if the employee so wishes, or ensures that HR does this
5. Holds interviews on possibilities pursuant to legislation
6. Reflects on the situation and learns in order to adjust future practice
7. Prepares a plan for return to work.

### **HR**

1. Ensures referral to external expertise
  - a. The Institute works with expert stress managers and an appointment can be arranged at short notice
  - b. If the employee has other wishes, we will make a decision based on information submitted about the intervention and terms.
2. If the manager and employee agree, then the process will be completed as agreed, see above re.:
  - a. Contact with the employee during sick leave
  - b. Long-term plan to reduce overload.
3. Follows up with the employee and the immediate manager re. the sickness report, action plan and organisational learning for the future.

### **External expertise**

An employee on long-term sick leave due to stress will be offered professional assistance from a psychologist.

Professional assessment and assistance specifically adapted to the individual:

1. Diagnoses the stress, the situation and the stressed person and makes a prognosis
2. Advises about reporting sick, duration, agreements and return to work
3. Completes the course of treatment
4. Advises the Institute.

## **INITIATIVES FOR THE RETURN TO WORK**

### **Professional assistance**

1. Advises on the return to work, including the possibility of reduced working hours for a period
2. Phased out when the employee is 'back to normal'.

### **HR**

1. Together with the manager and possibly external expertise, draws up a plan for the return to work
2. Acts as the contact person for the person suffering from stress, if the employee does not want his/her manager as the primary contact
3. Acts as an advisor and sparring partner for the manager.

### **Manager**

1. Prepares a plan for the return to work and possibly an amended job description
2. Monitors closely during the stress period
3. Follows up regularly after the end of the stress period.

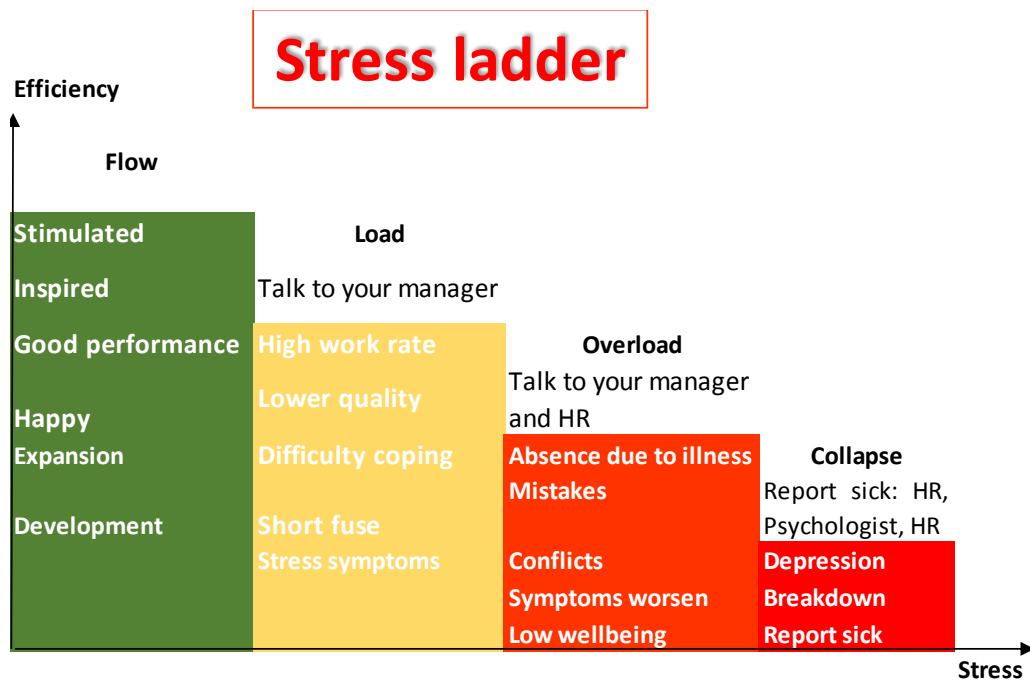
### **Employee**

1. Gently returns to work, possibly on a part-time basis for a while
2. Incorporates learning from the experience in future work situations.

# ANNEXES

## THE STRESS LADDER

The first phase with 'Flow' and high productivity is what we are working to achieve, while we also consciously and carefully manage employees who get into an inappropriately demanding situation for a period.



Source : Matzau

## INPUT FROM THOMAS MILSTED

### What is stress?

The stress-reaction is a practical and innate protection mechanism which enables us to react and counter external threats or possible injury as well as cope with additional loads.

### Definitions of stress

There is no consensus between researchers and other professionals on a definitive definition of stress, but according to international stress literature most work is based on three definitions:

1. Stress defined as a condition in the individual – for example tension, irritability, uncertainty, anxiety or agitation.
2. Stress defined as factors in the surroundings - for example high demands, time pressure, threats, losses or danger.

3. Stress defined as the relationship between factors in the surroundings and the individual. It is usual to talk about demands from the surroundings exceeding the individual's resources.

Source: Videnscenter for Arbejdsmiljø

### **What protects against stress?**

A number of organisational and personal resources seem to protect against the experience of negative working-environment impacts. These resources include:

1. Experience of support from colleagues
2. High degree of independence at work, e.g. opportunities to decide to a certain extent for yourself on tasks, collaboration partners and work rate
3. Experience of a good balance between effort and reward
4. Awareness of a high degree of confidence in own abilities to complete tasks and manage challenges.

### **FIVE KEYS TO CLARITY:**

- Framework
- Direction
- Rules
- Roles
- Relationships

### **FOUR LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT MAY INDICATE STRESS:**

- Sleep
- Sex
- Eating habits
- Social habits

All in all be aware of any changes in your own or other people's behavior!



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