



Managing stress at work – A competency framework for line managers



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This management competency framework for preventing and reducing stress at work was developed as part of a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and CIPD-sponsored research project to identify and develop the management behaviours necessary to implement the HSE Management Standards. The competencies shown here are the findings from the first phase of the research; further research will be undertaken during 2007 to validate the framework and establish which of the competencies are most important for stress management.

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

Management Standard	Competency	Examples of positive manager behaviour	Examples of negative manager behaviour
Demands	Managing workload and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bringing in additional resource to handle workload • aware of team members' ability • monitoring team workload • refusing to take on additional work when team is under pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delegating work unequally to team • creating unrealistic deadlines • showing lack of awareness of how much pressure team are under • asking for tasks without checking workload first
Demands	Dealing with work problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following through problems on behalf of employees • developing action plans • breaking problems down into parts • dealing rationally with problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening but not resolving problems • being indecisive about decisions • not taking problems seriously • assuming problems will sort themselves out
Demands	Process planning and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing processes to see if work can be improved • asking themselves 'could this be done better?' • prioritising future workloads • working proactively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not using consistent processes • sticking too rigidly to rules and procedures • panicking about deadlines rather than planning
Control	Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trusting employees to do their work • giving employees responsibility • steering employees in a direction rather than imposing direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managing 'under a microscope' • extending so much authority employees feel a lack of direction • imposing 'my way is the only way'
Control	Participative approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides opportunity to air views • provides regular team meetings • prepared to listen to employees • knows when to consult employees and when to make a decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not listening when employee asks for help • presenting a final solution • making decisions without consultation
Control	Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourages staff to go on training courses • provides mentoring and coaching • regularly reviews development • helps employees to develop in role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refuses requests for training • not providing upward mobility in the job • not allowing employees to use their new training

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work (continued)

Management Standard	Competency	Examples of positive manager behaviour	Examples of negative manager behaviour
Support	Accessible/ visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicating that employees can talk to them at any time having an open-door policy making time to talk to employees at their desks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being constantly at meetings/away from desk saying 'don't bother me now' not attending lunches or social events
Support	Health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> making sure everyone is safe structuring risk assessments ensuring all health and safety requirements are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not taking health and safety seriously questioning the capability of an employee who has raised a safety issue
Support	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> praising good work acknowledging employees' efforts operating a no-blame culture passing positive feedback about the team to senior management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not giving credit for hitting deadlines seeing feedback as only 'one way' giving feedback that employees are wrong just because their way of working is different
Support	Individual consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides regular one-to-ones flexible when employees need time off provides information on additional sources of support regularly asks 'how are you?' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assuming everyone is okay badgering employees to tell them what is wrong not giving enough notice of shift changes no consideration of work-life balance
Relationships	Managing conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening objectively to both sides of the conflict supporting and investigating incidents of abuse dealing with conflict head on following up on conflicts after resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not addressing bullying trying to keep the peace rather than sort out problems taking sides not taking employee complaints seriously
Relationships	Expressing and managing own emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having a positive approach acting calmly when under pressure walking away when feeling unable to control emotion apologising for poor behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> passing on stress to employees acting aggressively losing temper with employees being unpredictable in mood
Relationships	Acting with integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeps employee issues private and confidential admits mistakes treats all employees with same importance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks about employees behind their backs makes promises, then doesn't deliver makes personal issues public

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work (continued)

Management Standard	Competency	Examples of positive manager behaviour	Examples of negative manager behaviour
Relationships	Friendly style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • willing to have a laugh and a joke • socialises with team • brings in food and drinks for team • regularly has informal chats with employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • criticises people in front of colleagues • pulls team up for talking/laughing during working hours • uses harsh tone of voice when asking for things
Role and change	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeps team informed of what is happening in the organisation • communicates clear goals and objectives • explains exactly what is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeps people in the dark • holds meetings 'behind closed doors' • doesn't provide timely communication on organisational change
Other	Taking responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'leading from the front' • steps in to help out when needed • communicating 'the buck stops with me' • deals with difficult customers on behalf of employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying 'it's not my problem' • blaming the team if things go wrong • walking away from problems
Other	Knowledge of job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • able to put themselves in employees' shoes • has enough expertise to give good advice • knows what employees are doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doesn't have the necessary knowledge to do the job • doesn't take time to learn about the employee's job
Other	Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • takes an interest in employees' personal lives • aware of different personalities and styles of working within the team • notices when a team member is behaving out of character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insensitive to people's personal issues • refuses to believe someone is becoming stressed • maintains a distance from employees – 'us and them'
Other	Seeking advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeks help from occupational health when necessary • seeks advice from other managers with more experience • uses HR when dealing with a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • n/a

The full scientific research report relating to this project is available at <http://www.hseresearchprojects.com/ProjectSearch.aspx?id=1878>

For further details about the research project or the validation process, please contact Rachel Lewis, Research Associate at Goldsmiths College, on r.lewis@gold.ac.uk



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ
Tel: 020 8612 6200 Fax: 020 8612 6201
Email: cipd@cipd.co.uk Website: www.cipd.co.uk

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