



Figure 2: Organizational Stressors Survey

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An informal survey of Calgary organizations shows the degree to which HR, OE and Wellness professionals perceive stressors within the organizations they serve. 44 people from about 30 organizations responded. The % of people who replied 0 or 1, % who replied 2 or 3, and % who replied 4 or 5 to each item are shown below.

- 0 = Strongly Disagree 3 = Somewhat Agree
- 1 = Disagree 4 = Agree
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree 5 = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree 0	1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
1. are NOT clear about the specific performance expectations (results) for which they are accountable	25%		45%		30%	
2. are faced with CONFLICTING priorities and demands	03%		25%		72%	
3. are NOT clear about the behavioural expectations (personal conduct) that is consistent with the organization's values	30%		52%		18%	
4. are NOT clear about how their individual work will contribute to the goals of the organization	22%		55%		23%	
5. do NOT understand the standards for their success and how their progress and contributions will be measured	13%		45%		42%	
6. do NOT get the coaching they need to succeed in their current roles	08%		40%		52%	
7. do NOT get the learning support they need to further develop their capabilities	20%		32%		48%	
8. are in jobs that do NOT match their own personal interests and attributes; do NOT find their work meaningful	28%		65%		07%	
9. are <u>often</u> involved in POOR working relationships	33%		50%		17%	
10. encounter workplace situations in which they feel emotionally or psychologically VULNERABLE	22%		48%		30%	
11. encounter workplace situations in which they feel physically UNSAFE	68%		32%		00%	
12. do NOT get measurement data about their progress	10%		63%		27%	

or cholesterol levels, heightened awareness of the environment, or increases in muscle tension. Psychologically, judgement may be impaired; you may experience irritability, anxiety, anger, an inability to concentrate, or memory loss.

Coping Mechanisms

We all have individual ways of dealing with everyday stressors. Good communication and problem solving skills, regular exercise and relaxation, as well as a variety of personal interests can serve to lessen the effects of stress. However, when stress is prolonged, many of us respond in ineffective ways: avoidance, withdrawal, panic, or aggressive behaviour _even an increased use of drugs and alcohol. These ineffective coping mechanisms may serve to deal with the stress of the moment, but can seriously impair our physical and emotional health in the long run.

Effects on Individuals

For years, health professionals have recognized the symptoms of workplace stress: headaches, ulcers, hypertension, substance abuse, anxiety, and clinical depression. However, society is just now beginning to appreciate the tremendous costs associated with workplace stress: –productivity losses, the human costs, increased employee benefit plan costs, and the enormous burden on our health care system.

Organizations are not solely responsible for the negative effects of organizational stress. However, when the average Calgarian spends as much as 2/3 of their waking hours at work, or with concerns of work, it begs the question: what is the appropriate level of organizational responsibility?

- Three million Canadians suffer depressive episodes in any 12 month period
 - One in four cases are detected and diagnosed
 - Less than 7% are being properly treated
 - North American price tag for direct costs and productivity losses is \$60 billion annually
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*

Individual Health Effectiveness Support (Health and Wellness Programs)

Our organizations and institutions are not typically uncaring nor do they choose to deliberately ignore stress-related problems. Many leaders are themselves affected. In response, many organizations have put services in place to help employees develop effective coping mechanisms. And so we see offerings like...

- Employee and Family Assistance Programs



	Strongly Disagree 0	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
13. do NOT get sufficient communications about developments in the organization or information that affects their job	33%		47%				20%
14. have little or NO involvement in decisions that affect their work	20%		45%				35%
15. do NOT have the necessary autonomy and discretion to successfully deliver on their accountabilities	27%		53%				20%
16. feel they have NO influence over things that happen to them at work	26%		52%				22%
17. feel their roles are UNCLEAR or are <u>in conflict</u> with the roles of other employees	27%		43%				30%
18. do NOT have access to the tools, equipment, job aids or other resources they need to succeed in their jobs	35%		52%				13%
19. feel encumbered with UNclear or INeffective work practices or procedures	07%		63%				30%
20. feel their physical work environment is NOT conducive to working efficiently or effectively	22%		48%				30%
21. feel they <u>lack sufficient time</u> to do the work required of them	05%		32%				63%
22. do NOT get the recognition they need to stay energized and motivated in their work	05%		47%				48%
23. get little or NO positive feedback on how they do their work	15%		45%				40%
24. get little or NO <u>helpful</u> corrective feedback on how they do their work	10%		55%				35%
25. believe they are not treated with fairness, trust and respect	40%		43%				17%
26. believe that how well they perform DOES NOT really matter - that there are NEITHER positive consequences for good performance NOR negative consequences for poor performance	37%		40%				23%

- Flexible Benefit Plans
- Flexible work hours
- Fitness centres or subsidies
- Exercise and relaxation programs
- Child Care Services
- Elder Care Services
- Education programs

Are we treating symptoms instead of causes?

No doubt, these are good and very necessary employee support services. But are we not consoling ourselves with very expensive "aspirins" when we really need to address the root causes of workplace stress. We maintain that a significant cause is the organizational environment in which the employee works.

Effects on Organizations

The cost of workplace stress is not borne by employees alone. Organizations pay a huge price for emotional mismanagement of employees in the form of expenses and productivity losses. Low morale, lack of cooperation, conflict, apathy and hostility are among the behavioural outcomes we see. The operational outcomes of this stressors cycle include high rates of employee absenteeism, staff turnover, productivity losses, and increased employee benefit plan costs. In the final analysis, the overall result impacts the organization's "bottom line".

Organization Effectiveness Support ~ breaking the cycle

Dealing with causes breaks this unfortunate "cycle of harm". To achieve this, an organization must truly understand what is going on. Measurement is the key.

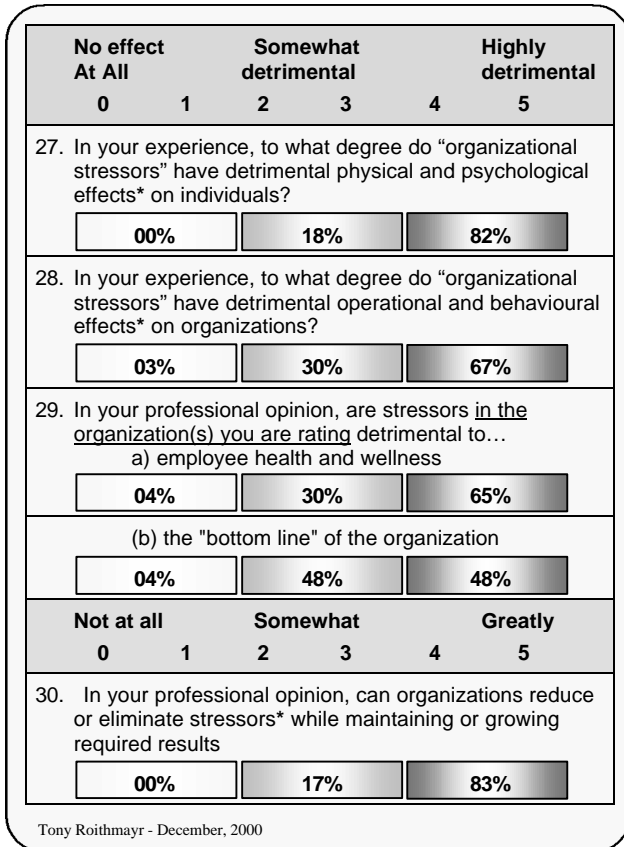
Measurement will enable an organization to make evidence-based decisions about which remedies will produce the desired improvements. This is not only about tracking EFAP usage, or monitoring drug plan usage, counting union grievances or determining the number of absent employees. Measurement must track all the components of the cycle illustrated in Figure 1 and bring that data together to form a holistic picture of the relationships active within the cycle.

"If you don't measure it, you can't manage it!"

Dr. Cam Waddell, Medical Director, Foothills Hospital, Calgary

Measurement must provide data about the following:

- The degree to which stressors are being experienced by employees
- The physical and psychological effects on individuals
- The effects on the organization
 - Behavioural outcomes



- Operational results

- The financial or 'balanced scorecard' results of the organization²

Performance Improvement Actions

Calling all Performance and Organization Effectiveness consultants!

You have the "soft technology" for improving human performance in the workplace - for dealing with the "organizational stressors" as the root causes they are.

So what can you do?

The skills and insights of Performance and Organization Effectiveness consultants are needed by organizations to

1. Conduct assessments
2. Analyze causes
3. Select and implement interventions
4. Track results and evaluate outcomes

The principles and research that underpin Human Performance Technology mandate front-end assessment in order to make evidence-based decisions about improvement.

Analysis in your organization may point to such remedies as:

- **Education** - comprehensive briefings to top executives and senior management using both external and internal data to illustrate the business case associated with workplace stress and enhancing employee health and well-being.
- **Measurement system** - develop and implement measurement that includes indicators for "stress toxicity" as well as individual health and financial results.
- Promote **access** to and the use of a Wellness program (Individual Effectiveness Support)
- Improve the capacity of management to **recognize** and respond to causes of workplace stress and employee distress.
- **Performance Support Practices** - become better at managing people. The most effective and enduring remedy is to implement and sustain performance support practices that focus on the "4 Es" of people management³:
 - ✓ Establish purpose,
 - ✓ Enable performance,
 - ✓ Expect results, and
 - ✓ Encourage success.

The importance of effective people management is not news to anyone. We know it's not just "nice to do", but essential to creating an environment that fosters employee loyalty and long term, sustainable success.

Good performance support practice is good business!

Dennis Kravetz studies the correlation between people management practices and financial success (see www.kravetz.com)⁴. He developed an index for rating an organization's performance in people management practices (PMP score). In 1996 he published a study that looked at the correlation of PMP scores to financial performance over a ten-year period. The following chart compares companies having Low PMP scores with companies having High PMP scores:

Financial Factor	Companies with HI PMP Scores	Companies with LO PMP Scores
Sales growth	16.1%	7.4%
Profit growth	18.2%	4.4%
Profit margin	6.4%	3.3%
Growth (earnings/share)	10.7%	4.7%
Total return (stock appreciation + dividends)	19.0%	8.8%



Organizational Stressors and Health

Organizations that consistently practice good people management create an environment that reduces (or even eliminates) significant workplace stressors. Not only do these organizations enable good business; they foster the conditions for a healthy workplace.

A list of best practices for performance support contains no surprises. But, far too many organizations find it very difficult to consistently practice them:

ESTABLISH PURPOSE

- Help employees understand the organization's vision, values, goals and business strategies
- Guide the development of individual performance and learning plans that will achieve organization goals

ENABLE PERFORMANCE

- Align resource allocations with performance expectations
- Coach employees to overcome difficulties and build skill and knowledge
- Foster and maintain effective work groups
- Resolve performance issues and remove barriers that are beyond the control of individuals and teams

EXPECT RESULTS

- Facilitate the measurement of progress, contribution and development
- Hold people accountable for delivering agreed upon results

ENCOURAGE SUCCESS

- Sustain communication that maintains focus, fosters commitment and facilitates implementation
- Recognize and celebrate progress, development and the achievement of desired results

Organizational Stressors - status in Calgary

Figure 2 shows the results of an informal survey we conducted in preparation for this article. It suggests that significant organizational stressors exist in Calgary workplaces. The survey looks at specific factors within the conditions that we know are needed to foster and sustain successful performance.

What we found:

In general, the number of people who responded "disagree" (1) or "strongly disagree" (2) is low on most items. It is concerning that few people, on most items, can say clearly "this is not a stressor"!

Highlights from the survey (below) are organized into the "four conditions for great performance"¹

mentioned at the beginning of the article. In choosing the highlights we focused on responses that rated items 0 or 1 and 4 or 5.

Know what to do

- 72% say employees are faced with conflicting priorities and demands (2)
- 42% employees are unclear about how their performance is measured (5)
- less than 25% appear to report goal alignment (1,4)

Able to do it

- Half the respondents report that employees don't get the coaching and learning support they need (6,7)

Equipped to do it

- Few (10%) believe employees get measurement data about their progress (12)
- Few (7%) believe employees have clear and effective work processes and procedures (19)
- 63% report that employees don't have the time to do the work required of them (21)

Want to do it

- Half the respondents say that employees lack the recognition they need to stay motivated while only 5% indicate that they are recognized (22)
- 15% report that employees get positive feedback while only 10% say they get helpful corrective feedback (23,24)

The 44 people who completed the survey acknowledged the 'cycle of harm' we assert. Their experience supports a causal relationship among stressors, health and operational results. (27,28,29)

This is consistent with research reported in 1998 by Dr. Martin Shain, University of Toronto. He advocates dealing with workplace stress at the source in terms of "work design, work control, work demand and work effort."

There is good news!

83% of respondents believe that organizations can reduce or eliminate stressors while maintaining or growing their business results.

NOTES:

1. Based on *The Performance Maximizer*TM; words and graphic are a trademark of Tony Roithmayr.
2. Some organizations are starting to build a 'health index' into their BSC - see www.healthyscorecard.com
3. Based on research into Performance Management best practices - available at performancebydesign@shaw.ca
4. The Kravetz website provides an executive summary of the study: www.kravetz.com



You can compare these results with the general trends reported by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:

- Top Ten Sources Of Workplace Stress***
1. Treadmill Syndrome. Too much to do at once, requires 24-hour workday.
 2. Random interruptions.
 3. Doubt - Employees not sure what is happening, where things are headed.
 4. Mistrust. Viscious office politics disrupt positive behaviour.
 5. Unclear company direction and policies.
 6. Career/job ambiguity. Things happen without employees knowing why.
 7. Inconsistent performance management - get raises but no review, positive feedback and then laid off.
 8. Being unappreciated.
 9. Lack of two-way communication up and down.
 10. Feeling of not contributing and having a lack of control.
- * www.camh.net

...but we can't prove it!

"In God we trust, all others.. bring data!"

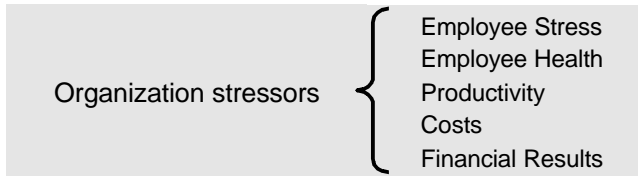
To our knowledge, not enough data are available to tie all the elements described in this article into a holistic framework of cause and effect. Organizations want to make evidence-based based decisions regarding the allocation of their limited resources. That is both understandable and prudent.

To get a breakthrough, however, we will need organizations to step forward and commit to...

- Implement a measurement system that tracks the entire "cycle of harm",
- Implement evidence-based actions to reduce or eliminate stressors,
- Track progress for 3-5 years and share the results publicly in order to motivate others.

Call to Action

Based on the experience of HR and Wellness professionals we can make this claim...



**Who out there hears the call?
Both our personal well-being and the bottom line are at stake!**

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