



Workplace Health

How job demands and control over work may affect your well-being

One of the most influential theories of occupational stress was developed by Dr. Robert Karasek in 1979. Since then, many researchers like Dr. Martin Shain continue to build on his work and explain that when employees are faced with high job demands and have low control over their work, it results in high job strain.

What is it?

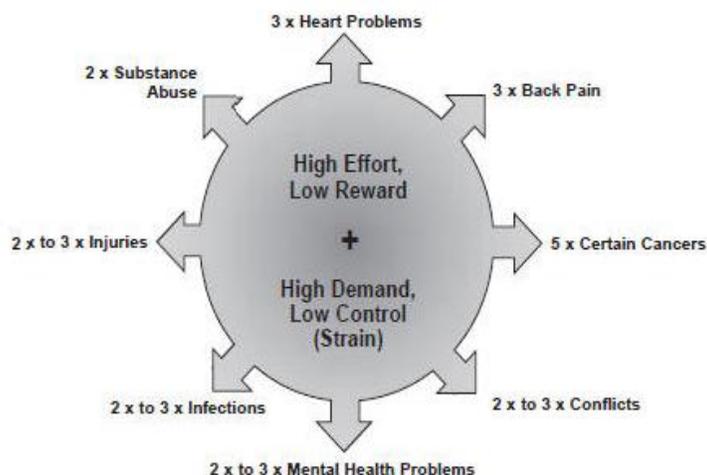
High Job Demands
(heavy work loads, fast pace, conflicting priorities)

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Low Job Control
(little influence over the planning or pacing of your work, not having a say on deadlines, little task variation, little use of creativity)

High Job Strain
(signs of mental strain that result in poor psychological well-being)

- increase the risk of liability for the negligent or intentional infliction of serious emotional harm (the duty to avoid or amend “poisoned” or toxic work environments, etc)



Source: *Best Advice on Stress Risk Management in the Workplace.*
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/stress-part-1/index-eng.php>

Employees under sustained conditions of high effort/ low reward and high demand / low control are 2 to 3 times more likely to experience mental and physical health problems.

Why should you care?

High job strain can:

- hurt the physical health of employees (cardiovascular health, workplace injuries, musculoskeletal complaints, etc)
- hurt the psycho-social health of employees (stress, burnout, low job satisfaction, emotional distress, etc)
- negatively impact on productivity (stress related absences, presenteeism - being at work but not performing at full capacity, team performance, interpersonal conflict, etc)
- cost your organization money (disability & health premiums, lost wages for absenteeism, worker compensation claims, etc)

What can you do about it?

If you are an employee...

- talk with your supervisor about work priorities and deadlines so that expectations are clear and realistic
- share your creative ideas to carrying out tasks with your supervisor and colleagues to benefit from their feedback and expertise
- identify obstacles to getting the job done
- propose solutions to remedy existing or potential problems
- take care of your own physical and mental health to maintain resiliency

If you supervise people...

- be proactive in discussing workplace priorities with employees (communicate often, explain how priorities were selected, agree upon what is required, etc)

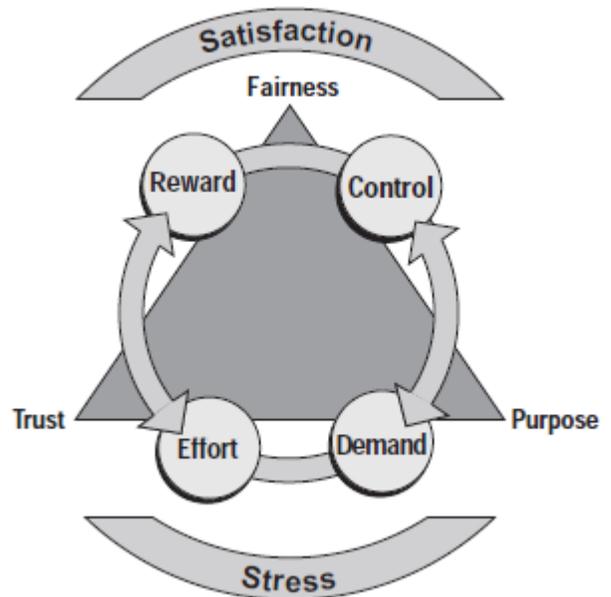


- engage employees in regular conversations about work expectations, workload, how to carry out tasks and manage the pace of work
- seek input from employees before making decisions that may affect their work or the way in which they do their work
- foster an environment in which employees have the information, atmosphere, support, and tools to perform their work
- tap into the hidden skills-sets of employees and encourage use of their full range of skills and abilities
- take advantage of internal services that are available to provide information, guidance and tools for assessing stress levels within your team (eg. human resources, employee assistance program)
- participate in training on communication skills, problem solving and conflict resolution

If you are a senior decision-maker within your organization...

- be a role model, demonstrating healthy workplace practices throughout your work day
- engage employees in decision-making, make information easily available and provide meaningful work opportunities, etc
- measure the extent to which work demands, work pace and work processes influence health and productivity within your organization, correct as necessary
- evaluate organizational policies and practices to ensure they are promoting employee efficiency and organizational effectiveness
- reward behaviours that promote trust, open communication and worker autonomy while fostering creativity and autonomy at all levels
- discourage / address behaviours that fuel high job demands, and low job control
- develop, implement and evaluate plans of action in support of employee and organizational wellbeing

Let health work FOR you:



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<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/stress-part-1/index-eng.php>

A workplace that promotes policies and practices that reward effort and encourage employee control when work demands are high show positive results. Add a work atmosphere perceived as fair (e.g. an employer’s respect for and trust of employees is evident), you are making health work FOR you.

Additional Resources

To find out more about how you can promote healthier, more productive workplaces please consult the following resources:

Workplace Health Promotion, Health Canada:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/workplacehealth

Best Advice to Stress Risk Management in the Workplace:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/occup-travail/work-travail/whr-rmt-eng.php#d>

Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace:
<http://www.managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/page01-eng.asp>

Creating Healthy Workplaces, Industrial Accident Prevention Association:
http://www.iapa.ca/pdf/2004_HWP_Healthy_Workplace_FINAL.pdf

Guarding Minds at Work: www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com

Karasek, R. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, 285-306.