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Promoting Work Well-being:
Professional Burnout &
Occupational Stress

Edited by: Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou

VOLUME C



Science is ever-changing

New research accomplishments and clinical experience has expanded the field of medical knowledge and represent an ongoing process. With this in mind, it is imperative that we make the appropriate changes as far as it concerns the course of action, in the treatment of our patients.

The content of this textbook reflects all the most recent knowledge and internationally accepted techniques as they are analyzed by experienced authors in the field, in each chapter.

Nevertheless, the authors and the editor acknowledge that every medical opinion is under the limitations of the time frame that this book was created, as well as possible mistakes that might have escaped their attention.

Readers of this textbook are encouraged to keep that in mind, while at the same time we hope that the information included will become a starting point for young colleagues or the more experienced ones, for new research projects, clinical trials or maybe an updated version of the book in the near future.

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**Promoting Work Well-being:
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Employees Responses Towards M and AS: Stress Theory Implications Related to Health and Commitment Outcomes

Chapter

10

Eleni Makri & Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou

1. Introduction

"Mergers and acquisitions continue to be a highly popular form of corporate development. In 2004 30,000 acquisitions were completed globally, equivalent to one transaction every 18 minute. The total value of these acquisitions was \$ 1,900 billion, exceeding the GDP of several countries" (Cartwright & Schoenberg, 2006, p. S1).

M&As continue to be very popular means of strategic organizational development and lately, due to the worldwide economic recession, a powerful tool in establishing the survival of organizations across the globe. According to Marks and Mirvis (2001), many M&As do not succeed in achieving their financial goals measured in terms of "increased share/shareholder value, return on investment and post-merger profitability" (c.f./Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p.80).

Last years, research has emphasized the potential dysfunctional effects drastic organizational change conditions such as M&As have on the employees involved. These include, among other things, higher levels of stress (e.g. Applebaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper, & Jobin, 2000; Cartwright, Tytherleighm, & Robertson, 2007), lower satisfaction at work (e.g. Zhu, May, & Rosenfeld, 2004), and reduced organizational commitment/identification (Mottola, Bachman, Gaertner, & Dovidio, 1997). However, the key factors leading to M&As deficit continue to be a matter of continuous assessment, as they tend to be rather inconsistent (Kavanaugh & Ashkanasy, 2006; Stahl & Voigt, 2003; Stahl & Voigt, 2008). Yet, management of human integration following M&As should be taken into account when considering M&As performance (Amiot,

Terry & Callan, 2007, p. 557), as the "human factor" is considered to potentially affect M&As success (Gleibs, Mummendey, & Noack, 2008).

Given that M&As are often lengthy and involve large-scale organizational restructuring, they are particularly related to negative psychological and behavioral problems for the employees involved, influencing their health and well-being. One of the most pertinent of these negative outcomes includes stress and subsequent decreased physical and psychological health, with implications for certain employee attitudes, such as organizational commitment. Economically viable and healthy organizations have long been established as those who invest and succeed in ensuring that their employees are characterized by good physical and psychological health (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994), so we may realize the importance of stress effects for employee adjustment and their consequences for human resource management and organizational theory and practice.

2. Stress, Physical and Psychological Health

"It has been estimated that stress-related problems costs the United States economy approximately \$200 billion a year, or the equivalent of the revenues of the 500 most profitable firms. Similar estimates for the United Kingdom shows stress-related illnesses absorbing almost 10 per cent of GDP" (International Labor Organization, TMBF-R-2000, p. 100)

Work-related stress is considered to affect employees' health and well-being (Cropley & Millward-Purvis, 2003) to such extent, that it is consistently described as an occupational danger for both employees and employers and associated with negative individual and organizational outcomes that threaten labour and organizational health. Examples of such unfavorable individual outcomes include among others, high blood pressure, depression, alcohol or caffeine use (Johnson, 2009, p. 135), while organizational-level negative effects involve, for example, increased levels of work absence, turnover and turnover intentions, work accidents, communication problems (Cranwell-Ward & Abbey, 2005; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992), absenteeism (Johnson, 2009, p. 135), poor productivity, decreased morale and underperformance (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001). In addition, work stress is related to increased financial cost, for example, estimated UK costs include 6.5 million working days lost every year, £370 million costs for organizations and £3.75 billion in general (Johnson, 2009, p. 135).

Stress is defined in numerous ways, but widely accepted descriptions include the physiological and psychological outcomes that people experience when they lack resources to satisfy the demands placed on them; or in other words, "the adverse rea-

ction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them" (HSE, 2001 cited in Jordan et al., 2003, p. 2). Work stress has been widely acknowledged as a threat to employees' and organizations' health and well-being (Cartwright, Tytherleigh, & Robertson, 2007; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001; Zapf, Dorman & Frese, 1996), as it seriously affects both working and private lives of millions of people worldwide.

Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) suggest that there are three major sources of work stress described as job specific/job-related (e.g., physical work conditions), organizational (e.g. relationships at work) and individual (e.g. type A/B personality) ones. One of the most influential theoretical frameworks in the work stress and health literature for a long time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006, p. 310), is the demand-control model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). It proposes that strain appears at work when high demands are placed on the employees in respect with for example, work overload or pressure at work, while at the same time the resources available to them to meet those demands in terms, for instance, decision autonomy, control over work, or social support from others, are reduced.

Then, progressing pressure becomes apparent (Siegrist, 2009) and strain is sequentially associated with work stress, i.e. symptoms of mental and physical strain (Schnall, Landsbergis, & Baker, 1994) measured in studies assessing employees' physical and psychological well-being. Physical well-being relates to physical symptoms experienced by employees such as, for example, high blood pressure, while psychological well-being is related, among others, to positive individual and organizational outcomes, such as, lower threat in cases of organizational restructuring, and increased organizational effectiveness (Robertson & Flint-Taylor, 2009).

Workplace psychological well-being is defined as "the affective and purposive psychological state that people experience while they are at work" (cited in Johnson, 2009, p. 164). The relationship between strain and subsequent stress and health has revealed poor individual physical and psychological health conditions and negative effects for the organization itself (e.g. coronary heart disease, Kuper & Marmot, 2003; neck-shoulder symptoms, Leroux, Brisson, & Montreuil, 2006; anxiety & depression, Biringer et al., 2005; Mausner-Dorsch & Eaton, 2000, Michie & Williams, 2003; voluntary turnover, De Croon et al., 2004, absenteeism, Smulders & Nijhuis, 1999) and subsequently the potential danger that strain and stress comprise for employee welfare.

3. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is a concept that has characterized organizational be-

behavior and human resource management research over the years breeding controversy over its conceptualization and measurement (Cohen, 2007). Nevertheless, it is associated with established beneficial organizational outcomes (e.g., lower turnover, O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; organizational citizenship behavior, Meyer et al., 2002) and it has been suggested to be important in predicting positive employee behaviors within change settings and particularly affecting employees' approval of change (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005, p. 163).

It is defined by Allen & Meyer (1990, p. 14) as "the psychological state" that binds employee to organization, denotes employees' trust and confidence at the values and vision of the organization and the eagerness and aspiration to go extra mile in favor of that organization. These different elements of commitment to the organization, in essence reflect the fact that organizational commitment resembles at the same time both an attitudinal and a behavioral construct (cf. Nijhof, de Jong & Beukhof, 1998). As it is based on the interrelationship between work and organizational factors and grows over time, it is operationalized as a long-term and stable in nature construct (Vandenberg & Lance, 1992) and more dependent on the social exchange relationship between the individual (employee) and the organization in terms of resources reciprocity (van Dick & Wagner, 2002, p. 134).

When an employee is committed, he/she takes pleasure in working for the organization in the long-term and exerts extra effort to achieve the highest performance rates possible (Pool, 2000), reflecting to a greater extent their cognitive/perceptual involvement with the organization (cf. Abrams & de Moura, 2001; Ellemers, 2001). As with other related organizational constructs such as identification, commitment reflects the affective bond/psychological affiliation between the individual/employee and the organization (cf. van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006) and has attracted the attention of organizational behavior research due to favorable individual and organizational outcomes.

These outcomes include, among others, higher levels of overall job satisfaction (cf. Gautam, van Dick & Wagner, 2004) with commitment having a closer relationship with it in relation to organizational identification (cf. van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006, p. 574), organizational citizenship behavior and affective well-being (e.g. Terry et al., 2001; van Dick, Ullrich & Tissington, 2006), lower levels of employee threat (e.g. Mottola, Gaertner, Bachman & Dovidio, 1997; Terry & O'Brien, 2001) and lower levels of employee turnover and conflict among corporate members (cf. van Dick, Wagner & Lemmer, 2004b; Ullrich et al., 2005). Organizational commitment is also related to individual characteristics (e.g., age, education, job level, etc.) (Oztag, 2006) and associated with positive work behaviors and attitudes such as job satisfaction,

mental and physical health and intentions to quit, with highly committed people exhibiting increased satisfaction with work, good mental and physical health and decreased turnover intentions (Leong, Furnham, & Cooper, 1996). In addition, negative relationships between workplace stress and organizational commitment have also been reported in non-organizational-change conditions (e.g., Khatibi, Asadi, & Hamidi, 2009).

4. The relationship between Stress, Physical and Psychological Health and Organizational Commitment in M & As

Any kind of organizational change process represents an unusual event for employees, as they are obliged to follow the new demands and rules changes bring about; hence, any change in general, has been related to employees' uncertainty, elevated stress levels and negative results for them, such as for example, decreased job satisfaction and negative health (Falkenberg, Nâswall, Sverke & Sjöberg, 2009). Since most kinds of organizational change activities have the potential to generate feelings of insecurity and stress among employees, M&As tend not to be an exception to the rule (Davy, Kinicki, Kilroy, & Scheck, 1988).

The radical change associated with M&A activity considered to bring about wide organizational transformation, has the potential to affect and change various aspects of work life, including "employees' perceptions, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics of merging process itself" (c.f. Marks & Mirvis, 1985 p. 50). Employees expect that important changes are due, leading to feelings of uncertainty and stress based on, for example, fear of job loss or replacement (Dackert et al., 2003), even before integration is under way (Seo, 2001). The greater the uncertainty surrounding the merger, the greater the perceived inconsistency between the pressure of the merger and the individual's ability to respond. Panchal & Cartwright (2001) report that the stress associated with this kind of organizational activity is considered to be equal with the stress when having children or become bankrupt, while it remains present even years following M&A activity (Guerrero, 2008). Others also argue that it is not only the amount but also the length of uncertainty and anxiety that triggers stress within M&As with serious implications for employees' physical and psychological health (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Cartwright & Cooper, 1996; Seo, 2001).

Stress is suggested to be one of the two leading symptoms of the the so-called "merger syndrome" according to Marks (1997, p. 268; Marks & Mirvis, 1985) and it appears in most M&A cases irrespective of the deal/event characteristics. M&As are considered to be very emotional and troublesome organizational transformation

events, as they often involve major and vague changes (Marks, 1997) and generate, therefore, higher levels of employees' uncertainty and stress (Lotz & Donald, 2006) likely to have a negative effect on their physical and psychological health (e.g. Cartwright & Cooper, 1993; Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996; van Dick et al., 2006). M&As' stress can be indicative of employees' lack of ability to keep a balance between their reactions to the forthcoming changes and the resources offered to them to deal with those changes (Lotz & Donald, 2006).

Relevant evidence indicates that M&As are related to increased levels of stress across different hierarchical levels (e.g. Lotz & Donald, 2006) and poor physical and psychological health following merger (e.g. Bruckman, 2000; Cartwright & Cooper, 1993; Covin et al., 1996; Gulliver, Towell & Peck, 2002; Idel et al., 2003; Marks, 1997; McHugh, 1995; Siu, Cooper, & Donald, 1997; Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996). Employees of the low status pre-merger organizations have been also found to receive merger experience as more stressful in relation to their counterparts from the high status pre-merger organizations (Terry & Callan, 1998; Terry & O'Brien, 2001).

In some cases, though, mergers are suggested to create higher levels of employees' stress in relation to acquisitions, as they are considered to involve more speedy and lengthy organizational changes and employees are obliged to abandon their organizational identity as members of the previous (pre-merger organization) to the newly merged organization (Amiot, Terry, & Callan, 2007; Cartwright & Cooper, 1996). Thus, they are more likely to experience increased feelings of insecurity and stress, as they feel that they are "sold out" (Napier, 1989 p. 274) and demonstrate unfavorable attitude towards the organization (Hui & Lee, 2000) and decreased performance and negative attitude towards their work (Davy et al., 1988). Moreover, empirical data demonstrate that stress is related to lower levels of job satisfaction (Appelbaum et al., 2000), less favourable attitude towards merger experience, lower post-merger organizational identification (Pheiffer & Marson, 2005) and decreased post-merger organizational commitment (Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992).

Job insecurity identified as "the perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984 p. 438), is considered to be one of the most salient sources of employees' work stress (Cooper et al., 2001) and generates negative employee-and-organization oriented responses in terms of lowered job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Sora et al., 2009). In a given M&A context, job insecurity experienced by employees is suggested to be related to the degree of threat they feel that the situation bears for them (Amiot et al., 2006; van Dick et al., 2006). Also, employees of the acquiring merger partners are expected to feel less threatened by the merger experience in relation

to the ones of the acquired, due to an increased sense of continuity from the pre- to the post-merger organization (Covin et al., 1996); in a takeover experience, employees are suggested to show increased insecurity levels (Guerrero, 2008) possibly because the takeover process triggers a greater feeling of threat jeopardizing their sense of security and safety on itself.

Stress, anxiety and ill health together with heightened resistance to change itself (Cartwright, 2005; Hogan, Overmyer-Day, 1994), are the most evident negative responses within M&A conditions. More specifically, empirical findings indicate that organizational members feel anxiety when dealing with potential merger experience (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993b), while not only the extent but also the length of anxiety and uncertainty experienced by employees, may trigger stress in M&As and lead to worse physical and psychological health (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996). The amount of insecurity experienced by employees seems to depend on the degree of threat experienced by the changing conditions under way (Guerrero, 2008). Hence, the magnitude, the length, the rate of the changes involved accompanied by the fact that employees need to abandon their pre-merger identity and adhere to the one of the post-merger organization, are considered as particular stressors for them (Amiot, Terry, Jimmieson, & Callan, 2006).

In addition, role ambiguity and role conflict as examples of sources of stress due to potential work roles rescheduling, have also been suggested to exist within such change settings (Marks & Mirvis, 1992) and possibly as is the case in general, lead to worse job satisfaction, motivation at work (Seo, 2001) and organizational commitment (Igharia et al., 1992).

Furthermore, evidence indicates that job position weakening leads to worse health post-merger in terms of exhaustion and functional incapacity; also, occupational groups such as white-in relation to blue-collar employees experience a higher risk of exhaustion, while the blue-collar ones an increased risk of decline in their capacity to work (Väsnänen et al., 2004). In other studies, though, job level appears to have no effect on the sources of stress experienced by employees, while other variables such as communication satisfaction, are negatively associated with sources of stress (Lotz & Donald, 2006).

Moreover, employees of the dominated corporate partners are experiencing higher levels of merger-related stress (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993) and heightened insecurity in hostile acquisitions (Guerrero, 2008), while other findings indicate no differences in the experience of sources of stress between the dominant and the dominated corporate members (Cartwright et al., 2007). Additional evidence obtained in non-merger settings showed that employees exhibiting high levels of stress

demonstrate lowered organizational commitment, but they did not confirm the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between stress and attitudes to change (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

Amiot et al. (2006 p. 553) argue that although employees' responses and reactions within M&As conditions have become the focus of attention over the past few years, yet, there is a shortage of studies incorporating stress and coping perspective. However, certain coping strategies such as avoidance coping and problem-focused coping (Amiot et al., 2006; Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2001), are two examples of the processes used by organizational members to deal with and adjust to the merger experience. Further evidence also confirms the negative relationship between stress and psychological well-being in terms of both work anxiety and burnout, while it also illustrates escapism and problem-focused coping as mediators in the relationship between stress and the above mentioned measures of psychological well-being (Terry, Callan & Sartori, 1996).

M&As are expected to lead to lower employee commitment towards the vision of the merged organization (Jans, 2005; Meyer, 1998), as the psychological contract between the employees and the organization is under potential change (i.e., the agreement regarding employees' rights within and their obligations towards the merged organization and vice versa). More specifically, empirical findings indicate greater organizational commitment for the employees of the dominant high status pre-merger organization in relation to those of the low status pre-merger organization, as they transfer their sense of continuity from the pre- to the post-merger organization (Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001; Terry & O'Brien, 2001; Ullrich & Greitemeyer, 2005).

In addition, the more employees are committed towards the implementation of the organization's vision and values, the less threatened they feel by merger (Bachman, 1993) and particularly, in the case of a transformation merger pattern (Mottola et al., 1997). Also, increased organizational commitment is related to greater psychological affiliation to the merged organization and thereby, to a more positive attitude towards merger experience (Gautam, van Dick & Wagner, 2004), while it mediates the relationship between stress and turnover intentions (Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992). Better adjustment to the merger in terms of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment is also related to the perception of the employees that the merger has been implemented in a positive way, while problem-focused coping has been also linked to improved adjustment to the merger experience (Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001).

5. Conclusion

The expansion of M&As either on national or cross-border grounds and the amount of assets they involve, seem to contrast the high underperformance rates

reported. M&As are complex organizational change activities, not alike and involve a huge amount of human resources management which is often mentioned as the critical factor in their success. As Appelbaum et al. (2007 p. 134) argue, "people are at times resistant to change and do not deal with stress and anxiety in the same way". The relationship between sources and outcomes of workplace stress is a complex one and requires a multilevel approach in considering the individual, group and environmental factors that affect it (Probst, 2010). Since it is rather largely generated by feelings of fear regarding expecting changes and not the change per se (Lotz & Donald, 2006), it could be managed in a certain way. Given the "dynamic and unstable" (Amiot et al., 2007 p. 559) nature of M&A context with ongoing changes and adjustment over time, it is reasonable to expect that strategies aimed at easing potentially stressful employees' responses should be employed by upper management.

For example, carefully designed stress management practices should be followed and evaluated accordingly. As workplace stress seems to be triggered more by the perceptions employees have as to whether the potential changes will affect them (Lotz & Donald, 2006 p. 6), then possible strategies easing their negative perceptions, should be applied by management team. For instance, communication is found to be very important throughout M&A process (Appelbaum et al., 2000). As evidence indicates that the more employees perceive they are asked by management team about assimilation process and their opinion is under serious consideration, the less stressed and more committed towards the post-merger organization are (Cartwright, Tytherleigh, & Robertson, 2007), exhibit increased self-efficacy and perceive the merger as a less stressful event (Amiot, Terry, Jimmieson, & Callan, 2006). Investing in meetings with management team and providing employees with realistic and clear information on a regular basis long before official merger process begins regarding their job tasks/ job roles rearrangements, would be helpful in alleviating potential sources of stress and the insecurity and uncertainty coming along in M&As environment.

Also, when employees participate in an honest and open communication process, regarding the reality of the merger experience like merger "preview" process (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991), are likely to perceive that they are respected, taken care and trusted by their organization and expected to experience lowered threat by the merger, perceive the post-merger organization as one entity (i.e., "common ingroup identity" cited in Fischer et al., 2007 p. 207) and in turn, demonstrate increased organizational commitment (Gaertner, Bachman, Dovidio, & Banker, 2001).

Most of all, though, they might be helped in perceiving the reality of merger ex-

perience as less insecure, threatening and stressful over the prospective changes that M&A reality puts forward, as the sense of control moderates stress reactions (Cartwright & Cooper, 2000). Heightened job control in carefully designed and implemented work management practices, should be the end result of organization-oriented stress management activities (Randall, Cox, & Griffiths, 2007). Moreover, managers employing equal opportunities schemes in reward policies, training and development activities and adopting at a pragmatic level aspects of pre-merger cultures, would probably generate feelings of fair and legitimate treatment between members of corporate partners, reduce merger-related stressors and support more favorable employee health outcomes.

Ultimately, if employees realize that M&A process and the associated changes represent an opportunity for favorable professional development by heightened status or new career prospects, then they would probably feel less stressed (Cartwright, Tytherleigh, & Robertson, 2007) and accept the long-term stages of transition to the new merger reality more easily. However, each merger experience is unique, so employees' responses will differentiate from one organization and industry to the other, as well as from one particular merger context to the other.

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