

Stress and Organizational Change

During organizational change, employees often experience:

- Anxiety connected with the loss of:
 - sense of security
 - sense of competence
 - relationships
 - sense of direction and control
 - territory
 - job
 - Anger, sense of betrayal
 - Helplessness, vulnerability
 - Uncertainty and ambiguity
 - Lowered concentration skills
 - Active rumor mill
 - Survivor guilt
 - Desire to punish the organization
 - Heavier workloads
 - Low morale
 - Decreased productivity
 - Increased stress-related symptoms (muscle tension, headaches, intestinal distress, depression, insomnia, exhaustion, prone to illness, etc)
 - Burnout
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Challenges to Work Relationships During Transition

- More time needed to discuss the process of change and our reactions to it; less time to do it
- Less time available for informal relationship building
- Free time often spent talking about the changes
- Increased frequency of saying goodbye and forming new relationships
- Increase in time spent on training and orienting self or others when workload is already high
- Development of new reporting relationships
- Increase in rumors, gossip, complaining
- Increased frequency of interactions that feel tense or hostile; people less patient, not as diplomatic or polite
- Misunderstandings are more frequent: it is difficult to speak clearly and to hear accurately if emotional intensity is raised, or if people feel rushed

- Increased competitiveness due to job insecurity

holding information back from others
gathering up responsibilities
increase in territorial behavior
not cooperating, not speaking
tattling, sabotage, self-marketing
mistrust

- Increased paranoia, resentment and mistrust of supervisors, managers and the institution
 - Fear of speaking up on controversial issues due to job insecurity
 - Disruption in the sense of belonging to a team
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Managing Work-Related Stress

- Protect your health: notice and respond to stress warning signs
 - Healthy lifestyle habits: good diet, adequate sleep, exercise
 - Protect and use rest periods
 - Focus attention on what you can control
 - Avoid excessive overworking: separate work and home
 - Keep up interests outside of work
 - Limit setting: saying "no"
 - Maintain sense of humor
 - Develop and maintain supportive relationships
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Damage Control for Work Relationships During Organizational Change

- Honesty
- Ask for information and disseminate information about changes
- Acknowledge and accept our own and others' emotional reactions to change and adjust our expectations accordingly
- Use reflective listening and check understandings with others. Take sufficient time with verbal interactions
- Exit from non-productive conversations involving complaints or rumors which are draining, anxiety provoking or depressing
- Remember your sense of humor
- Help and encourage those around you
- In direct and respectful ways, ask for what you need, express feelings, and attempt to resolve conflicts

- Choose the right time and place for settling a dispute with someone
 - Disengage from destructive, escalating arguments. Reschedule the discussion
 - Consider taking the first step to resolve a long-standing conflict with another
 - Take a deep breath, count to 10 (or higher) before responding if a highly emotional situation develops
 - Apologize after making a mistake that affects someone negatively
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