![CPH-NEW Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace]

Using the CPH-NEW IDEAS Tool to Reduce Stress in the Workplace:
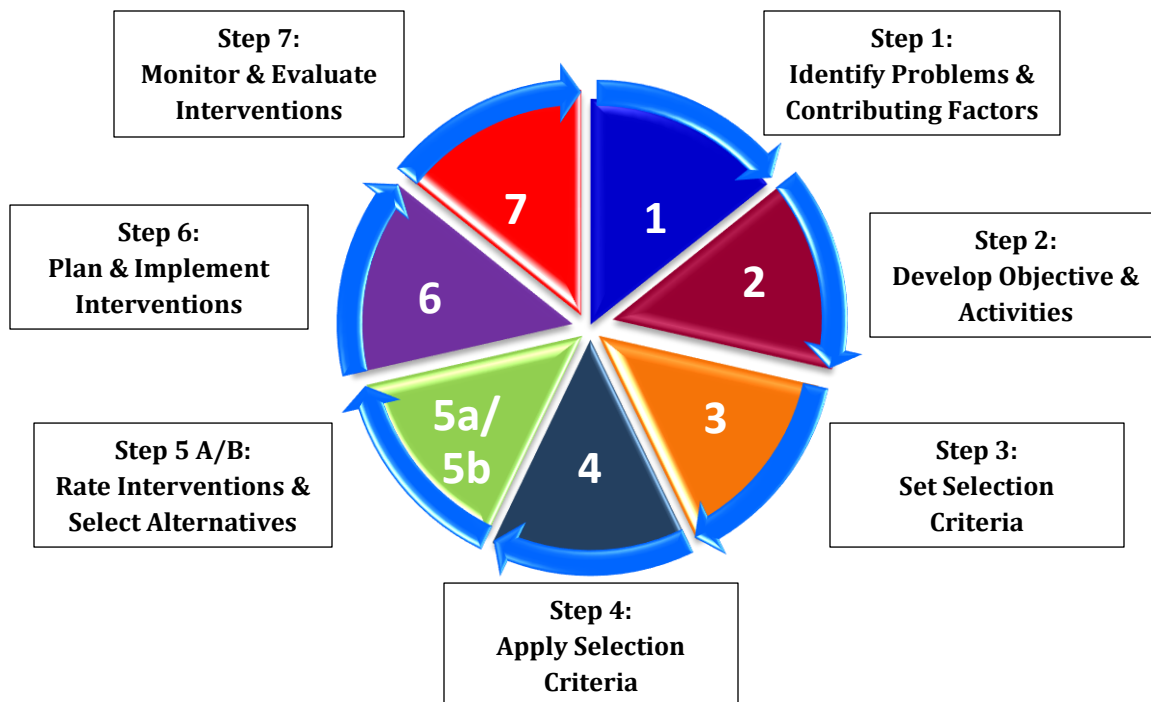## A Step by Step Guide for Design Teams and Steering Committees

Stress is an important risk factor for a variety of physical and mental health concerns in the workplace. Many workplace stress reduction interventions focus on teaching individual employees how to cope with stress, without addressing the underlying organization factors contributing to job stress[1,2,3,5,7]. Research shows that interventions that are "integrated" and comprehensive are more effective for impacting health and work outcomes. [8,9]

How to use this guide

Use this guide with an employee Design Team to discover root causes of job stress in your organization, and design effective interventions. This guide is a component of the Healthy Workplace Participatory Program (HWPP) toolkit (www.uml.edu/cphnewtoolkit). However, you can also use it with the existing change management systems.

1. Familiarize yourself with the CPH-NEW Intervention, Analysis and Design Scorecard (IDEAS) tool, which is freely available on the HWPP "Generating Solutions using the IDEAS tool" webpage (See Figure 1). Watch the training videos for **IDEAS Step 1 and Step 2** which can be found on the sub-navigation tabs.

2. Prepare to implement IDEAS Step 1. Read pages 4-6 in this guide to learn how to assess the most important stressors impacting your organization.

3. Prepare to implement IDEAS Step 2. Read pages 6-7 to learn how to design effective stress reduction interventions with a comprehensive array of prevention strategies. Review pages 7-10 to gather ideas for sample intervention activities for common workplace stressors. Contact cphnew@uml.edu for technical support if needed.

Figure 1: The IDEAS 7-Step Intervention Design Process

Step 7: Monitor & Evaluate Interventions

Step 6: Plan & Implement Interventions

Step 5 A/B: Rate Interventions & Select Alternatives

Step 1: Identify Problems & Contributing Factors

Step 2: Develop Objective & Activities

Step 3: Set Selection Criteria

Step 4: Apply Selection Criteria

Job Stress: Concept Definitions

Job stress is "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker"
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Job stress, job stressors, job strain....are these all the same thing? No they are not, and it is important to distinguish between them. This page provides a brief overview of job stress terms and concepts. More resources are available on the CPH-NEW Stress@Work website.

Job stress is "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker"[5].

Job stressors are those things in the workplace that cause a "stress response" (the body's physical, emotional, or behavioral reaction). Examples of job stressors could include physical hazards, organizational practices and policies the result in work overload, low job control, interpersonal conflicts, or events that cause a stress response within employees.

Job strain is a term that refers to the interaction between job demands and job control in causing a stress response. This concept has been used in research to understand the components of the job that produce ill health effects. The combination of high physical or psychological job demands (i.e. working very fast, working very hard, not enough time) and low job control (i.e. low decision making authority, lack of ability to use skills), particularly in the presence of low social support, produces measurable risk to psychological distress and physical illness[1].

Job Stress: Health Impacts

Scientific studies have clearly demonstrated a causal association between job strain and many poor health and safety outcomes such as[2,3,5]:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Depression and anxiety
- Injury on the job
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure and cortisol levels
- Weakened immune response
- Changes in appetite and digestive patterns

There is also clear evidence that higher levels of job stress are associated with lower levels of healthy behaviors that can protect against disease[5]. Physical activity and dietary habits suffer when stress increases. Smoking rates (and quit relapses) are also higher among workers reporting high job stress[1].

Paradoxically, workers experiencing high job stress are less likely to participate in workplace health promotion programs, which are designed to help protect against disease formation. Therefore, employees who would most benefit by health promotion during the workday are least likely to get it.

People vary in their subjective experience of stress. One employee may develop stress-related illness whereas another will not. However, the principle of prevention for all employees is important for ensuring healthy working conditions that are conducive to well-being, and free of recognized hazards, including serious psychosocial stressors[5].

Pages 4-7 in this guide can help you identify root causes of key job stressors, then plan effective interventions to address them. In this way you can develop a prevention-oriented approach to stress in the workplace.

Job Stress: Business Impacts

The Business Case for Workplace Stress Reduction

American companies spend more than $300 billion a year in health costs, absenteeism and poor performance due to stress on the job. There are important work-related concerns for employer organizations that impact healthcare costs, periods of disability, increased absenteeism, greater job turnover and poor productivity, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

- 40% of job turnover is related to stress. Job stress is the source of more health complaints than financial or family problems[4].
- Healthcare expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress[5].
- Insurance data indicates insurance claims for stress related industrial accidents cost nearly twice as much as non-stress related industrial accidents[6].
- Depression (a common outcome of excessive job stress) is the largest single predictor of absenteeism and work related performance. For every 47 cents spent on treating depression, another 53 cents is indirectly spent on absenteeism, presenteeism, and disability[7].

Figure 2: The cost of doing nothing about job stress
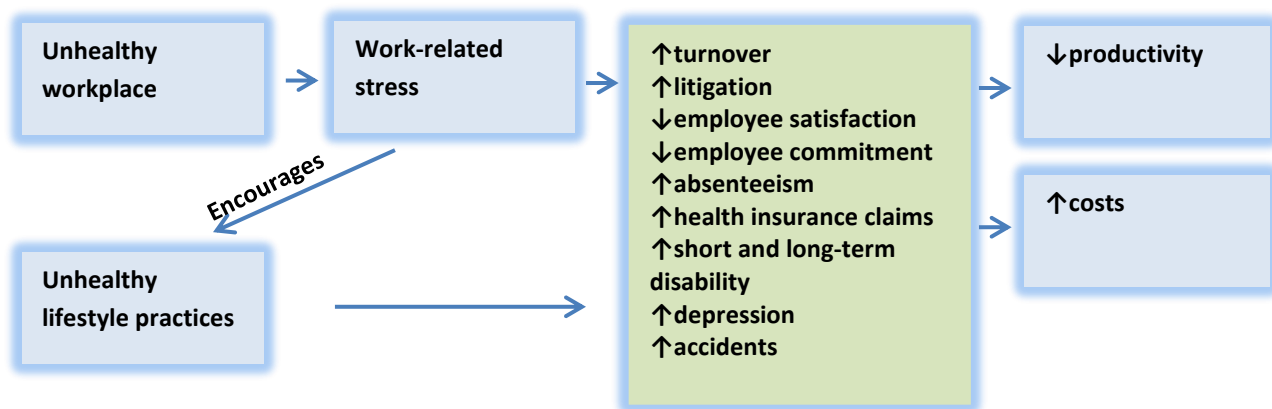
Graphic adapted from "The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace" produced by Industrial Accident and Prevention Association. http://www.uml.edu/docs/fd_business_case_healthy_workplace_tcm18-42671.pdf

Applying the IDEAS 7-Step design process for workplace stress reduction

IDEAS STEP 1:
Identify and Select Job Stress Concerns for Intervention

An effective intervention plan can be developed only after a problem or concern has been defined and described. What may appear to be the "problem" may only be a symptom and therefore taking time to assess the underlying contributing factors to concerns is a key first step to a successful intervention design.

As a facilitator of the participatory design effort, it is important that you work with your Design Team and Steering Committee to assess perceptions and concerns from a variety of employees representing the range of work units to be targeted by the intervention. It is vital that viewpoints are heard from employees on the front lines during this phase of intervention planning. Assessment methods and tools are described below.

Key assessment questions for facilitators and Design Teams:

1. What are the most important stress related issues affecting the workforce and what are the main contributing factors?

2. How are different segments of the workforce affected by these issues? (E.g. Are these issues more prevalent in one department or work unit than others? How do the issues impact employees at different levels of the organizational hierarchy?)

3. Which issues present the most salient threat to the organization's goals? Framing stress-related concerns in business terms (turnover, absenteeism, low productivity or quality, injuries/accidents, employee engagement/involvement, etc.) will elevate the importance of the issue and likelihood that the intervention will be supported by managers.

Types and examples of workplace stressors

There are several types of stressors in the workplace that may or may not be amenable to intervention. Some of these (especially the physical hazards) may be observable, and others will need to be identified by employees themselves.

Categories and examples of workplace stressors:
*   Job characteristics--excessive workload, shiftwork, lack of control, lack of physical mobility

*   Organizational factors—lack of communication, lack of training and growth opportunities, discrimination, poor supervision, unpredictable shifts

*   Interpersonal Relationships--unsupportive supervisors, bullying, harassment, excessive time away from family, uncivil and disrespectful behavior

*   Physical hazards—fatigue, awkward postures, heavy lifting, sharps risks, poor lighting, slippery floors, violence/assault risk from patients/clients/co-workers

Methods of assessment and discovery

To answer the key assessment questions, it will probably be necessary to use a variety of methods including an all-employee survey, interviews with key representatives of managers and supervisors, and focus groups with individual contributors and front line employees. The Healthy Workplace Participatory Program toolkit assessment instruments are designed to identify potential concerns in all of the above mentioned categories. The IDEAS Worksheets and Quick Reference Guides should be used by the facilitator to guide the Design Team through a discovery process to explore the underlying factors contributing to stress-related concerns so that they are described in detail. These materials can be found at www.uml.edu/cphnewtoolkit in the "Generate Solutions using the IDEAS Tool" navigation tab.

Group process activities such as factor tree analysis, fishbone diagramming, hazard mapping, and root cause analysis are all appropriate methods for this discovery phase. Materials for some of these methods are provided on the Toolkit website (see Training a facilitator and Using the IDEAS tool); however, it is also acceptable to use whatever methods are already approved and sanctioned by the organization, so long as the process is open ended.

Allocate at least one to two Design Team meetings to fully explore root causes of key stress issues that are important to them and their peers. Encourage Design Team members to identify when there is overlap in root causes for several related issues. Areas of overlap can signal important intervention targets.

Tips for facilitators regarding assessment and discovery of workplace stressors

- *Managing complexity*--It is important to recognize and acknowledge that not all issues or contributing factors can be feasibly addressed once they are "discovered." Even so, it is important to analyze the full scope of the situation so that goal setting and intervention planning is appropriately targeted and therefore can be effective at achieving the desired results.

- *Managing credibility*—Participation by a large number of employees is crucial for identifying issues that really matter to a large segment of the workforce. Your assessment data will be more credible to company managers if you can say that a particular issue or concern was raised by multiple groups of employees vs. only a couple of vocal employees in one focus group.

- *Managing sensitive discussion topics*—When facilitating group discussion about workplace stressors, it is important to anticipate and manage potential pitfalls that could detract from productive discussion. Remind the Design Team to avoid revealing confidential information about other employees, to protect what is said in the discussion by not repeating specifics, and to be as concise as possible. If a Design Team member begins to discuss a personal grievance, offer to discuss the situation after the meeting to help identify appropriate problem solving resources.

Prioritizing intervention targets

Undoubtedly, the Design Team will uncover a range of issues and sub-issues that contribute to stress in the workplace. At this point it will be important for the Design Team to prioritize the issues so that they can proceed with intervention planning in a way that is manageable and feasible. The Steering Committee (managers) may recommend top health/safety issues to be addressed by the Design Team. Selecting issues that are modifiable at the workplace should be the priority, although there are many programs and services that can help address personal and non-work sources of stress.

The facilitator should assist the Team with developing consensus. Keep in mind that certain issues may be more appropriate for the Design Team to deal with, while others may be better communicated and solved by another work group within the organization. The Steering Committee may do its own design initiatives. At the very least, the Design Team should gain approval from the Steering Committee before proceeding with intervention planning. This will help assure management support for the Design Team efforts.

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IDEAS STEP 2:
Develop Job Stress Intervention Objectives and Activities

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Once the Design Team has selected an intervention priority, then they are ready to develop an objective and range of possible solutions to address the issue. This step frames the stress intervention based on the *business needs* of the organization. Although the value and justification for stress interventions is obvious to workplace health practitioners and employees alike, the decision by company managers to allocate resources to fund the intervention must be driven by the organization's business concerns. A *written objective states the desired outcome of the intervention*, and forms the basis for developing various intervention alternatives that will be proposed to the Steering Committee. A full explanation of how to develop objectives and solution activities is provided in the [Complete IDEAS Tool and Detailed Instructions for Facilitator](). Be sure to allocate sufficient time (1-2 meetings is recommended) to brainstorm and to refine solutions.

Now that an intervention objective has been established, the Design Team can begin to think about various intervention strategies. To the extent possible, help the team to consider a range of activities, placing priority on *reducing workplace stressors first*, then helping individual employees to build resiliency and coping strategies.

Qualities of evidence-based programs to reduce job stress:
- ✓ Focuses on <u>primary prevention</u> – reduces employee exposure to job stressors
- ✓ Targets psychosocial stressors in addition to physical hazards
- ✓ Couples workplace improvements with employee health skill building
- ✓ Assures access to treatment and rehabilitation services for stress-related symptoms or disease

Scientific program evaluation studies consistently demonstrate that comprehensive interventions that use a "systems approach" are much more effective than interventions that have a narrow focus on individuals. Targeting interventions at the **organization** (changing policies, job design, work processes, communication systems, etc.) *in*

combination with **individual** health promotion and stress reduction should be the goal. This means that everyone in the organization can and should be involved to support and reinforce the objectives--employees, supervisors, work teams, and management. Vendors and consultants can also contribute their services to help with carryout specific activities, especially when expertise is not available within the organization. Example of a "systems change" intervention structure is illustrated in Figure 3. Examples of professional expertise that may be useful for delivering specific intervention activities is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 3 A Systems Approach to Job Stress*

Intervention Level	Effectiveness	Intervention Targets	Examples
1 -- Primary **Preventive, proactive** Goal: reducing risk factors or exposure to stressors before employees experience stress symptoms or disease.	+++	Reducing stressors at their source; improving the organization of work and working conditions	Participate in work planning, scheduling Breaks from clients Redesign work flow
2 -- Secondary **Ameliorative** Goal: reducing harmful effects of stress by helping employees build knowledge, skills, resources to cope with stressful conditions.	++	Improving employee responses to stressors; reducing perceived stress or strain; improving healthy lifestyle behaviors.	Mindfulness meditation Health screening/early detection Supervisor training to detect symptoms and refer
3 -- Tertiary **Reactive** Goal: treating/ rehabilitating employees with stress-related symptoms and disease.	+	Reducing stress-related disability, improving disease management.	Medical care and counseling Job modification Return to work programs

*Adapted from LaMontange et al., A Systematic Review of the Job-stress Intervention Evaluation Literature, 1990–2005; Int. J. Occup. Environ Health 2007; 13:268–280.

Figure 4 Professional disciplines that may help with job stress interventions
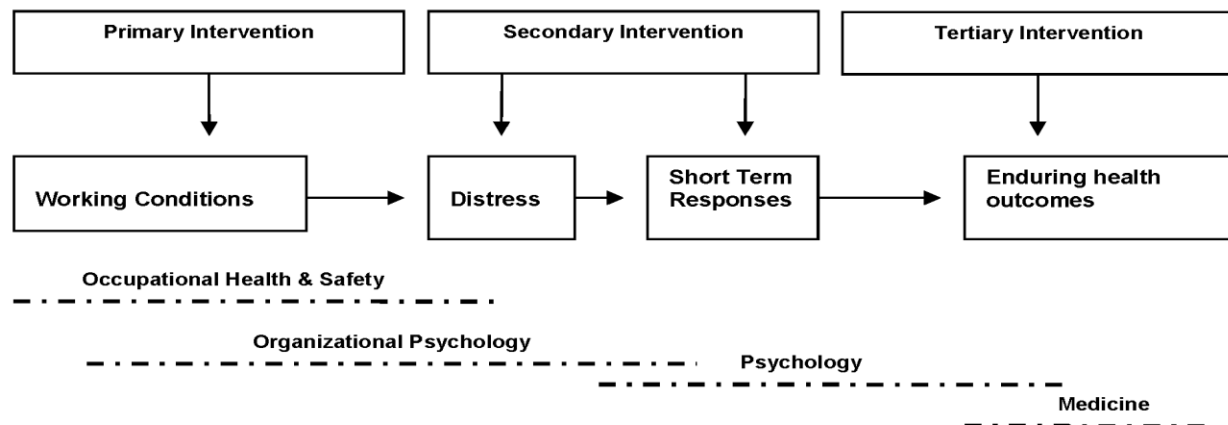
From LaMontagne et al., Protecting and promoting mental health in the workplace: developing a systems approach to job stress; Health Promotion Journal of Australia 2007; 18 (3): 221-228.

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3. Schnall PL, Dobson M, Rosskam E (Publication date pending) Unhealthy Work: Causes, Consequences, and Cures. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. http://baywood.com
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8. LaMontange et al., A Systematic Review of the Job-stress Intervention Evaluation Literature, 1990–2005; Int. J. Occup. Environ Health 2007; 13:268–280.
9. LaMontagne et al., Protecting and promoting mental health in the workplace: developing a systems approach to job stress; Health Promotion Journal of Australia 2007; 18 (3): 221-228.

SAMPLE STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE WORKPLACE STRESS

The sample strategies provided below are intended to be used as a starting point in generating ideas to deal with common stressors in the work environment. They are not one-size-fits-all solutions. These sample strategies should be considered by a Design Team when planning interventions for specific concerns identified in their workplace.

You can apply **best practices** for intervention planning by:
➢ Taking time to **discover employee perspectives** about causes and contributors to stress in the workplace**.** This can be done by having one-on-one discussions, focus groups, confidential surveys or group discussion with employees.
➢ Engage employees at all levels in planning **comprehensive** interventions that target working conditions, employees, and the organization as a whole.

Sample workplace intervention strategies

Ergonomic hazards
Sample strategies to address high ergonomic risk in hand motion and materials handling

- Conduct job analysis to assess risk to all body parts
- Slower Work Pace
- Job Rotation, Job Enrichment
- Mix Seated and Standing Work
- Alter work flow, process
- Training in better technique
- Rest breaks, stretching
- Ergonomic and adjustable workstations
- Reduce Repetition
- Reduce Force Requirements
- Reduce Awkward and/or Static Postures

Organizational health climate
Sample strategies to address poor health climate (norms of health behavior and communication)

- Create an awareness campaign that gets people talking and engages all work groups.
- Train managers/supervisors on the importance of participating in and promoting company sponsored lifestyle programs.
- Encourage appropriate use of paid sick time to prevent spread of illness.
- Establish a feedback process for employees to communicate about needed workplace health improvements.
- Establish performance standards for supervisors so they are held accountable for supporting worksite health initiatives in their departments.

Organizational safety climate
Sample strategies to address poor safety climate (perceptions of safety and management concern)

- Work with top leadership to develop and adopt a written workplace safety policy and program.
- Communicate workplace safety policies clearly and reinforce them in everyday activities.
- Conduct a safety audit to identify and address problem areas.
- Develop procedures to assure that workplace safety practices are adhered to in each department.
- Encourages reporting of safety hazards and 'near-misses' in a way that removes fear of reprisal.
- Establish performance standards for supervisors so they are held accountable for workplace safety practices and the number of accidents in their departments.

- Provide clear communication channels for employees to voice safety concerns or suggestions.
- Provide ongoing workplace safety training for all employees, including new hires.
- Assign a safety committee (or link with Healthy Workplace/Wellness Committee) to meet regularly
- Integrate safety and health committee activities
- Recognize and reward excellence in workplace safety.

Adapted from nonprofitrisk.org Organization Safety Culture Checklist
http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/tools/workplace-safety/public-sector/concepts/orgchk-ps.htm

Organizational support for healthy lifestyle behaviors
Sample strategies to address low perceived organizational support for active living/working, eating healthfully, managing stress, getting enough sleep, and working safely.

- Involve employees across the company in planning the worksite health program. Find out what is important to them, when they can participate, what the potential barriers are.
- Enhance communication campaigns to increase awareness of any existing programs.
- Find out why employees don't participate in existing programs. You can do this formally with a survey or focus group or informally with conversations in the workplace. Establish nutrition standards to assure healthy food in vending machines, snack stations, and cafeteria.
- Provide meal break areas that are clean, furnished, well-equipped so employees can eat home cooked meals in a social environment.
- Organize schedules to allow at least 30 minutes for a work-free meal break.
- Use incentives to encourage participation in healthy lifestyles. Offer educational programs and information to all employees
- Offer a health coaching service to employees
- Provide safe, clean, and attractive stairs and walkways; encourage walking one-on-one meetings.
- Offer flexible scheduling to employees to participate in worksite health programs and to attend preventive health screenings.

Social support
Sample strategies to address low coworker and supervisor social support

- Sponsor social events to foster camaraderie and positive relationships.
- Organize job roles to allow employees to participate in work teams.
- Train managers/supervisors on effective leadership of work teams.
- Train managers/supervisors on effective communication.
- Train managers/supervisors on recognition and referrals for stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Make sure that meal break areas clean, furnished, and well-equipped so employees can socialize at break times.
- Organize peer support groups (healthy lifestyle, elder caregivers, illness/injury, etc.) for employees in the workplace or make it easy for employees to connect with support groups in the community.
- Recognize employees for achievements on and off the job.
- Establish vacation or sick time pooling programs to help employees during hardship.
- Encourage appropriate use of paid sick time to prevent spread of illness

Stressful Job Design
Sample strategies to address high job stress, low job control

- Train managers and supervisors how to encourage employee involvement, how to communicate supportively, and other aspects of cultivating employee performance and development.
- Evaluate manager performance in the areas of
    - ✓ involving all employees in discussing problems and solutions,
    - ✓ communicating frequently with employees about important decisions and future plan,
    - ✓ arranging work assignments to prevent excessive demands,
    - ✓ planning work carefully with employees to agree on achievable deadlines or work pace,
    - ✓ ensuring that tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined, and
    - ✓ providing employees with opportunities for learning and skills development.
- Develop standards for job descriptions so that responsibilities are clear, there are a variety of tasks, reasonable workload, and a clear line of report.
- Offer stress management training to employees as a *supplement* to establishing preventive job design improvements (see above).
- Train managers/supervisors on how to recognize employee symptoms of stress and depression and respond effectively with work modifications and referrals.
- Assure benefits plan includes treatment and rehabilitation services for stress-related symptoms or disease such employee assistance programs.

Work Climate
Sample strategies to address problems of incivility and injustice in the workplace

- Incorporate respect and fairness into the company mission statement, personnel policies, and expectations for daily interactions.
- Establish policies and procedures to deal with incivility, abuse, harassment, and violence at work.
- Provide training for all employees on respectful and fair treatment in the workplace; involve executives, managers, supervisors, production employees, and all new hires.
- Reward employees for being good role models for respect and fairness in the workplace.
- Include positive workplace etiquette in all leadership training.

EXAMPLE OF A MODEL PROGRAM—Veterans Affairs Culture Change Initiative
http://www.va.gov/ncod/crew.asp

Work-family conflict
Sample strategies to address work-family conflict

- Adopt policies on flexible work schedules appropriate to industry; communicate policies and procedures to all employees.
- Train supervisors how to communicate and support existing work-life policies and programs.
- Establish measures and limits to avoid excessively long work hours.
- Expand benefits and programs to assist with managing personal and care-giving needs.
- Develop vacation or sick time pooling programs to help employees during hardship.
- Establish corporate volunteer program to provide flexible work hours or paid time for community volunteering.

Resources for intervention planning

JOB STRESS

Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints

http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_168053/lang--en/index.htm

This publication provides practical low-cost action steps employers can take to address specific types of job stressors. A plain language checklist is provided to use during a walk-through assessment to identify and prioritize key stressors. Useful for stress intervention planning.

Reducing Stress in the Workplace: An Evidence Review

http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Economic-participation/Creating_Healthy-Workplaces.aspx

The 2012 report provides a plain language review of the scientific evidence for strategies to reduce the health impacts of workplace stress. Specific examples of best practice strategies for workplace stress reduction are provided along with a frame work for designing systems level workplace interventions.

Stress in America: Our Health at Risk

http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/index.aspx

The report summarizes the results of the American Psychological Association's 2016 national Stress in America™ survey. The Stress in America™ survey measures attitudes and perceptions of stress among the general public and identifies leading sources of stress, common behaviors used to manage stress and the impact of stress on our lives.

University of Massachusetts Lowell's Stress@Work Website

https://www.uml.edu/Research/CPH-NEW/Worker/stress-at-work/default.aspx

This website provides an overview of causes, impacts, and intervention strategies for work-related stress. Written for human resources and workplace health practitioners, and employees.

DEPRESSION

Workplaces That Thrive: A Resource for Creating Mental Health-Friendly Work Environments

http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Workplaces-That-Thrive/SMA07-4272

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has developed this resource to help human resources professionals understand the benefits and design of a mental health-friendly workplace.

Treatment Works: Get Help for Depression and Anxiety

https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/basics/mental-illness/depression.htm

This CDC web page offers guidance on the signs of depression and where to find help.

American Psychological Association Help Center

http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/depression.aspx

This website offers education and guidance on depression and other mental health concerns.

NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health)

http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics/

This site provides information on ergonomics and musculoskeletal disorders in the workplace. It includes a list of ergonomics programs and interventions, evaluation of risk factors for lifting tasks, back injuries, keyboard and display terminal analysis, and the effects of vibration.

OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)

https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ergonomics/training.html

This site provides materials on ergonomic outreach and assistance. It includes ergonomic eTools, cooperative programs, training and education, and industry-developed guidelines.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work, Family and Health Network

http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/wfhn/home

This site is written for employers, researchers and working people. It provides information for employers, evidence on effective worksite interventions for workers and families, as well as family resources. The program is funded by NIH and the CDC.

Families and Work Institute

http://www.familiesandwork.org/

This site provides research findings on employer Work-Life practices and benefits, the changing workforce, family and community. It includes reports available for download, research and publications, and a newsroom section featuring a blog and press releases.

WORKPLACE INCIVILITY

CREW (Civility Respect and Engagement in the Workplace)

http://www.va.gov/ncod/crew.asp

This site provides information about the CREW initiative, created by the Department of Veterans Affairs. CREW strives to improve the work climate through more civil and respectful interactions. The site includes contact information for organizations who are interested in implementing the CREW initiative in their workplace.

Newfoundland, Canada Public Service Secretariat

http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/harassment.html

This site provides information on harassment and discrimination-free workplace policies. It includes a guide for managers and employees, detailed definitions of harassment-related terms, and procedures and resolutions options.