

UNDERSTANDING
EXECUTIVE
STRESS

Also by Cary L. Cooper

T-GROUPS: A SURVEY OF RESEARCH (*with Iain Mangham*)
GROUP TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUAL AND
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
THEORIES OF GROUP PROCESSES
DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS IN MANAGERS:
ADVANCES IN GROUP TRAINING (*editor*)
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK AND USA:
A JOINT EVALUATION (*editor*)

UNDERSTANDING EXECUTIVE STRESS

Cary L. Cooper
and
Judi Marshall



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**This volume is dedicated to Our Social Support Team:
Richie, June, Scott, Beth and Pat**

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Introduction

The main aim of this book is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the sources of stress acting upon managers in organisations. We have drawn on a wide range of sources for our material – from novels to research reports, from writers concerned with organisational effectiveness to those whose aim is to improve the quality of working life. In so doing we have not, however, been satisfied just to review the literature, but have chosen to tie it to an underlying model, that of Person : Environment Fit, and to elaborate underlying conceptual implications as this seems appropriate.

Chapters 1 and 2 are intended to give the reader a broad grounding in the topic area via an examination of various ways in which stress can be defined and a review of some of the available literature. In Chapter 3 the Person : Environment Fit model is applied specifically to managerial stress and potential sources of stress in both the immediate job environment and ‘in’ the individual are considered. Building on this, a wider view of the manager is then taken and the pressures which may result from working in an organisation, with other organisational members, discussed. Our view of the manager is finally expanded one step further to consider possible problems at the interface between his work and home lives. Particular attention is paid to the meaning for their joint lives of the role his wife adopts. Having built up a static picture of the manager and his wife, we then conclude our description of potential stressors by considering the importance of timing in the stress sequence and illustrate some of its facets by following the couple through a potentially stressful event – relocation.

This extensive consideration of stressors provides a sound base from which to suggest ways that both organisations and individuals can cope more effectively. Chapter 7 does just this but emphasises that as pressures have beneficial, as well as destructive, effects, stress must be *managed* rather than totally eradicated. In the first half three broad strategies are proposed – prevention, the remedying of known common environmental stressors and the provision of means to handle stress once it has occurred. The second half considers the role the personnel

officer might play in this context.

In a final chapter we point to some of the shortcomings of current research methodology in this area and make suggestions for future studies.

Before proceeding, a short explanatory note! In this time of increasingly vocal concern for 'equal opportunities' the fact that this book concentrates on *the male manager* and his female spouse requires, perhaps, some justification. We do not mean by this bias to suggest that managers should be male but to reflect the *status quo*, that the overwhelming majority are male. In 1973 a mere 3000, 0.75%, of Britain's 400,000 executives were women. In consequence there is little or no research work dealing with the stresses on female managers. We feel, therefore, that it is more worthwhile, for the present, to focus on topics which have been explored than to speculate about those which are a future research need.

C.L.C.
J.M.

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