

### Exhibit 18-7 Work Is the Biggest Source of Stress for Most

"What area of your life causes you the most stress?"

Area	Causes Most Stress
My job	34%
My finances	30%
Health	17%
Other	19%

Source: Based on 2013 poll of over 2,000 U.K. individuals, [www.mind.org.uk/news/8566\\_work\\_is\\_biggest\\_cause\\_of\\_stress\\_in\\_peoples\\_lives](http://www.mind.org.uk/news/8566_work_is_biggest_cause_of_stress_in_peoples_lives), accessed July 31, 2013.

are having mental breakdowns and needing professional help at higher rates than ever.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, as Exhibit 18-7 shows, work is, for most people, the most important source of stress in life. What are the causes and consequences of stress, and what can individuals and organizations do to reduce it?

## What Is Stress?

**Stress** is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.<sup>61</sup> This is a complicated definition. Let's look at its components more closely.

Although stress is typically discussed in a negative context, it is not necessarily bad in and of itself; it also has a positive value.<sup>62</sup> In response to stress, your nervous system, hypothalamus, pituitary, and adrenal glands supply you with stress hormones to cope. Your heartbeat and breathing accelerate to increase oxygen, while your muscles tense for action.<sup>63</sup> This is an opportunity when it offers potential gain. Consider, for example, the superior performance an athlete or stage performer gives in a "clutch" situation. Such individuals often use stress positively to rise to the occasion and perform at their maximum. Similarly, many professionals see the pressures of heavy workloads and deadlines as positive challenges that enhance the quality of their work and the satisfaction they get from their job. However, when the situation is negative, stress is harmful and may hinder your progress by elevating your blood pressure uncomfortably and creating an erratic heart rhythm as you struggle to speak and think logically.<sup>64</sup>

Researchers have argued that **challenge stressors**—or stressors associated with workload, pressure to complete tasks, and time urgency—operate quite differently from **hindrance stressors**—or stressors that keep you from reaching your goals (for example, red tape, office politics, confusion over job responsibilities). Although research is just starting to accumulate, early evidence suggests challenge stressors produce less strain than hindrance stressors.<sup>65</sup>

Researchers have sought to clarify the conditions under which each type of stress exists. It appears that employees who have stronger affective commitment to their organizations can transfer psychological stress into greater focus and higher sales performance, whereas employees with low levels of commitment perform worse under stress.<sup>66</sup> And when challenge stress increases, those with high levels of organizational support have higher role-based performance, but those with low levels of organizational support do not.<sup>67</sup>

More typically, stress is associated with **demands** and **resources**. Demands are responsibilities, pressures, obligations, and uncertainties individuals face in the workplace. Resources are things within an individual's control that he or she can use to resolve the demands. Let's discuss what this demands-resources model means.<sup>68</sup>

When you take a test at school or undergo your annual performance review at work, you feel stress because you confront opportunities and performance

**stress** An unpleasant psychological process that occurs in response to environmental pressures.

**challenge stressors** Stressors associated with workload, pressure to complete tasks, and time urgency.

**hindrance stressors** Stressors that keep you from reaching your goals (for example, red tape, office politics, confusion over job responsibilities).

**demands** Responsibilities, pressures, obligations, and even uncertainties that individuals face in the workplace.

**resources** Things within an individual's control that can be used to resolve demands.

**OB Poll** Many Employees Feel Extreme Stress

What is your stress level?



Note: According to StressPulse survey of 1,880 employees.

Source: Based on "Presenteeism on the Rise as Employees Show Fatigue From a Slow- to No-Hire Economy," ComPsych Corporation press release (October 29, 2012), [www.compsych.com/press-room/press-releases-2012/678-october-29-2012](http://www.compsych.com/press-room/press-releases-2012/678-october-29-2012).

pressures. A good performance review may lead to a promotion, greater responsibilities, and a higher salary. A poor review may prevent you from getting a promotion. An extremely poor review might even result in your being fired. To the extent you can apply resources to the demands on you—such as being prepared, placing the exam or review in perspective, or obtaining social support—you will feel less stress.

Research suggests adequate resources help reduce the stressful nature of demands when demands and resources match. If emotional demands are stressing you, having emotional resources in the form of social support is especially important. If the demands are cognitive—say, information overload—then job resources in the form of computer support or information are more important. Thus, under the demands–resources perspective, having resources to cope with stress is just as important in offsetting it as demands are in increasing it.<sup>69</sup>

### Potential Sources of Stress

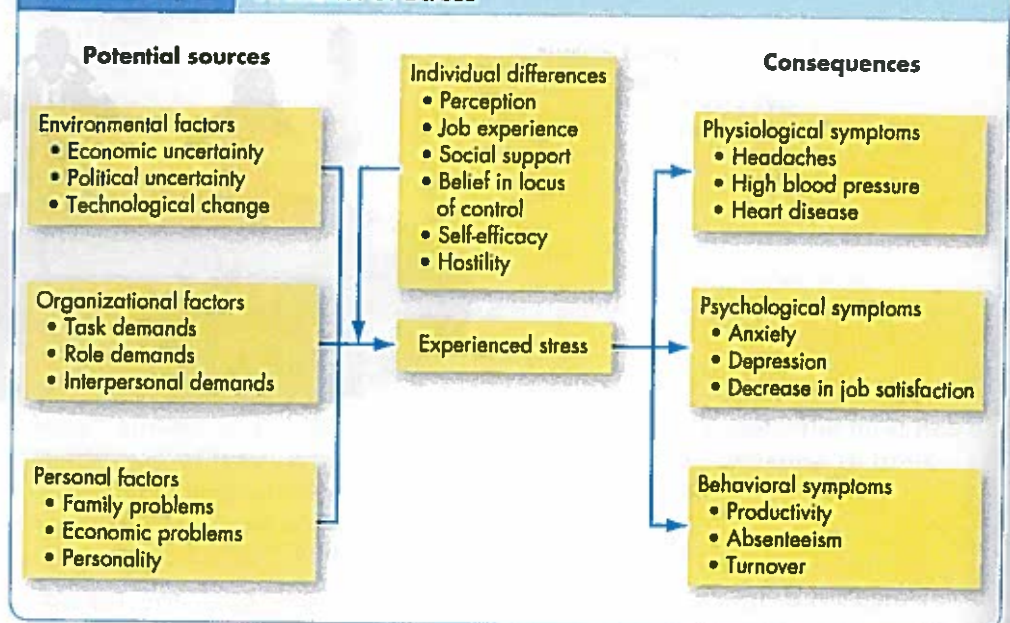
What causes stress? As the model in Exhibit 18-8 shows, there are three categories of potential stressors: environmental, organizational, and personal. Let's take a look at each.<sup>70</sup>

**Environmental Factors** Just as environmental uncertainty influences the design of an organization's structure, it also influences stress levels among employees in that organization. Indeed, uncertainty is the biggest reason people have trouble coping with organizational changes.<sup>71</sup> There are three main types of environmental uncertainty: economic, political, and technological.

Changes in the business cycle create *economic uncertainties*. When the economy is contracting, for example, people become increasingly anxious about their job security. *Political uncertainties* don't tend to create stress among North Americans as they do for employees in countries such as Haiti or Venezuela. The obvious reason is that the United States and Canada have stable political systems, in which change is typically implemented in an orderly manner. Yet political threats and changes, even in countries such as the United States and Canada, can induce stress. Threats of terrorism in developed and developing nations, for instance, lead to political uncertainty that becomes stressful to people in these countries.<sup>72</sup> Because innovations can make an employee's skills



Exhibit 18-8 A Model of Stress



and experience obsolete in a very short time, computers, robotics, automation, and similar forms of *technological change* are also a threat to many people and cause them stress.

**Organizational Factors** There is no shortage of factors within an organization that can cause stress. Pressures to avoid errors or complete tasks in a limited time, work overload, a demanding and insensitive boss, and unpleasant co-workers are a few examples. We've categorized these factors around task, role, and interpersonal demands.<sup>73</sup>

*Task demands* relate to a person's job. They include the design of the job (its degrees of autonomy, task variety, degree of automation), working conditions, and the physical work layout. Assembly lines can put pressure on people when they perceive the line's speed to be excessive. Working in an overcrowded room or a visible location where noise and interruptions are constant can increase anxiety and stress.<sup>74</sup> As customer service grows ever more important, emotional labor becomes a source of stress.<sup>75</sup> Imagine being a flight attendant for Southwest Airlines or a cashier at Starbucks. Do you think you could put on a happy face when you're having a bad day?

*Role demands* relate to pressures placed on a person as a function of the particular role he or she plays in the organization. Role conflicts create expectations that may be hard to reconcile or satisfy. Role overload occurs when the employee is expected to do more than time permits. Role ambiguity means role expectations are not clearly understood and the employee is not sure what to do. Individuals who face high situational constraints (such as fixed work hours or demanding job responsibilities) are also less able to engage in the proactive coping behaviors that reduce stress levels.<sup>76</sup> When faced with hassles at work, they will not only have higher levels of distress at the time, but they'll also be less likely to take steps to eliminate stressors in the future.

*Interpersonal demands* are pressures created by other employees. Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationships can cause stress, especially among employees with a high social need. A rapidly growing body

of research has also shown that negative co-worker and supervisor behaviors, including fights, bullying, incivility, racial harassment, and sexual harassment, are especially strongly related to stress at work.<sup>77</sup>

**Personal Factors** The typical individual works about 40 to 50 hours a week. But the experiences and problems people encounter in the other 120-plus hours can spill over to the job. Our final category, then, is factors in the employee's personal life: family issues, personal economic problems, and inherent personality characteristics.

National surveys consistently show people hold *family* and personal relationships dear. Marital difficulties, the breaking of a close relationship, and discipline troubles with children create stresses employees often can't leave at the front door when they arrive at work.<sup>78</sup>

Regardless of income level—people who make \$100,000 per year seem to have as much trouble handling their finances as those who earn \$20,000—some people are poor money managers or have wants that exceed their earning capacity. The *economic* problems of overextended financial resources create stress and siphon attention away from work.

Studies in three diverse organizations found that participants who reported stress symptoms before beginning a job reported most of the same variance in stress symptoms 9 months later.<sup>79</sup> The researchers concluded that some people may have an inherent tendency to accentuate negative aspects of the world. If this is true, then a significant individual factor that influences stress is a person's basic disposition. Subsequent research has suggested that stress symptoms expressed on the job may actually originate in the person's personality.<sup>80</sup>

**Stressors Are Additive** When we review stressors individually, it's easy to overlook that stress is an additive phenomenon—it builds up.<sup>81</sup> Each new and persistent stressor adds to an individual's stress level. So a single stressor may be relatively unimportant in and of itself, but if added to an already high level of stress, it can be too much. To appraise the total amount of stress an individual is under, we have to sum up his or her opportunity stresses, constraint stresses, and demand stresses.

## Individual Differences

Some people thrive on stressful situations, while others are overwhelmed by them. What differentiates people in terms of their ability to handle stress? What individual variables moderate the relationship between *potential* stressors and *experienced* stress? At least four—perception, job experience, social support, and personality—are relevant.

In Chapter 6, we demonstrated that employees react in response to their perception of reality, rather than to reality itself. *Perception*, therefore, will moderate the relationship between a potential stress condition and an employee's reaction to it. Layoffs may cause one person to fear losing his job, while another sees an opportunity to get a large severance allowance and start her own business. So stress potential doesn't lie in objective conditions; rather, it lies in an employee's interpretation of those conditions.

*Experience* on the job tends to be negatively related to work stress. Why? Two explanations have been offered.<sup>82</sup> First is selective withdrawal. Voluntary turnover is more probable among people who experience more stress. Therefore, people who remain with an organization longer are those with more stress-resistant traits or those more resistant to the stress characteristics of their organization. Second, people eventually develop coping mechanisms to deal with stress. Because this takes time, senior members of the organization are more likely to be fully adapted and should experience less stress.

**Photo 18-4** DentalPlans .com employee Kristen Reineke celebrates after scoring a point while playing foosball in the employee lounge. In giving its employees the opportunity to form collegial relationships with each other by playing games like foosball and Wii, DentalPlans provides them with the social support that can lessen the impact of on-the-job stress.



Source: CHARLES TRAINOR / IR/MCT/Newscom.

*Social support*—collegial relationships with co-workers or supervisors—can buffer the impact of stress.<sup>83</sup> This is among the best-documented relationships in the stress literature. Social support acts as a palliative, mitigating the negative effects of even high-strain jobs.

Perhaps the most widely studied *personality* trait in stress is neuroticism, which we discussed in Chapter 5. As you might expect, neurotic individuals are more prone to experience psychological strain.<sup>84</sup> Evidence suggests that neurotic individuals are more prone to believe there are stressors in their work environments, so part of the problem is that they believe their environments are more threatening. They also tend to select less adaptive coping mechanisms, relying on avoidance as a way of dealing with problems rather than attempting to resolve them.<sup>85</sup>

Workaholicism is another personal characteristic related to stress levels. Workaholics are people obsessed with their work; they put in an enormous number of hours, think about work even when not working, and create additional work responsibilities to satisfy an inner compulsion to work more. In some ways, they might seem like ideal employees. That's probably why when most people are asked in interviews what their greatest weakness is, they reflexively say, "I just work too hard." However, there is a difference between working hard and working compulsively. Workaholics are not necessarily more productive than other employees, despite their extreme efforts. The strain of putting in such a high level of work effort eventually begins to wear on the workaholic, leading to higher levels of work-life conflict and psychological burnout.<sup>86</sup>

### Cultural Differences

Research suggests the job conditions that cause stress show some differences across cultures. One study revealed that whereas U.S. employees were stressed by a lack of control, Chinese employees were stressed by job evaluations and lack of training. It doesn't appear that personality effects on stress are different across cultures, however. One study of employees in Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, Israel, and the United States found Type A personality traits (see Chapter 5) predicted stress equally well across countries.<sup>87</sup> A study of





5,270 managers from 20 countries found individuals from individualistic countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom experienced higher levels of stress due to work interfering with family than did individuals from collectivist countries in Asia and Latin America.<sup>88</sup> The authors proposed that this may occur because, in collectivist cultures, working extra hours is seen as a sacrifice to help the family, whereas in individualistic cultures, work is seen as a means to personal achievement that takes away from the family.



Evidence suggests that stressors are associated with perceived stress and strains among employees in different countries. In other words, stress is equally bad for employees of all cultures.<sup>89</sup>



SELF-ASSESSMENT LIBRARY

### How Stressful Is My Life?

In the Self-Assessment Library (available in MyManagementLab), take assessment III.C.2 (How Stressful Is My Life?).

## 6 Identify the consequences of stress.

### Consequences of Stress

Stress shows itself in a number of ways, such as high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty making routine decisions, loss of appetite, accident proneness, and the like. These symptoms fit under three general categories: physiological, psychological, and behavioral symptoms.

**Physiological Symptoms** Most early concern with stress was directed at physiological symptoms because most researchers were specialists in the health and medical sciences. Their work led to the conclusion that stress could create changes in metabolism, increase heart and breathing rates and blood pressure, bring on headaches, and induce heart attacks.

Evidence now clearly suggests stress may have harmful physiological effects. One study linked stressful job demands to increased susceptibility to upper-respiratory illnesses and poor immune system functioning, especially for individuals with low self-efficacy.<sup>90</sup> A long-term study conducted in the United Kingdom found that job strain was associated with higher levels of coronary heart disease.<sup>91</sup> Still another study conducted with Danish human services workers found that higher levels of psychological burnout at the work-unit level were related to significantly higher levels of sickness absence.<sup>92</sup> Many other studies have shown similar results linking work stress to a variety of indicators of poor health.

**Psychological Symptoms** Job dissatisfaction is an obvious cause of stress. But stress shows itself in other psychological states—for instance, tension, anxiety, irritability, boredom, and procrastination. For example, a study that tracked physiological responses of employees over time found that stress due to high workloads was related to higher blood pressure and lower emotional well-being.<sup>93</sup>

Jobs that make multiple and conflicting demands or that lack clarity about the incumbent's duties, authority, and responsibilities increase both stress and dissatisfaction.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the less control people have over the pace of their work, the greater their stress and dissatisfaction. Jobs that provide a low level of variety, significance, autonomy, feedback, and identity appear to create stress and reduce satisfaction and involvement in the job.<sup>95</sup> Not everyone reacts to



## “When You’re Working Hard, Sleep Is Optional”

This is false. Individuals who do not get enough sleep are unable to perform well on the job. A recent study found that sleeplessness costs U.S. employers \$63.2 billion per year, almost \$2,300 per employee, partially due to decreased productivity and increased safety issues. Sleep deprivation has been cited as a contributing factor in heart disease, obesity, stroke, and cancer. It can also lead to disastrous accidents. For example, U.S. military researchers report that sleep deprivation is one of the top causes of friendly fire (when soldiers mistakenly fire on their own troops), and 20 percent of auto accidents are due to drowsy drivers. More than 160 people on Air India Flight 812 from Dubai to Mangalore were killed when pilot Zlatko Glusica awoke from a nap and, suffering from sleep inertia, overshot the runway in India’s third-deadliest air crash.

Sleeplessness is affecting the performance of millions of workers. According to a recent study, one-third of U.S. employees in most industries, and more than one-quarter of workers in the finance and insurance industry, are sleep deprived, getting fewer than

6 hours of sleep per night (7 to 9 are recommended). More than 50 percent of U.S. adults age 19 to 29, 43 percent age 30 to 45, and 38 percent age 46 to 64 report that they rarely or never get a good nightly rest on weekdays.

Research has shown that lack of sleep impairs our ability to learn skills and find solutions, which may be part of the reason law-enforcement organizations, Super Bowl-winning football teams, and half of the *Fortune* 500 companies employ “fatigue management specialists” as performance consultants.

Meanwhile, managers and employees increasingly take prescription sleep aids, attend sleep labs, and consume caffeine in efforts to either sleep better or reduce the effects of sleeplessness on their performance. These methods often backfire. Studies indicate that prescription sleep aids increase sleep time by only 11 minutes and cause short-term memory loss. The effects of sleep labs may not be helpful after the sessions are over. And the diminishing returns of caffeine, perhaps the most popular method of fighting sleep deprivation (74 percent of U.S. adults consume caffeine per day), require

the ingestion of increasing amounts to achieve alertness, which can make users jittery before the effect wears off and leave them exhausted.

When you’re working hard, it’s easy to consider using sleep hours to get the job done, and to think that the stress and adrenaline from working will keep you alert. It’s also easy to consider artificial methods in attempts to counteract the negative impact of sleep deprivation. However, research indicates that when it comes to maximizing performance and reducing accidents, we are not even good at assessing our impaired capabilities when we are sleep deprived. In the end, there is no substitute for a solid night’s sleep.

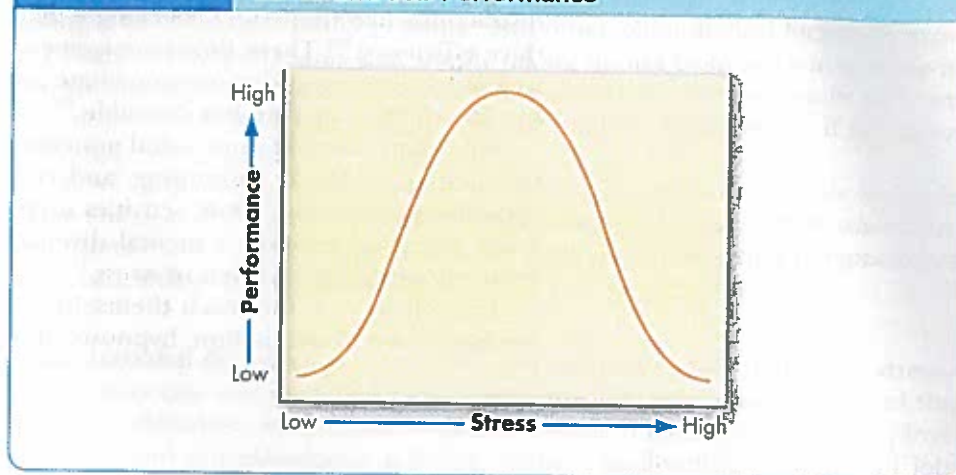
*Sources:* Fatigue Risk Management Science Ltd. Website, [www.frmsc.com](http://www.frmsc.com), accessed June 26, 2013; D. K. Randall, “Decoding the Science of Sleep,” *The Wall Street Journal* (August 4–5, 2012), pp. C1–C2; M. Sallinen, J. Onninen, K. Tirkkonen, M.-L. Haavisto, M. Harma, T. Kubo, et al., “Effects of Cumulative Sleep Restriction on Self-Perceptions While Multitasking,” *Journal of Sleep Research* (June 2012), pp. 273–281; and P. Walker, “Pilot Was Snoring before Air India Crash,” *The Guardian* (November 17, 2010), [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/17/sleepy-pilot-blamed-air-india-crash](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/17/sleepy-pilot-blamed-air-india-crash).

autonomy in the same way, however. For those with an external locus of control, increased job control increases the tendency to experience stress and exhaustion.<sup>96</sup>

**Behavioral Symptoms** Research on behavior and stress has been conducted across several countries and over time, and the relationships appear relatively consistent. Behavior-related stress symptoms include reductions in productivity, absence, and turnover, as well as changes in eating habits, increased smoking or consumption of alcohol, rapid speech, fidgeting, and sleep disorders.<sup>97</sup>

A significant amount of research has investigated the stress–performance relationship. The most widely studied pattern of this relationship is the inverted U shown in Exhibit 18-9.<sup>98</sup> The logic underlying the figure is that low to moderate levels of stress stimulate the body and increase its ability to react. Individuals then often perform their tasks better, more intensely, or more rapidly. But too much stress places unattainable demands on a person, which result in lower

### Exhibit 18-9 The Proposed Inverted-U Relationship Between Stress and Job Performance



performance. In spite of the popularity and intuitive appeal of the inverted-U model, it doesn't get a lot of empirical support.<sup>99</sup> So we should be careful of assuming it accurately depicts the stress–performance relationship.

As we mentioned earlier, researchers have begun to differentiate challenge and hindrance stressors, showing that these two forms of stress have opposite effects on job behaviors, especially job performance. A meta-analysis of responses from more than 35,000 individuals showed role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, job insecurity, environmental uncertainty, and situational constraints were all consistently negatively related to job performance.<sup>100</sup> There is also evidence that challenge stress improves job performance in a supportive work environment, whereas hindrance stress reduces job performance in all work environments.<sup>101</sup>

### Managing Stress

Because low to moderate levels of stress can be functional and lead to higher performance, management may not be concerned when employees experience them. Employees, however, are likely to perceive even low levels of stress as undesirable. It's not unlikely, therefore, for employees and management to have different notions of what constitutes an acceptable level of stress on the job. What management may consider to be “a positive stimulus that keeps the adrenaline running” is very likely to be seen as “excessive pressure” by the employee. Keep this in mind as we discuss individual and organizational approaches toward managing stress.<sup>102</sup>

**Individual Approaches** An employee can take personal responsibility for reducing stress levels. Individual strategies that have proven effective include time-management techniques, increased physical exercise, relaxation training, and expanded social support networks.

Many people manage their time poorly. The well-organized employee, like the well-organized student, can often accomplish twice as much as the person who is poorly organized. So an understanding and utilization of basic time-management principles can help individuals better cope with tensions created by job demands.<sup>103</sup> A few of the best-known time-management principles are (1) making daily lists of activities to be accomplished, (2) prioritizing activities

- 7 Contrast the individual and organizational approaches to managing stress.

by importance and urgency, (3) scheduling activities according to the priorities set, (4) knowing your daily cycle and handling the most demanding parts of your job when you are most alert and productive, and (5) avoiding electronic distractions like frequently checking e-mail, which can limit attention and reduce efficiency.<sup>104</sup> These time-management skills can help minimize procrastination by focusing efforts on immediate goals and boosting motivation even in the face of tasks that are less desirable.<sup>105</sup>

Physicians have recommended noncompetitive *physical exercise*, such as aerobics, walking, jogging, swimming, and riding a bicycle, as a way to deal with excessive stress levels. These activities increase lung capacity, lower the resting heart rate, and provide a mental diversion from work pressures, effectively reducing work-related levels of stress.<sup>106</sup>

Individuals can also teach themselves to reduce tension through *relaxation techniques* such as meditation, hypnosis, and deep breathing. The objective is to

## An Ethical Choice

### Manager and Employee Stress during Organizational Change

When organizations are in a state of change, employees feel the stress. In fact, a recent study indicated that job pressures, often due to downsizing and other organizational changes, are the second-leading cause of stress. Dealing with that stress has long been in the domain of workers, who could turn to constructive (counselors, health professionals, support networks) or destructive (alcohol, gossip, counterproductive work behaviors) options as coping mechanisms. Employees who couldn't cope with stress suffered job burnout and headed to the unemployment line. But are managers ethically obligated to alleviate employee stress?

Historically, no. Beneficent employers provided employee assistance programs (EAP) through subcontracted counselors or in-house HR departments to counsel employees dealing with stress. Managers simply steered individuals toward these resources when workplace problems indicated a need for intervention. This help often arrived too late to mitigate the negative outcomes of stress such as lost productivity and burnout—and sometimes

too late to save the employee's job. Research suggests that continually occurring job stressors, such as when organizations are in the midst of change, reduce employee engagement because workers are deprived of recovery periods. Employee stress thus needs to be addressed proactively at the manager level if it is to be effective, even before there are negative work outcomes.

On the one hand, managers are responsible for maximizing productivity and realize that organizations increase profitability when fewer employees perform increased work. On the other hand, overwork will increase employee stress, particularly when the organization is in a state of change due to downsizing or growth. Managers who keep head count low and workloads high may find short-term gains from lower workforce costs but long-term losses from negative stress outcomes, such as increased turnover and lowered productivity. Experts recommend that managers consider hiring the workers they need to keep employee workloads reasonable, adding reward programs to keep top employees

engaged, and cutting non-workforce costs to maintain profitability. Smaller methods, such as teaching employees stress reduction techniques and creating a "greenery room" for a nature retreat from the office environment, can also be helpful. Managers must make the ethical choice between spending more money now on labor costs and stress reduction methods versus later on the more hidden but salient costs of employee stress.

As research increasingly indicates, when employees react to stress, they and their organizations suffer the consequences. Managers must, therefore, consider their opportunity to help alleviate the stress before it's too late.

*Sources:* E. Fraenheim, "Stressed & Pressed," *Workforce Management* (January 2012), pp. 18–22; J. B. Oldroyd and S. S. Morris, "Catching Falling Stars: A Human Resource Responses to Social Capital's Detrimental Effect of Information Overload on Star Employees," *Academy of Management Review* 37 (2012), pp. 396–418; and S. Sonnentag, E. J. Mojza, E. Demerouti, and A. B. Bakker, "Reciprocal Relations Between Recovery and Work Engagement: The Moderating Role of Job Stressors," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97 (2012), pp. 842–853.

reach a state of deep physical relaxation, in which you focus all your energy on release of muscle tension.<sup>107</sup> Deep relaxation for 15 or 20 minutes a day releases strain and provides a pronounced sense of peacefulness, as well as significant changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and other physiological factors. A growing body of research shows that simply taking breaks from work at routine intervals can facilitate psychological recovery and reduce stress significantly and may improve job performance, and these effects are even greater if relaxation techniques are employed.<sup>108</sup>

As we have noted, friends, family, or work colleagues can provide an outlet when stress levels become excessive. Expanding your *social support network* provides someone to hear your problems and offer a more objective perspective on a stressful situation than your own.

**Organizational Approaches** Several organizational factors that cause stress—particularly task and role demands—are controlled by management and thus can be modified or changed. Strategies to consider include improved employee selection and job placement, training, realistic goal-setting, redesign of jobs, increased employee involvement, improved organizational communication, employee sabbaticals, and corporate wellness programs.

Certain jobs are more stressful than others but, as we've seen, individuals differ in their response to stressful situations. We know individuals with little experience or an external locus of control tend to be more prone to stress. *Selection and placement* decisions should take these facts into consideration. Obviously, management shouldn't restrict hiring to only experienced individuals with an internal locus, but such individuals may adapt better to high-stress jobs and perform those jobs more effectively. Similarly, *training* can increase an individual's self-efficacy and thus lessen job strain.

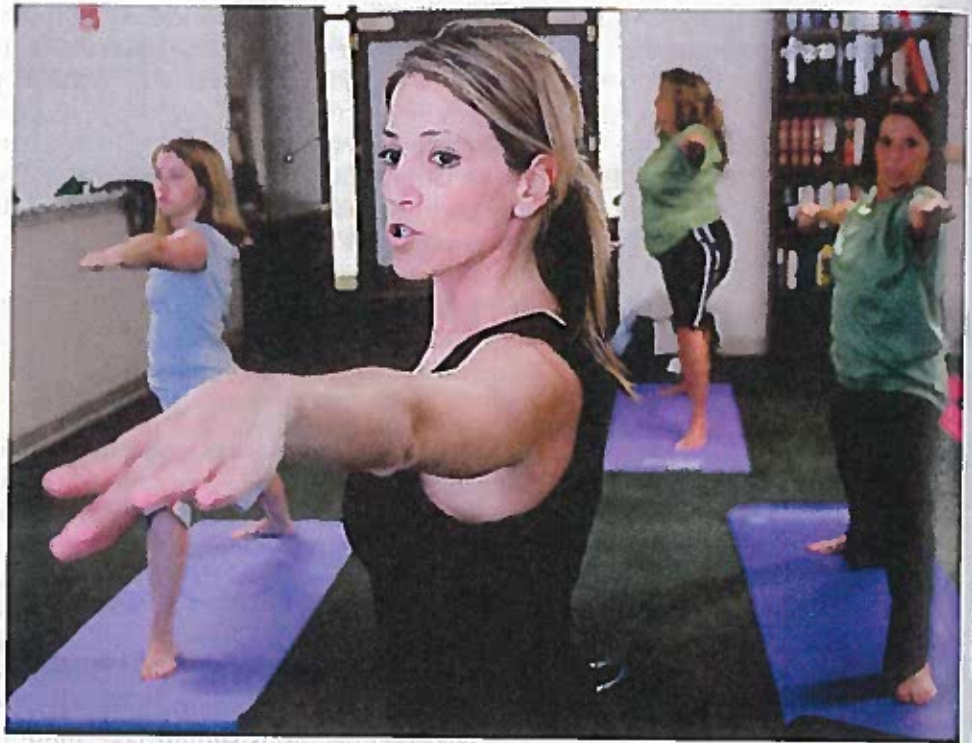
We discussed *goal-setting* in Chapter 7. Individuals perform better when they have specific and challenging goals and receive feedback on their progress toward these goals. Goals can reduce stress as well as provide motivation.<sup>109</sup> Employees who are highly committed to their goals and see purpose in their jobs experience less stress, because they are more likely to perceive stressors as challenges rather than hindrances. Specific goals perceived as attainable clarify performance expectations. In addition, goal feedback reduces uncertainties about actual job performance. The result is less employee frustration, role ambiguity, and stress.

*Redesigning jobs* to give employees more responsibility, more meaningful work, more autonomy, and increased feedback can reduce stress because these factors give employees greater control over work activities and lessen dependence on others. But as we noted in our discussion of work design, not all employees want enriched jobs. The right redesign for employees with a low need for growth might be less responsibility and increased specialization. If individuals prefer structure and routine, reducing skill variety should also reduce uncertainties and stress levels.

Role stress is detrimental to a large extent because employees feel uncertain about goals, expectations, how they'll be evaluated, and the like. By giving these employees a voice in the decisions that directly affect their job performance, management can increase employee control and reduce role stress. Thus, managers should consider *increasing employee involvement* in decision making because evidence clearly shows that increases in employee empowerment reduce psychological strain.<sup>110</sup>

Increasing formal *organizational communication* with employees reduces uncertainty by lessening role ambiguity and role conflict. Given the importance that perceptions play in moderating the stress-response relationship,

**Photo 18-5** Corporate wellness programs are one way organizations can help employees manage stress. As part of its wellness and fitness initiatives, the Fowler White Boggs law firm brings in yoga instructors during employees' lunch hour to lead them in stretching and breathing exercises that help relieve stress and promote a sense of well-being.



Source: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy.

management can also use effective communications as a means to shape employee perceptions. Remember that what employees categorize as demands, threats, or opportunities at work is an interpretation and that interpretation can be affected by the symbols and actions communicated by management.

Some employees need an occasional escape from the frenetic pace of their work. Companies including Genentech, American Express, Intel, General Mills, Microsoft, Morningstar, DreamWorks Animation, and Adobe Systems have begun to provide extended voluntary leaves.<sup>111</sup> These *sabbaticals*—ranging in length from a few weeks to several months—allow employees to travel, relax, or pursue personal projects that consume time beyond normal vacations. Proponents say they can revive and rejuvenate workers who might otherwise be headed for burnout.

Our final suggestion is organizationally supported **wellness programs**. These typically provide workshops to help people quit smoking, control alcohol use, lose weight, eat better, and develop a regular exercise program; they focus on the employee's total physical and mental condition.<sup>112</sup> Some help employees improve their psychological health as well. A meta-analysis of 36 programs designed to reduce stress (including wellness programs) showed that interventions to help employees reframe stressful situations and use active coping strategies appreciably reduced stress levels.<sup>113</sup> Most wellness programs assume employees need to take personal responsibility for their physical and mental health and that the organization is merely a means to that end.

Most firms that have introduced wellness programs have found significant benefits. A study of eight Canadian organizations found that every dollar spent on comprehensive wellness programs generated a return of \$1.64, and for high-risk employees, such as smokers, the return was nearly \$4.00.<sup>114</sup>

**wellness programs** Organizationally supported programs that focus on the employee's total physical and mental condition.

