

# Stress Prevention during Organisational Change

## at Shell Energy Europe

Organisational restructuring can be a very demanding and stressful time for all concerned. Some low cost forward planning can mitigate the risks associated with these changes to both employees and the business. Shell Energy Europe recently embarked on a major business re-engineering project and recognised the importance of taking such proactive action.

### The Process

A project team was formed that included the Project Manager, HSE Specialists, HR as well as a staff council representative. The aim was to identify any key stress risks arising during and after the transition, filter out those not being managed, and generate practical actions that could be implemented to best manage these risks.

In a workshop facilitated by Ken Gray from the Keil Centre, a set of 40 potential stressors were analysed by the group according to (a) their relevance to the project (b) whether currently well controlled and (c) whether likely to cause stress. This yielded a set of 'top five' stressors on which there was a consensus about their potential to cause harm. Examples of the top-five stressors included:

- Heavy and Uneven Workload
- Constant Interruptions
- Relocation and Reward
- Maintaining Work and Home Life balance
- Inadequate Training

The team then worked together to complete the risk assessment process. They identified how or why each stressor could cause harm, and generated ideas about what organisational and individual actions and practical control measures would mitigate the effects of the top-five stressors.

The business was keen to ensure that the prioritised actions would yield the "greatest bang for their buck". This meant consulting on the proposed solutions and control measures with those most affected by them and selecting those that could be implemented quickly and cost-effectively. As an example, to respond to the risk of 'heavy and uneven workload' on project teams, that project put in place an agreed framework for work requests. This included "Line of Sight" resource management; by channelling work requests exclusively via line management, conflicting or multiple requests on any given individual were avoided. Also, minimum requirements /maximum deadline became the starting point for all work requests.

### Working on Stress

This relatively simple, low cost stress prevention project was conducted by a cross-section of employees, with minimal external input. The project's design and execution exceeds the requirements of UK legislation and regulatory guidance on preventing risks to health and safety arising from psychosocial hazards at work. It shows how at the design stage, future hazards can be identified and removed or reduced.

For more information about stress prevention in organisations, please contact Ken Gray ([ken@keilcentre.co.uk](mailto:ken@keilcentre.co.uk)).

