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Psychosocial work environment, performance-based self-esteem and stress symptoms among Danish knowledge workers

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Boundaryless work – stress, sleep and private life

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New rules of work

- De-regulation of work through:
 - Decentralisation of work (self-organization, self-management)
 - From procedure to result
 - Flexibility in time and space
 - From general agreements to individual contract agreements
- Presupposing involvement and responsibility
- Individual competences, commitment and abilities to manage successes and failures more in focus

Performance-based self-esteem

- Self-esteem contingent on how well one performs in roles that are of vital significance for one's self-realization
(Hallsten et al. 2005)

Aim

- In a sample of Danish Knowledge-workers to explore whether performance-based self-esteem had a main effect on cognitive stress, over and above the effects of the work environmental factors

Hypothesis:

- Performance-based self-esteem will be positively and prospectively associated with cognitive stress symptoms
- Performance-based self-esteem will have an independent effect over and above the psychosocial work environment factors on 1) the level of cognitive stress symptoms and 2) changes in cognitive stress symptoms

Design and sample

- Recruited from the 2. DPWES of 3517 employees, representative for Danish wage earners (20-59 years)
- 853 knowledge workers received questionnaires and saliva kits for cortisol
- 396 questionnaires returned (response rate 46%) and 265 cortisol responses (response rate 31%)
- One year follow-up: response rate 86% of the responses from 1. round

Sample selection:

Professionals, physicians, dentists, engineers, architects, staff within IT and media, teachers, researchers, managers and leaders, social workers, librarians, accountants, bank clerks, salesmen

Cognitive stress symptoms

- “These questions are about how you have been during the last 4 weeks:”
- “How often have you had problems concentrating?”
- “How often have you found it difficult to think clearly?”
- “How often have you had difficulty in taking decisions?”
- “How often have you had difficulty with remembering?”

- *Response categories: all the time; a large part of the time; part of the time; a small part of the time; not at all.*

Performance-based self-esteem (Hallsten et al 2005)

- “I think that I sometimes try to prove my worth through my work”
- “My self-esteem is far too dependent on my work achievements”
- “At times, I have to be better than others to be good enough myself”
- “Occasionally I feel obsessed to accomplish something of value through my work”.
- *Response categories: does not fit at all, fits a little bit, fits quite well, fits perfectly.*

The psychosocial work environment (COPSOQ-II)

- Quantitative demands, influence, social support from colleagues, social support from supervisors (ISO-strain model)
- Role conflicts, role clarity (role stress theory)
- Rewards (effort-reward imbalance model)
- Predictability

- In addition:
- Total work time
- Gender, age-groups

Results

	B-estimates (95% CI) cognitive stress follow-up		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Performance based self-esteem baseline	0.26 (0.18-0.33)	0.20 (0.11-0.28)	0.10 (0.03-0.17)
R² for the total model (N)	0.18	0.27	0.46

Model 1: Adjusted for age-groups and gender

Model 2: Adjusted for age-groups, gender, working hours, quantitative demands, influence, predictability, rewards, role conflicts, role clarity social support from supervisors and social support from colleagues

Model 3: Adjusted additionally for cognitive stress symptoms at baseline

Hypotheses were confirmed

- Performance-based self-esteem at baseline was positively associated with cognitive stress symptoms at follow-up
- Performance-based self-esteem had an independent effect over and above the psychosocial work environment factors
 - 1) on the level of cognitive stress symptoms at follow-up and
 - 2) on changes in cognitive stress symptoms from baseline to follow-up

Conclusion

- The tendency to be dependent on performance and success in the job in order to maintain a high self-esteem was important for the development of cognitive stress symptoms
- Results suggest that both work environmental and individual characteristics should be taken into account in order to capture sources of stress in modern working life

Perspectives

- Vicious circle: strain-distress and lowered self-esteem (Hallsten et al 2005)
- Performance-based self-esteem a personality disposition or a consequence of the organization and management of work?
- Difficult to distinguish between the work environment surrounding the work and the capacities of the individual to meet the requirements

After firing of 39 employees and simultaneous hiring of 46 new employees, the Human Resources managers at Saxo Bank explains.....

- (to be a success in Saxo Bank is) "to have initiative, ambition, independence. Will to burn through with your personality in the job you are doing. It is an agenda set by us, and there is a lot of people who are super happy with it."

Erik Kjær, HR-manager Saxo Bank

Politiken 2007.10.20.

