



WORK EXPERIENCE SCAN

VANDERHEK | METHODOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY

For any organization, it is important to recognize the underlying causes of stress factors as early as possible so that its policy can be adjusted appropriately. Bearing in mind current developments in the labour market as well as policy relating to disability benefit legislation and sickness absenteeism, it would seem to be of paramount importance to keep people in employment as far as possible.

Additionally, where employees are not feeling at their best, the quality of the production process or the service provision may be impaired. A comprehensive review of potential sources of stress can be a useful tool for early intervention where the well being of staff is under pressure.

The Work Experience Scan (WES) is a scan – based on Cooper's theoretical stress model – which is designed to chart stress areas in a clear way. This is achieved by having large numbers of individuals within the organization report on their personal experience of stress. In this sense the WES differs from other questionnaires, which ask for example how many hours respondents work in order to measure workload. Because the WES measures the subjective experience, any discussion of matters such as the actual number of hours worked is irrelevant.

The application process

As a measurement tool the WES possesses good scientific properties. Nevertheless, the WES is not primarily intended as a scientific tool. It was developed as a management tool together with managers and for managers. Together with properties like speed, simplicity and clear presentation of reports, the way in which the tool is used is a major factor determining the success of its application process. One of the great advantages of the WES is its flexibility of application. It can serve as a tool for identifying risk groups, but equally as a tool in support of the stress management policy.



The WES charts:

- ✓ Sources of stress
- ✓ Personality traits and coping mechanisms
- ✓ Effects of stress

In addition, one of the great advantages of the WES is that it can differentiate between departments and groups. Although management may find it interesting to be able to see how the organization is doing as compared with other organizations, it is often more useful to be able to detect risk groups and/or departments within the organization itself.

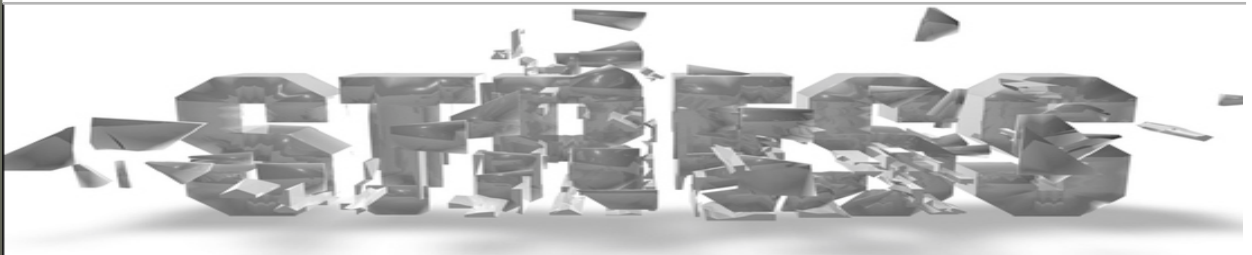


Development of the WES

In cooperation with Phyleon and Prof. Th. Compernelle and in close consultation with a number of medical officers on the staff of a multinational company working in various countries, VANDERHEK developed a new tool for the measurement of work stress, which tool was required to be workable on the international market. This collaboration ultimately resulted in the WES.

As defined by the World Health Organization, work stress is a state experienced in a *negative* way (associated with physical and/or psychological complaints), caused where a person is or feels unable to cope with the demands of the work situation. Within that situation, various stressors can be identified: workload, conflicting demands, personal conflicts, insufficient support, insufficient influence on the work, and substandard working conditions. The Work Experience Scan (WES) is designed to chart these problem areas in a clear way. This is achieved by having large numbers of individuals within the organization report on their personal experience of stress.

The Work Experience Profile (WEP) forms the basis of the WES. The WEP is a questionnaire developed by VANDERHEK with specific focus on diagnosis of the individual. Besides sources of work stress, it comprehensively charts personal coping styles and effects of stress in a personal profile. From this diagnostic questionnaire, a selection was made on a methodological basis of those items found to have the 'best' predictive performance. Then a number of items were added on the basis of practical experience of company medical officers and experts. These questions were used to perform a preliminary study on 100 test persons, and on the basis of the results an initial selection of items was made. The pilot took place in three European countries (the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Belgium), and covered a total group of 1000 test persons in all. The sub-scales were determined by means of statistical techniques, such as factor analysis. The results were positive: with the exception of just a few items the questionnaire performed entirely as would be expected in theory. In practice, too, the results matched the observations already made by the company medical officers in their own working environments.



Possible applications of the WES

	Organization	Team/Department
<i>Preventive</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengths/weaknesses analysis ✓ Working conditions legislation: risk inventory ✓ Forthcoming changes ✓ HR policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Determining extra support needs due to reorganizations
<i>Curative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stress complaints ✓ High absenteeism ✓ Motivation problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Department or team problems



Cooper's theoretical model

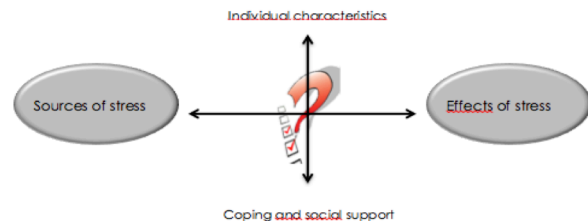
Cooper's theoretical model, on which the WES is partly based, proceeds from the assumption that the presence of stressors at work does not automatically have an impact on a person's physical and psychological well-being. Personality type and character traits as well as coping styles and social support also influence the degree in which stress complaints are experienced.

The extent to which a person experiences a situation as stressful depends on his or her individual resilience. This resilience is partly related to personality traits, such as extraversion and type A characteristics, but also on coping mechanisms and the experience of social support. Because these factors influence the individual's resilience, they form a buffer between sources of stress and effects of stress. For example, persons who are more introvert than extravert, not very assertive and who satisfy the criteria of type A behaviour, generally tend to be more sensitive to stressful aspects of the work than persons who do not possess these traits.

A person's resilience is also related to the presence of social support. The more social support people receive from those around them, the fewer physical and psychological complaints they are usually found to suffer. In effect, social support acts like a buffer that can block out the harmful effects of stressors.

The styles used by individuals in coping with problems also have an influence on personal well-being. In particular, resilience is enhanced where individuals are able to express themselves, have the possibility to talk about their problems at home or with friends, or have the ability to detach themselves from their work.

Consequences of stress measured by the WES include effects such as actual absenteeism resulting from psychological and/or physical complaints, problems in performing the work, and motivation at work.



Comparisons with reference groups

VANDERHEK has already compiled a large database (n=25000), so that the results found for a given organization can be compared against a reference group. This may be the reference group as a whole or a more specific group based on the class of job or organization (e.g. education, the petrochemical industry, government).

Some words of caution are called for when it comes to drawing comparisons with reference groups. To compare the results against the reference group as a whole entails the risk of marginalizing the problem. For it will be clear that, if the norm states that 45% of all employees in the Netherlands experience problems with the way changes are implemented while in your organization that figure is only 40%, you might be forgiven for concluding that there is no need for any change in policy. After all, by comparison with the norm your business is performing better than 'normal'. The real questions to be answered, however, are whether you yourself consider it acceptable that over one-third of your employees are experiencing problems with the way in which changes are implemented, and whether you see any opportunities to bring about improvements. In that case the WES results can provide key points for possible policy changes.



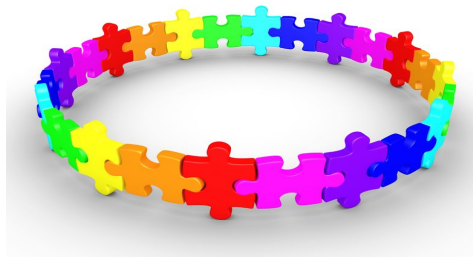
The Tool

The WES is a short scan consisting of 72 items that can only be answered with yes or no. It takes about ten minutes to fill in. The WES charts a number of stressors, personality styles and possible effects of stress.

The WES produces a picture of how groups of employees experience stress within the organization. It yields potential key points for selective intervention measures and is capable of charting problem areas.

The scan is available in a number of languages, including English, Spanish, German and Italian.

For possible interventions (i.e.: employee assistance programme, coaching, reintegration etc.) VANDERHEK can rely on an extensive network of experts in this field.



Example WES-questionnaire en WES-report

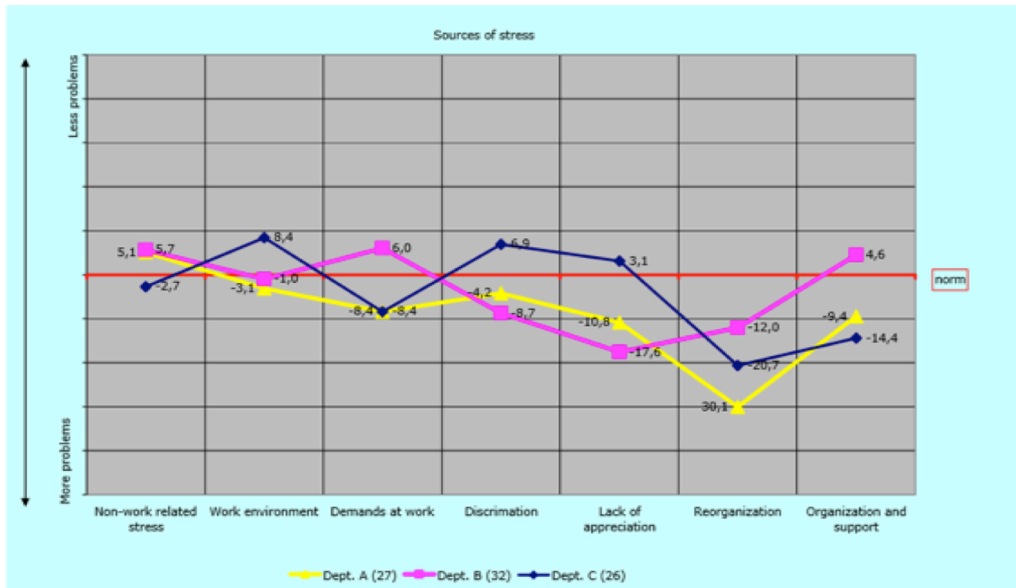
In the past three months, have you been troubled by:

	No	Yes
1. Insufficient support for your work from other departments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Poor organisation of the work	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Having to work with ineffective procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Disagreeable atmosphere in your department	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Insufficient guidance and/or support from managers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Insufficient assistance and/or support from colleagues	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Lack of co-operation or poor co-operation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



In general:

	No	Yes
72. I'm proud of the work I do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
73. I feel at home in this organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
74. My work is <u>worthwhile</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
75. I have a deep sense of commitment to the organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
76. I usually have sufficient energy left for other activities after a day's work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
77. I would recommend my organisation to others as a potential employer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Dept. A (27)	Dept. B (32)	Dept. C (26)	normgroup (3009)
9. Changes at work	70,4%	56,3%	53,8%	33,2%
10. The way in which changes are implemented	63,0%	50,0%	53,8%	38,6%

Statistical significant difference in positive direction
 Statistical significant difference in negative direction