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Introduction

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The literature on stress in general is vast, yet literature on occupational stress is a little less frequent. Most of the books are popular works for a wide audience to help people manage their stress in everyday life or at work. When considering the content of these books as a whole, none of them offers a comprehensive and exhaustive approach to the problem in terms of understanding, analysing, evaluating and managing occupational stress.

This book aims to meet this need and is addressed to the health professional as a priority, but also to workers in general since everyone is concerned by stress at work. Among the many chapters addressing occupational stress from different angles, everyone will be able to find answers corresponding to their questions, expectations or needs.

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This book has been developed to become a valuable aid for people wishing to manage stress at work, whether before or after the onset of symptoms associated with it, whether personally or professionally.

The book is divided into five parts:

1. Stress description
2. Stress assessment
3. Using stress at work
4. Macro description of stress
5. Dealing with stress

Part I, Stress description, provides, in an approach punctuated by historical reminders, the different conceptualisations of stress and the associated models. This allows readers to gain an understanding of these different models and to make the link from one model to another or from one approach to another. The psychological and physiological mechanisms associated with different types of stress are also presented, and the concept of the stress cycle is developed for a better understanding of the links between acute and chronic stress. Finally, a discussion is proposed on the contribution of the animal model for the understanding of stress phenomena in the field of neuroscience. Our experience has shown that a good knowledge of the mechanisms of onset and manifestations of stress is necessary to understand correctly the difficulties related to stress encountered by people.

Part II, Stress assessment, presents the different techniques for assessing the state of mental stress at work, both physiologically and psychologically. In the first case, these are techniques for measuring physiological parameters varying with stress, and therefore quantified and objective data. In the second case, it is the use of scientifically validated self-positioning questionnaires that the subject will complete in order to allow the analyst to access an assessment of the stress perceived by the subject. In Part II, a chapter is specially devoted to a technique of continuous analysis of the stress perceived by the subject. Finally, five chapters are devoted to the assessment of psychosocial risks in companies. This is indeed an important point since this type of assessment aims to reduce the effects of stress at work. This is probably the main concern of most readers of the present book. These chapters present the fundamentals and stakes associated with psychosocial risks and the broad outlines of psychosocial risk assessment, and propose methods for the assessment, data analysis and evaluation report writing.

Part III, Using stress at work, whose title may seem surprising, highlights the different benefits of a better knowledge of stress at work. This section

presents how managers can adjust their management methods to improve working conditions in the company, and advice is offered to achieve this objective. A chapter is devoted to training for work under stress and another is devoted to the use of stress as a criterion for hiring in companies. These chapters illustrate how stress may be seen as a resource rather than a disadvantage that should absolutely be discarded.

Part IV, Macro description of stress, presents broader considerations for understanding workplace stress. Cross-cultural ideas are first presented, followed by the link between stress and different professions, to finish with a chapter that deals with stress before entering professional life: that of students. Indeed, occupational stress does not begin with the entry into working life of individuals, but rather from academic or vocational training, the aim of this training being to integrate and transition the individual into the world of work.

Part V, Dealing with stress, the last part of this book, presents collective or individual techniques where the objective is to manage occupational stress and thus to increase performance at work or improve health at work. A special chapter is dedicated to resilience to stress in the workplace because, too often, people forget what personal resources they possess during or after episodes of stress. Finally, a chapter addressing stress pharmacology provides a portrait of the state of stress in the world population based on drug consumption data.

Our corollary objective is to make it clear to decision-makers in companies, as well as to all those who plan to intervene in the field of psychosocial risk analysis in companies, that this is a matter for specialists and not amateurs. Indeed, experience has shown the damage that ill advised and/or incompetent people can do in the field: the main negative consequences observed in practice have been the aggravation of psychosocial disorders, the appearance of new psychosocial risk factors, or, less severe, the discrediting of the psychosocial risk assessment approach in companies. Therefore, the present book is a combination of theoretical contributions and practical examples concerning stress at work and intervention in companies.

All skills being a set of know-how taking their source in a set of knowledge, theoretical contributions are proposed to form the basis of know-how already existing in the reader or to come. The practical contributions are suggestions: indeed, they are the result of academic training, professional experience and possibly scientific research that has proven its worth. It is up to the readers to grasp it and transform it so that it can meet their own needs according to their own skills. The important thing is not to derogate the fundamental principles proposed in the present book, which are neither more nor less than the principles developed by the various professions of the human sciences and interventions in companies.