

Your self-care can't wait (and it doesn't have to): Strategies for protecting your health and well-being during work periods

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Acknowledgments

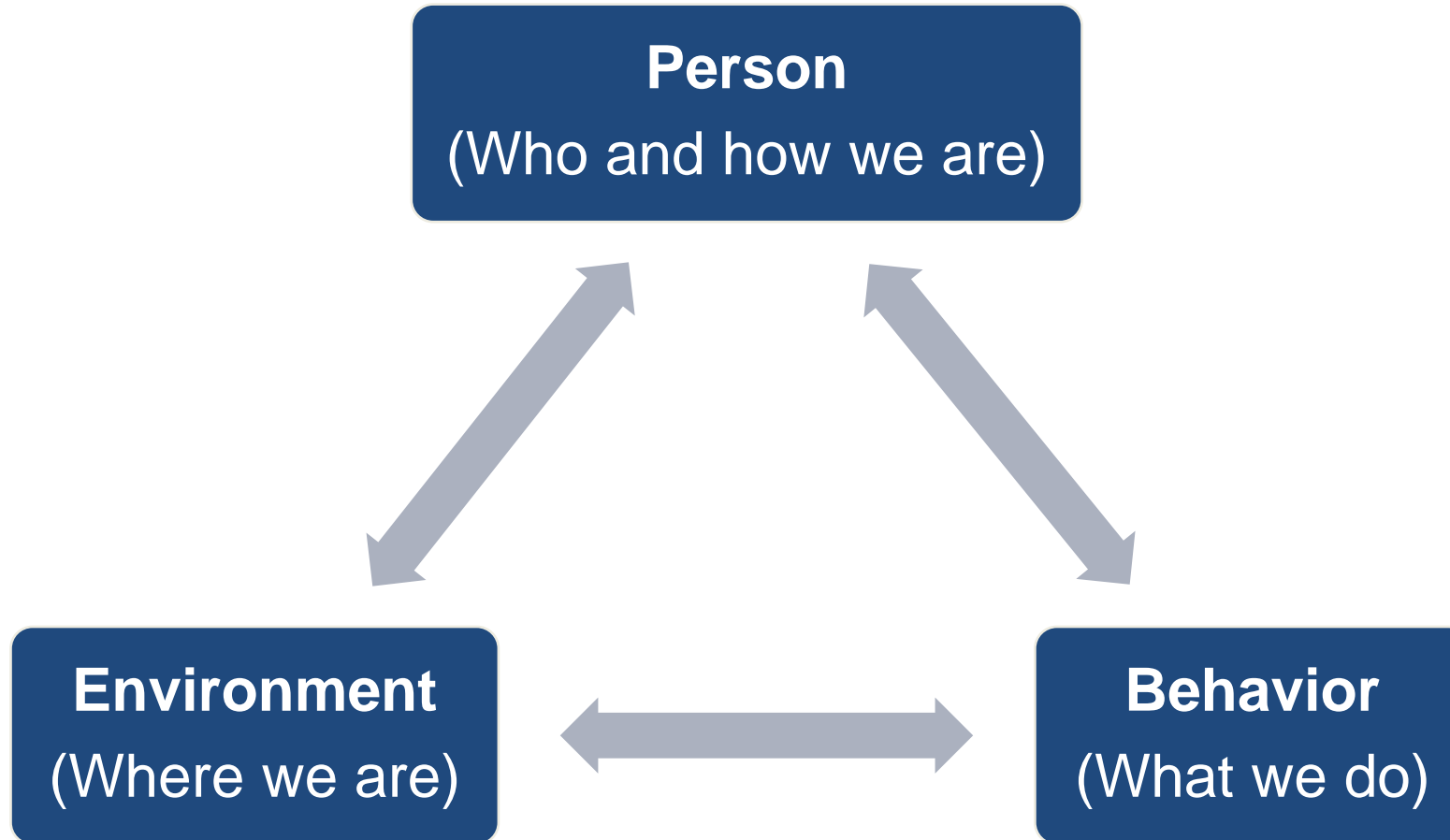
- This presentation builds on multiple projects conducted through the HOW lab with the assistance of many talented graduate and undergraduate students at UTC.
- The resilient physician and HCP research noted throughout was made possible with the financial support and encouragement of Drs. Millie and Jackson Yium and many members of the HOW lab team, including: Amira Marquez Moreno, McKenzie Adams, Nolan Doscher, Jane Voss, and Katie Werth
 - *Some elements included here from this study build on preliminary findings shared at the 2021 International Conference on Work, Stress, & Health and the 2023 Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*

Session Objectives

That you should be able to:

- 1) Describe the work-related stress and recovery process using a demands-resource balancing perspective.
- 2) Identify specific personal and situational demands and examples of resources you need to manage those demands.
- 3) Outline several practical strategies for protecting your well-being at work by protecting and restoring resources while working.
- 4) *Hopefully feel that this session was worth your time...*

Psychology Matters at Work – *Triadic Reciprocal Causation (Bandura)*



What is OHP?

- Occupational Health Psychology
 - Applying psychological theories, principles, and evidence to manage and protect worker health, safety, and well-being (WHSWB)
 - *Core belief:* Wellness > absence of symptom
- OHP is an integral part of transdisciplinary efforts to protect and improve workers, organizations, families, and society (i.e., successful Total Worker Health® initiatives)

OHP Perspective

- Creating and maintaining healthy and safe work environments involves multiple factors:
 - **Environmental** (hazard/exposure management)
 - **Social** (groups/teams, units, organizations)
 - **Psychological** (cognitive, emotional, behavioral)
- Psychology of and about workers is absolutely essential to protecting worker health, safety, and well-being
 - For a detailed overview, see Cunningham and Black (2021), *Essentials of OHP* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis)

OHP Focal Topics

Work stress (and recovery)

Psychological individual differences

Aging and other forms of diversity

Worker psychological and physical health

Healthy workplace design and management

Worker safety (psychological and physical)

Worker mistreatment (incivility, harassment, bullying)

Work-family/nonwork interrole dynamics

Workload, pace, and schedule

Multi-level phenomena

The work-related stress and recovery process

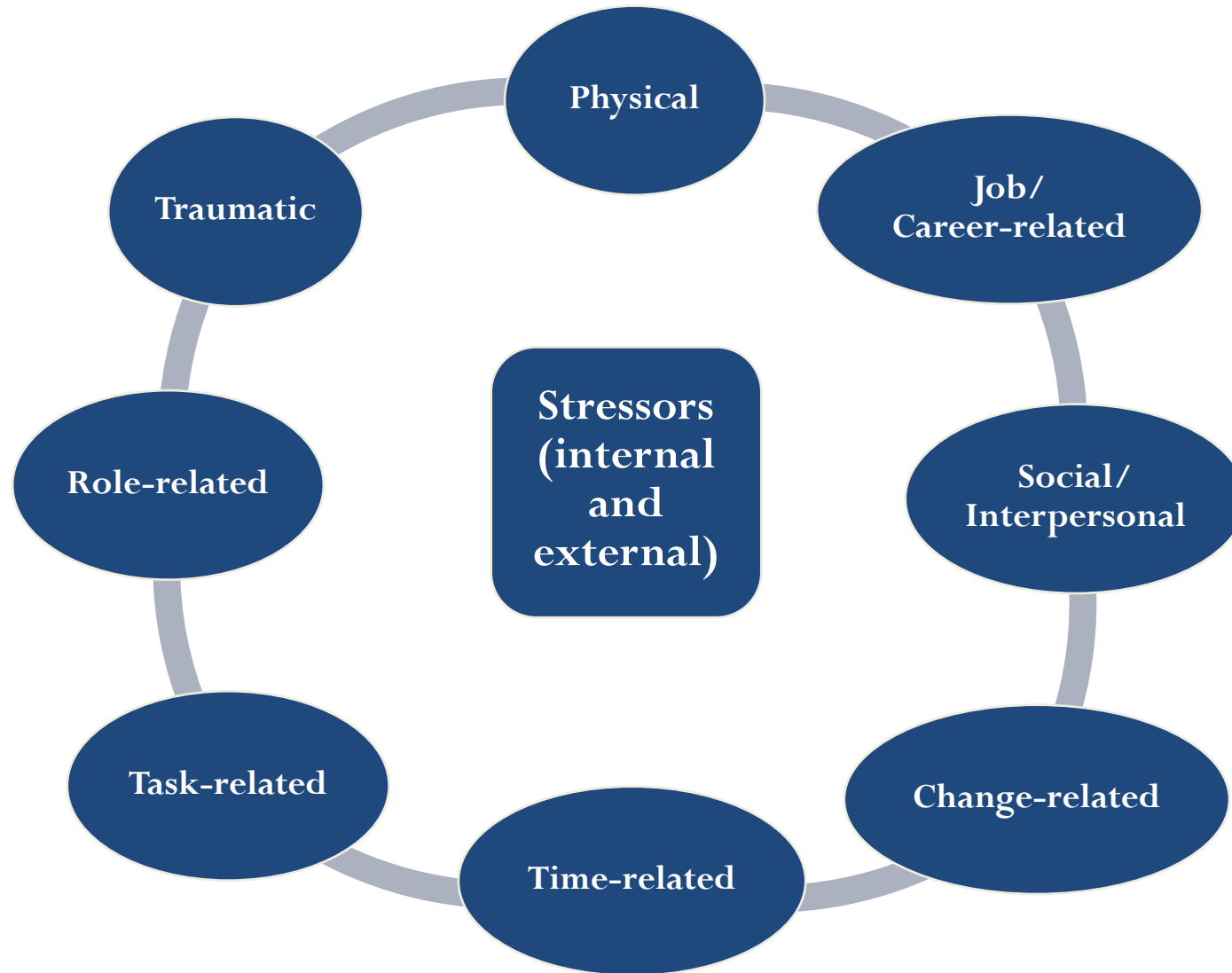
Work-Related Stress

- Work-related stress is real and prevalent
 - ~75% of U.S. workers report being “stressed at work”
 - Pay, co-workers, discrimination, workload, insecurity...
- Not all stress is “in our heads”
 - Work environments are stimuli-rich and resource-limiting
 - Many jobs are chronically under-resourced
 - Even “safe” jobs pose major risks (MSDs, chronic physical symptoms, interpersonal/social conflicts)

Work-Related Stress

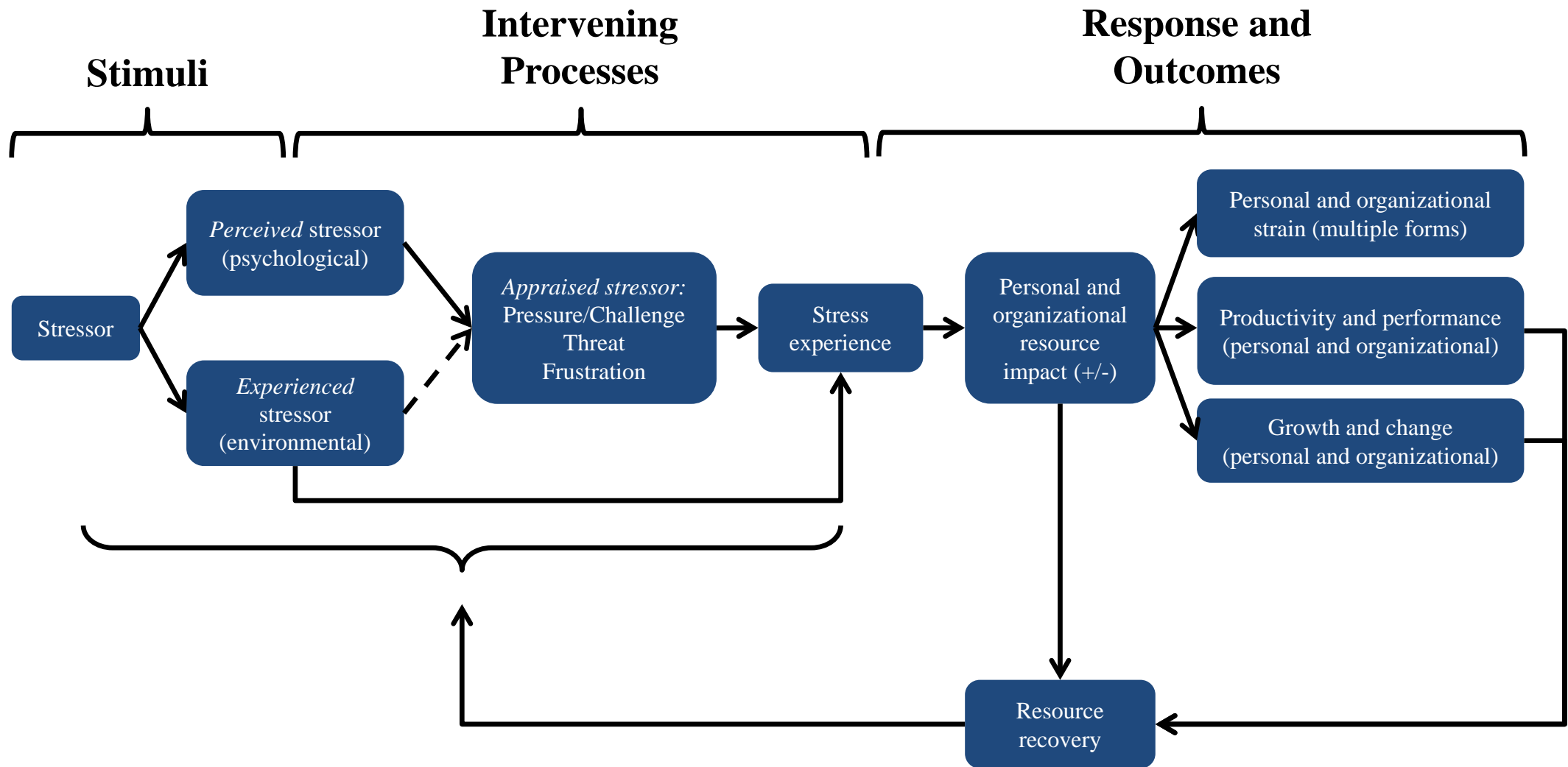
- We continuously seek a balanced resting state
 - **Homeostasis:** Perceived demands = Available resources
- **Stressors** are stimuli that disturb this state
- **Stress** is the experience of arousal in response to stressors and in preparation for a response
- **Strain** is what develops if the stress process is not interrupted
- Strained/depleted workers are less able to be resilient or adaptive when facing demands

Stress Process “Triggers”



Common Work Stressors

- Role-related ambiguity and conflict
- Workload
- Interpersonal incivility, mistreatment, and conflict
- Organizational constraints
- All especially difficult to handle at work because:
 - Limited response options (fight or flight?)
 - Cumulative effects
 - Individual differences



From Cunningham & Black (2021), *Essentials of OHP*, Routledge/Taylor Francis

Work-Related Stress: *Good, Bad, or ?*

“Good” when it...

- motivates
- forces necessary adaptation
- is not permanently present in the environment
- is not chronically experienced
- is handled appropriately by the worker and the organization

“Bad” when it...

- impairs cognitive functioning
- contributes to physical and psychological strains
 - repetitive use/strain disorders and symptoms
 - depression, anxiety, frustration
- reduces worker effectiveness

Effects of Work-Related Stress

- Stress changes workers' interactions with work environments:
 - Perception and appraisal (sensory and cognitive)
 - *Mind steps out or becomes fixated, losing broad perspective*
 - Response (emotional, physiological, and behavioral)
 - *Body goes into overdrive*
- Managing work-related stress requires more than minimizing stressors
 - Personal/organizational resources must facilitate meeting demands

Consequences of Work-Related Stress

Personal

- Chronic uninterrupted exposure to stressors (objective or subjective) may lead to strains of various forms:
 - **Psychological:** anxiety, depression, mood
 - **Physiological/medical:** physical symptoms, disorders
 - **Behavioral:** substance abuse, eating disorders, bullying/violence

Organizational

- **Direct costs**
 - Negative attitudes, poor job performance, more accidents, turnover, higher health-care costs
- **Indirect costs**
 - Loss of vitality, poor communication, reduced relationship quality, bullying/incivility/violence

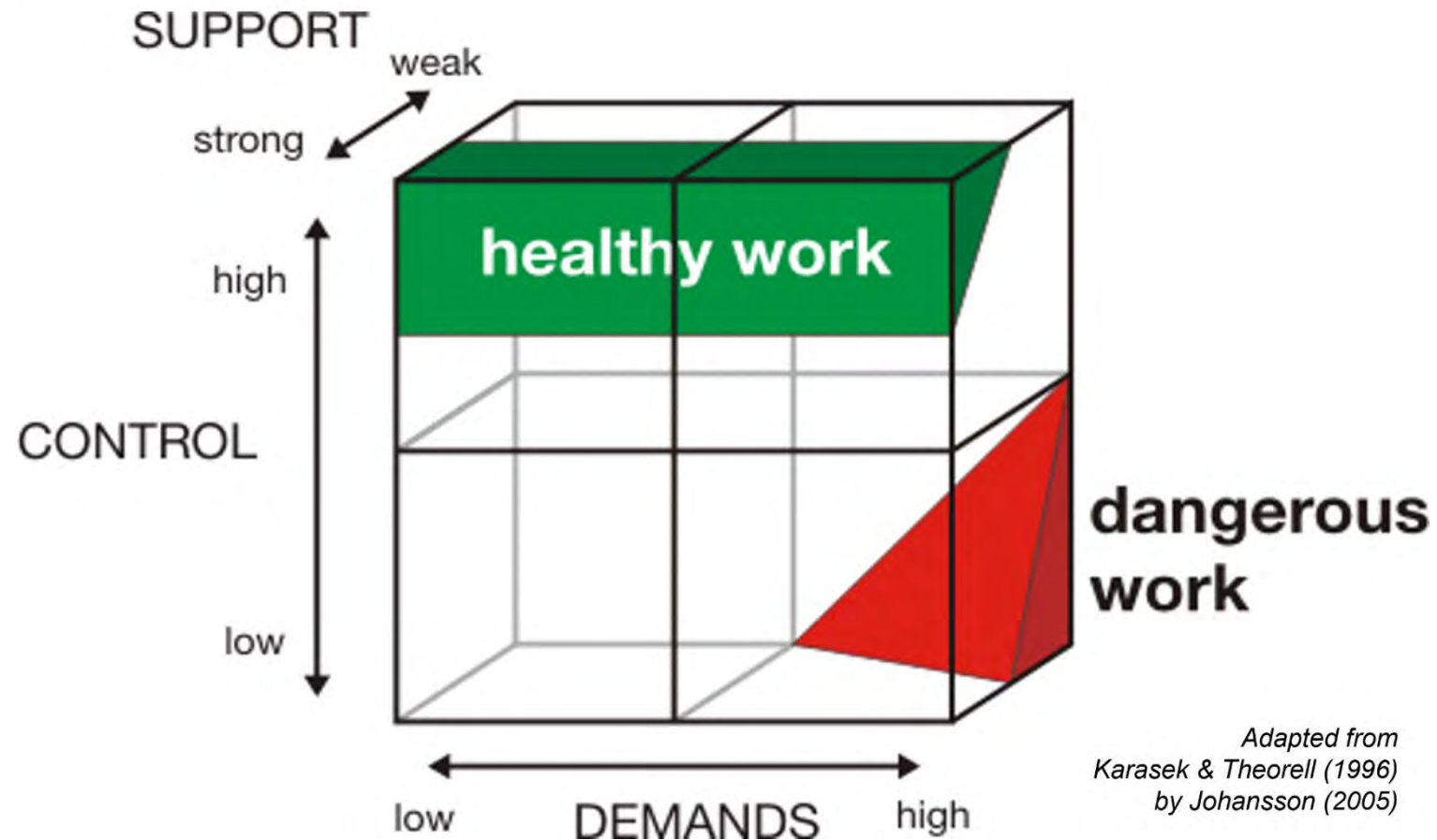
Work-Related Stress: Many “Faces”

- The experience of stress is inherently personal
- Multiple workers in the same organization, exposed to the same stress-inducing stimuli, will likely experience different consequences
 - **Individual differences**
 - Personality, cognition, perception, behavioral responses
 - **Environmental differences**
 - “closeness” to exposure source
 - **Availability of necessary resources**

Critical personal and situational demands and resources in healthcare work environments

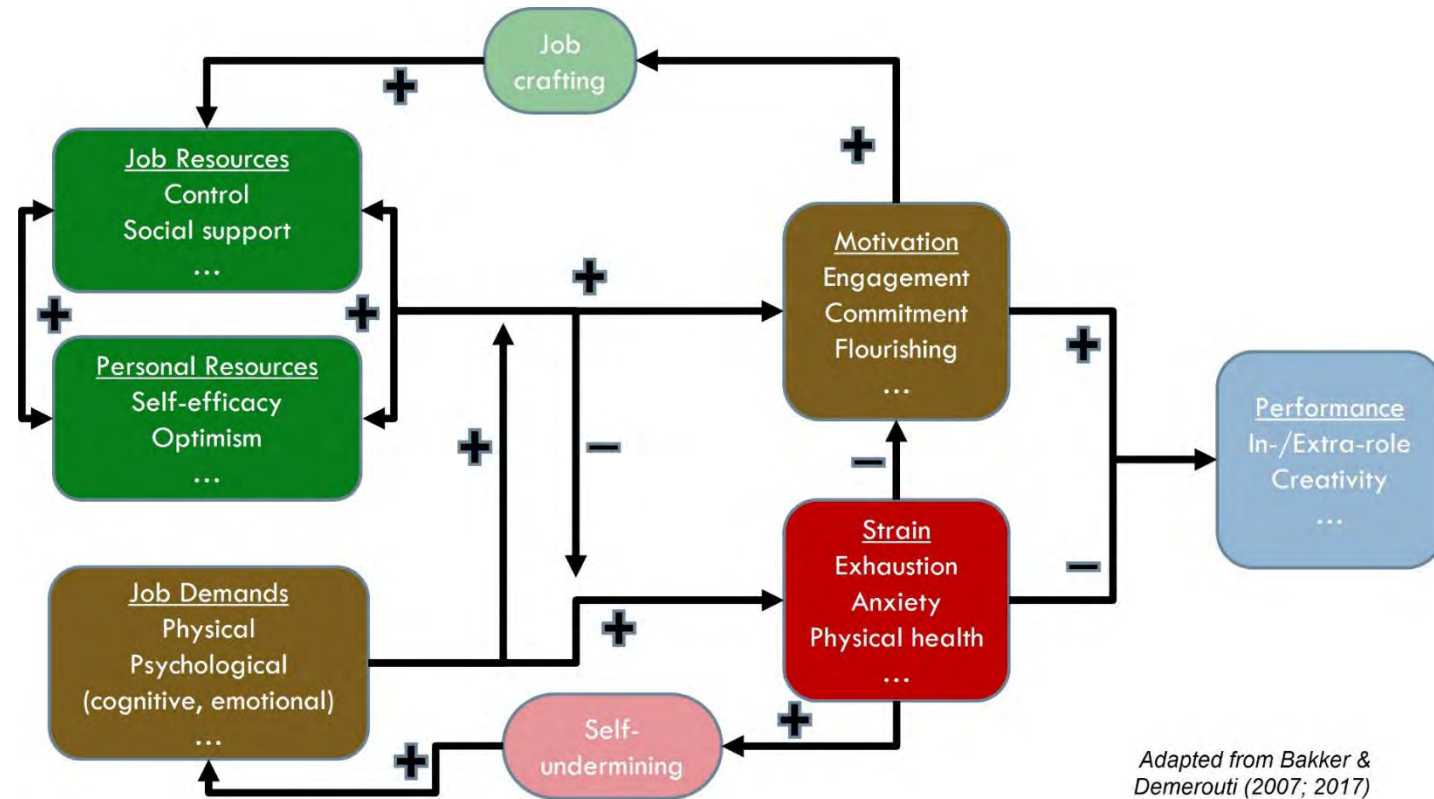
Demands x Control x Support (DCS)

- All jobs can be characterized in terms of Demand x Control conditions
- The presence or absence of support is hugely important
- So is the presence or absence of employees' sense of agency or efficacy

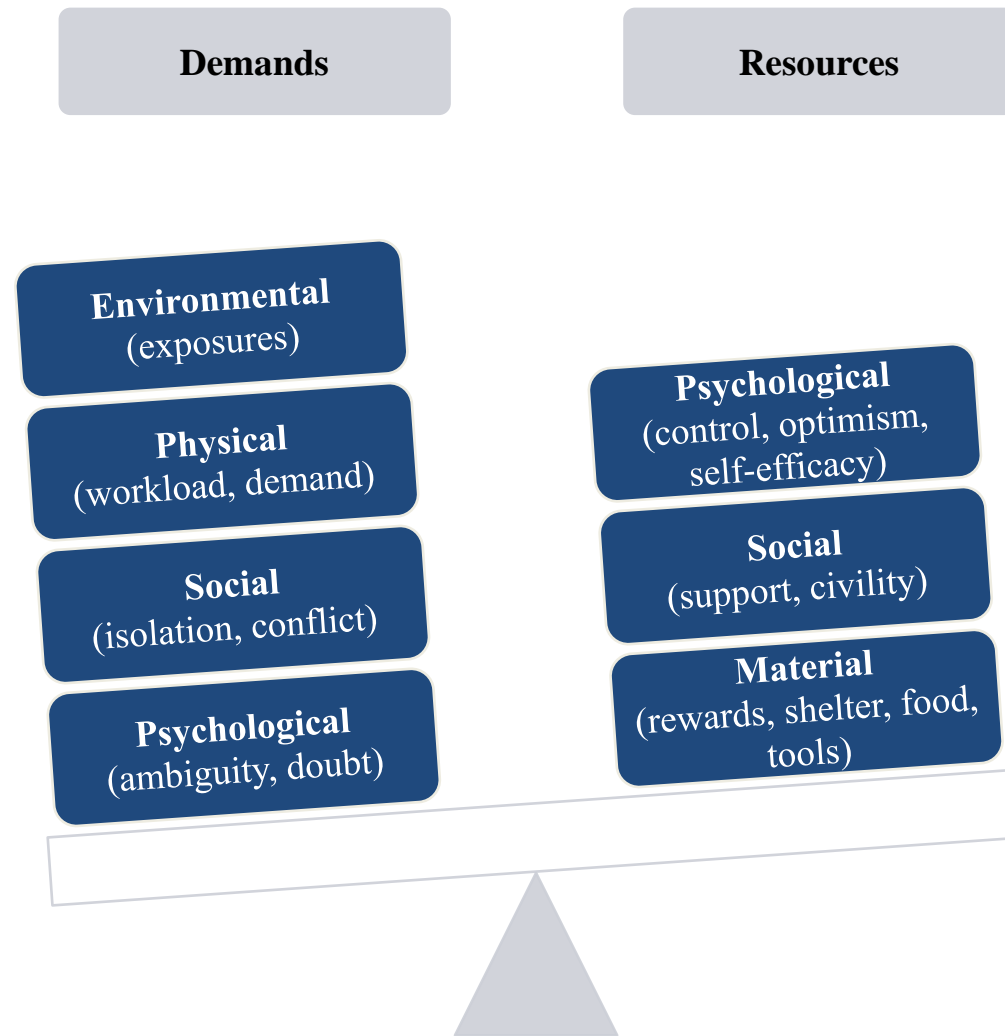


Job Demands-Resources Theory

- Two types of job-related factors influence key outcomes:
 - Demands force adaptation or response
 - Resources help to achieve goals or reduce demands and their costs
- Underlying psychological processes:
 - Health impairment, physiological cost of job demands
 - Motivational via job resources



Demands-Resources Balance



From Cunningham & Black (2021), *Essentials of OHP*, Routledge/Taylor Francis

Resilience-Boosting Personal Resources

Material	Psychological	Social
Transportation	Feeling successful	Good marriage
Adequate clothing	Feeling valuable to others	Family stability
Necessary tools for work	Pride	Intimacy with family
Suitable housing	Hope	Role as a leader
Financial stability	Stamina/endurance	Intimacy with friends
Time for work	Optimism	Understanding from boss
Savings/emergency money	Feeling in control	Support from co-workers
Adequate food	Self-discipline	Companionship
	Know who I am	People I can learn from
	Knowing where I'm going	Loyalty of friends
	Feeling life has purpose	Involvement with others
	Motivation	who share my interests

Adapted from Hobfoll and others' work with COR theory

**US Surgeon General's
Solutions to health
worker burnout (Figure 3;
<https://tinyurl.com/USSGhealthcareburnout>)**



Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.



Components

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm

- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community

- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony

- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

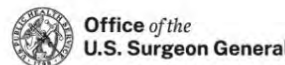
Mattering at Work

- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth

- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

*Diversity, Equity,
Inclusion & Accessibility



<https://tinyurl.com/USSGworkerwellbeing> (USSG, 2022)

The “Holy Grail” of Resilience

Resilience = individual difference

- Trait-like adaptability and adjustment, ego-resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996; Epstein, 1989; Friborg et al., 2005; Oshio et al., 2018)
- Ability to bounce back from adversity (e.g., Bonanno, 2004; Richardson, 2002)
- Composite characteristic (e.g., psychological hardiness; Bartone, 2013)

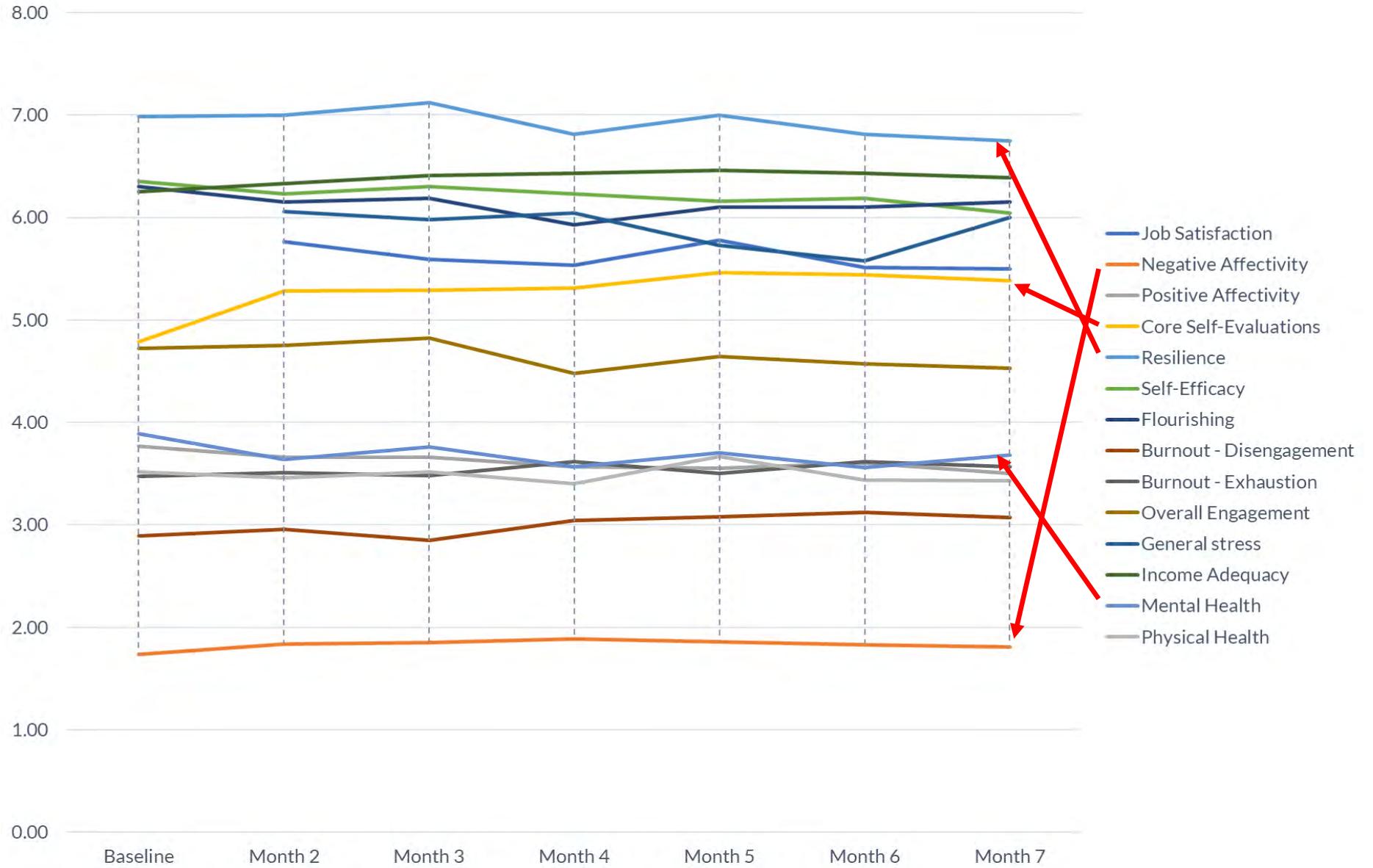
Resilience > individual difference

- Work experiences/contexts help or hinder ability to demonstrate resilience (e.g., Näswall et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2019)
- JD-R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), Broaden and Build (Fredrickson, 1998), and other theories illustrate how our ability to respond to demands is influenced by external factors
- Worker resilience can be developed (or damaged), depending on work context elements (cf., Näswall et al., 2019)

Resilient Physician and HCP Study Overview

- **Objective:** Understand how resilient healthcare workers manage and sustain their resilience in difficult work environments (e.g., hospital setting during COVID)
- $N = 54$ healthcare workers recognized for their resilience at different career stages
 - **Administrator/leadership** (e.g., executive and director level personnel)
 - **Physician** (e.g., residents, fellows, practicing physicians)
 - **Nurse** (of different forms, including physician assistants and nurse practitioners)
 - **Staff** (e.g., janitorial, food service, chaplains)
- Baseline survey / 8 to 10 monthly follow-up surveys / in-depth interview (30-60 minutes)
- **Sample characteristics:** Well-experienced, even M/F split, mostly White and non-Hispanic/Latinx, most married or in committed relationship

Remarkable resilience consistency over time



Key Findings

- Most core person-level elements to resilience are +/- affected by personal, situational, organizational, and social factors at least somewhat organizationally controlled

Sense of meaning and purpose

- enhanced/damaged by work design, task assignments, workload, and resource availability

Acknowledgment and recognition

- can sustain motivation and sense of meaning if present (and destroy it if absent)

Positive outlook on growth and learning

- encouraged and empowered by organizational policies, practices, and resources

Relationships characterized as supportive and trusting

- impacted by staffing, work design, and organizational policies and practices

Consistently high-quality communication among colleagues and with supervisors and senior leaders

- helped/hindered by organizational policies/practices and resources (technology, staffing, training, etc.)

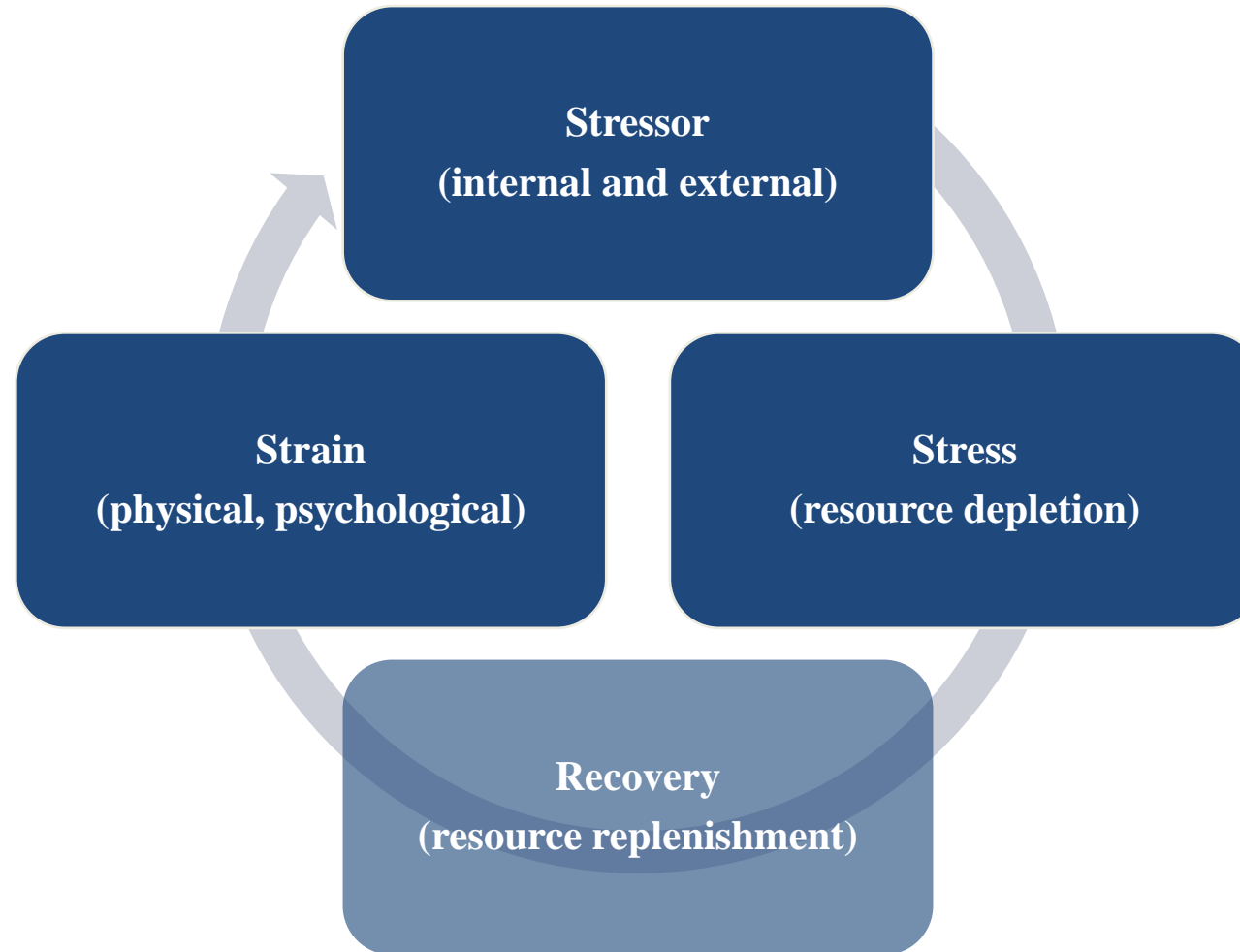
Strategies for protecting and restoring resources while working

What can be done?

- Preventing burnout and promoting well-being is not easy...
- There are various evidence-based strategies
- A multilevel approach is needed
 - The IGLOO Model



Stress and Recovery



From Cunningham &
Black, *Essentials of OHP*,
Routledge/Taylor Francis

This is NOT a Solution

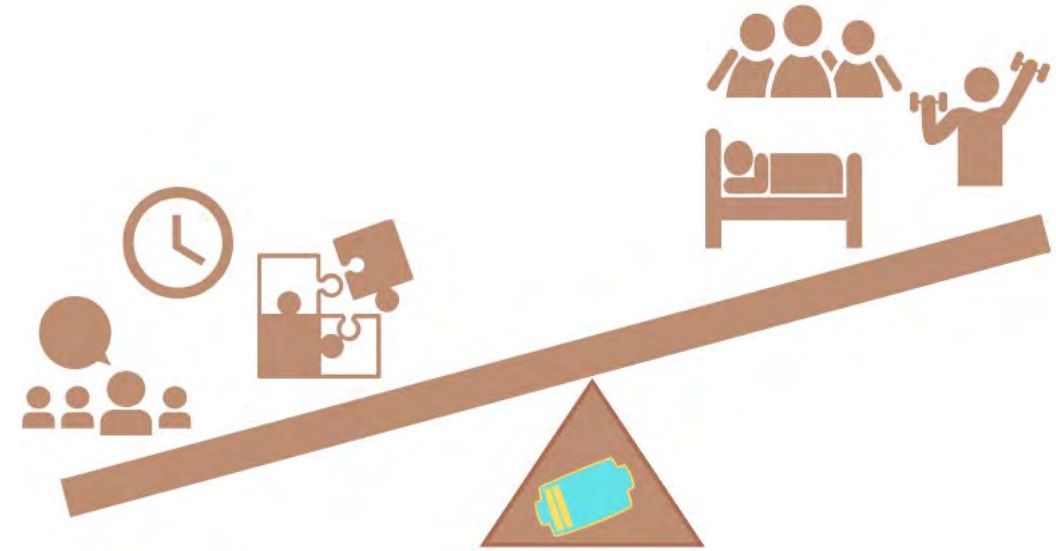


Implications of our research with physicians and other HCP

- Recovery of resources does not only happen outside of work
- Mixed-method research helps uncover complex and dynamic interplays between worker- and organization-level factors
- Person-level resilience is not only a function of internal differences
- Building and sustaining worker resilience requires building and sustaining resilience-enabling work contexts

IGLOO: Individual Level

- Empowering individuals to reduce controllable demands, increase resources, or both.
- General strategies may include:
 - Change how we appraise or cope with stressors
 - Address self-care needs



From Cunningham & Black (2023), *Understanding and Preventing Burnout among Public Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health Leaders*. NIOSH/CDC

IGLOO: Individual Level Examples

- Enhancing coping skills
 - Stress inoculation training
- Encouraging restorative workday breaks
- Cultivating positive psychological states
 - Gratitude, confidence, sense of coherence
- Helping employees manage high demands
 - Planning



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Self-Care and Recovery from Demands

- Self-care is a popular topic and buzzword – but what is it?
 - Activities that reduce exposure to demands and provide an opportunity for restoring resources
 - Necessary, but insufficient to reduce burnout risk
 - Basic health behaviors and activities that build personal and social resources.

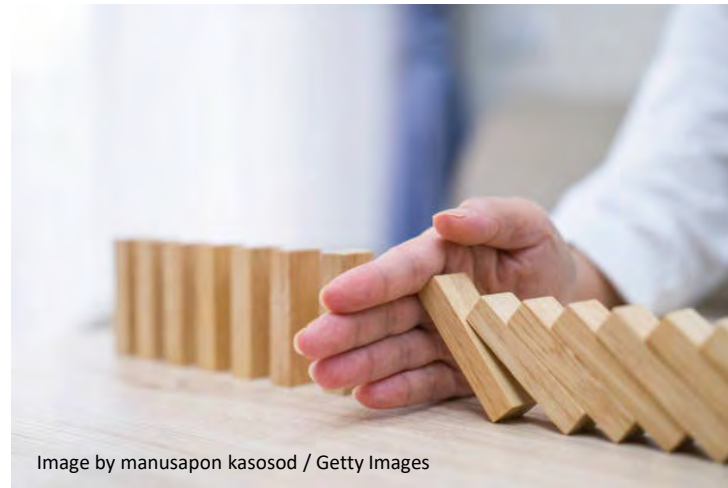


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Why do we need self-care?

- Because self-care is...
 - A preventative measure to protect against burnout.
 - A response to signs of burnout.
 - Necessary to avoid the negative effects of burnout on our health and performance.



From Cunningham & Black (2023), *Understanding and Preventing Burnout among Public Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health Leaders*. NIOSH/CDC

Key Elements to Restorative Recovery

- Psychological Detachment
- Control
- Relaxation
- Mastery
- Relatedness



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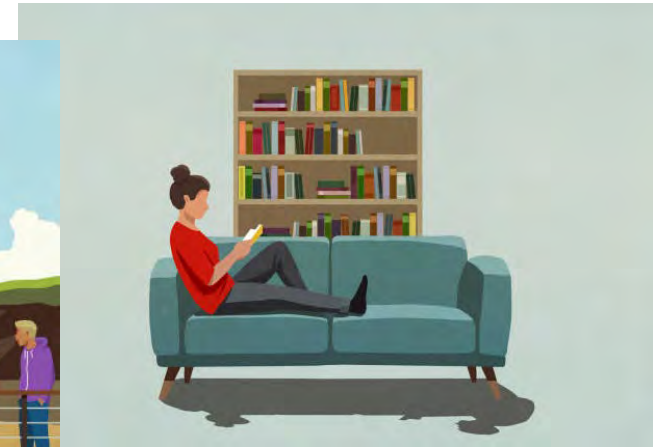


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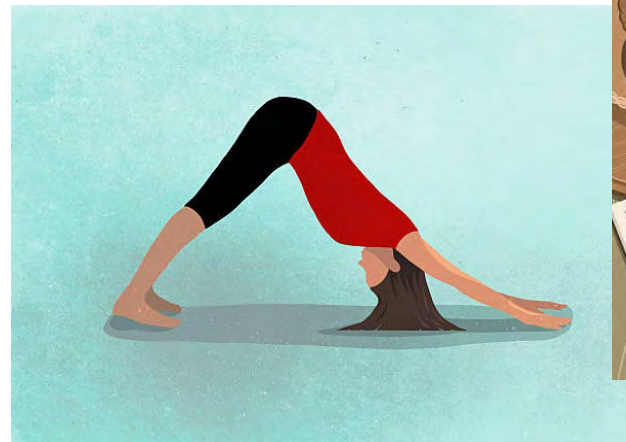


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Considerations for Smarter Self-care

- Avoid overly complicated self-care and comparisons to others
- Self-care can happen by reducing demands
- Beware activities that are more resource depleting than resource replenishing

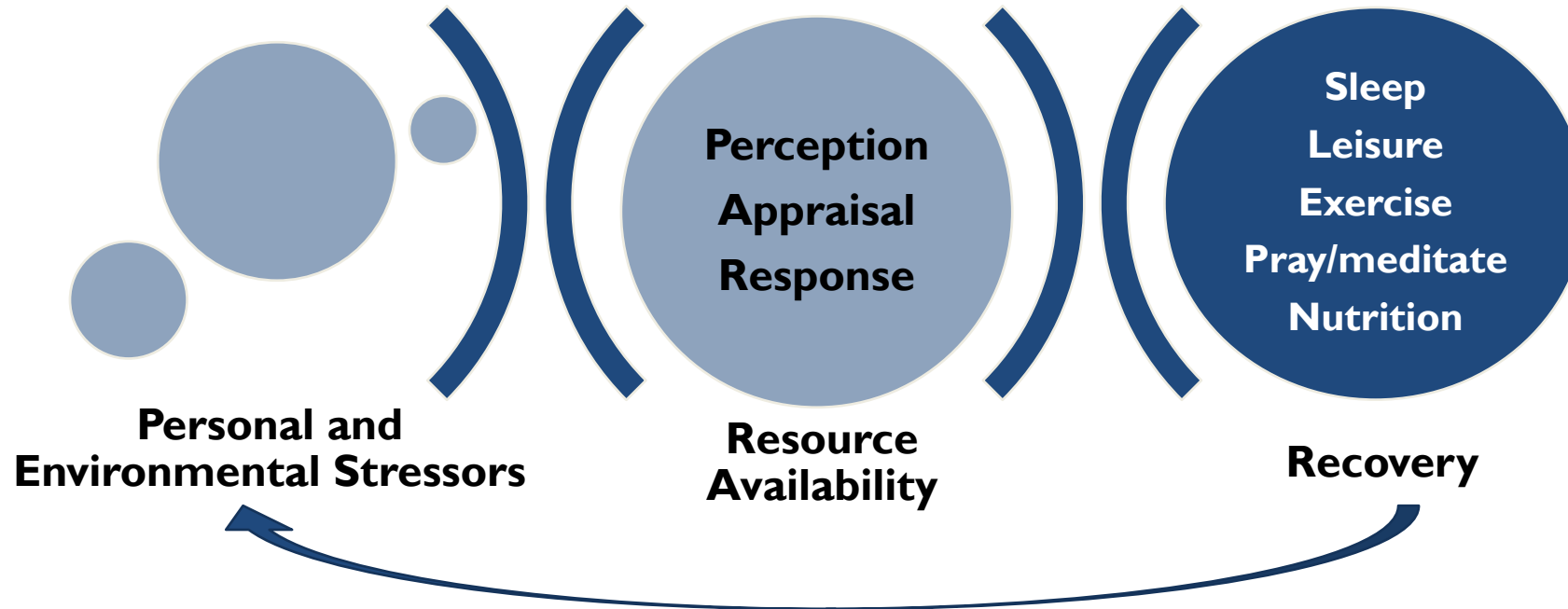


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Personal “Resource Banking” = Recovery Management

- Personal resource banking is like a checking and savings account
 - If we overdraft on our available resources, bad things happen...
 - Even with low interest rates, savings are smart
 - ROI only if we invest some of what we have



Replenishing and Restoring Resources

- **Active**

- Physical exercise
- Socializing with friends/family
- Pursuing hobbies



- **Passive**

- Rest & sleep
- Reading
- Prayer & meditation



IGLOO: Group Level

- Adjusting group norms and practices to help self/others balance demands and resources
 - Promoting healthy work and lifestyle norms
 - Working together to address common demands



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Adapted from Cunningham & Black (2023),
*Understanding and Preventing Burnout among
Public Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health
Leaders*. NIOSH/CDC

IGLOO: Leader, Manager, or Supervisor Level

- Focus on leader-level decisions that support worker health and facilitate recovery
 - Showing clear support for rest and recovery
 - Being a positive role model
 - Supporting healthy work-life balance
 - Cultivating positive states



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NIOSH/CDC

IGLOO: Organization Level

- Foster an organization-wide context that supports individual workers' abilities to recover
 - Creating an overarching culture that values well-being
 - Revising policies, procedures, and practices that threaten or undermine a culture of well-being



Image by Kristen J. Black

Adapted from Cunningham & Black (2023),
*Understanding and Preventing Burnout among Public
Health Workers: Guidance for Public Health Leaders.*
NIOSH/CDC

Resource Management Tips: Organizational

- Reduce worker exposure to stressors
 - Demands and expectations that are reasonable (be “real”); Reduce impediments/constraints
- Facilitate healthy lifestyles
 - Reinforce healthy emotions, attitudes, and behaviors
- Increase employee control
 - Through policies and practices that permit choice, flexibility
- Improve interpersonal relations among colleagues
 - Facilitate support chains (upward and downward)

Example Strategy: Building Support for Psychological Health into Work

- Protecting and promoting positive psychological health is a design challenge
- Building organizational climates (practices) that encourage positive interaction among employees
- How people interact with one another needs to be changed throughout the organization
 - Psychological safety: open and respectful dialogue among employees; people are supported by others
 - Inclusion: Everyone is accepted for who they are and are shown respect.
- Helpful resource: <https://www.supportiveleadership.org/>

IGLOO: Overarching Context Level

- The broader community can support employee efforts to balance demands and resources, and recover
 - Engaging community support for physicians and other HCP
 - Recognizing HCP sacrifices
 - Sharing stories of physicians impacting the community



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The Truth is...

- No “silver bullet” to help workers avoid stress
 - Work-related stressors often just are and will always be
 - Personal stress experiences differ within person and environment
- Addressing stress symptoms will not resolve stressor effects
- Work-related stress is managed by:
 - Preventing stress experiences from becoming chronic
 - Limiting unnecessary demands and exposures
 - Maintaining and replenishing personal and work-related resources

Final Points to Remember

- Work-related stress and recovery can be understood as part of an ongoing process or cycle that is driven by the need to balance demands with resources we need to meet those demands.
- In all work settings, a complex combination of resources is needed to effectively respond to the varied personal and situational demands that are faced.
- Practical strategies for protecting well-being at work involve actively managing our personal demand-resource balances with a multi-level perspective on how to engage in self- and other-care.

Your self-care can't wait (and it doesn't have to).



THANK
YOU!

Questions?

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