

V

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF WORK STRESSORS: A PROLOGUE TO CHANGE

This chapter first explores how these forces of change, while bringing with them at times turmoil and at other times crisis, also helped usher in new ideas that grew into movements, and new opportunities that gave voice to those calling for the need to reflect, refine and reconstruct established ways of thinking. In doing so, they better express not just the work experience but the consequences of that experience in terms of health, well-being and sustainability. Of course, work stress research was not immune to these calls, and the demand for change. This chapter explores the evolving nature of work stressors, offering a prologue to change. It explores how these forces have helped change, shape and fashion the structure of organizations, the direction of work and the nature of work itself. Within this context, we explore briefly how work stressors have evolved in terms of reflecting both time and context, before turning our attention in the next chapter to those stressors that express aspects of contemporary work, reflect widespread concern, and have received considerable empirical support.

The shaping and refashioning of work

It is somewhat of an understatement to simply point to work as having gone through many changes throughout the last 50 years, although the statement is, in itself, absolutely correct. What lies behind such a statement, as the previous three chapters have pointed out, is the enormity of those changes and their fundamental and sometimes radical impact on work and working lives. Earlier chapters have also, either

explicitly or implicitly, made it clear that work and working lives will continue to be transformed, calling for ‘fresh approach[es]to work’ and how we are ‘poised for a revolution in working practices’ (Maitland & Thomson 2011, p. 32). Commentators almost universally have, as we have done, pointed to the impact of globalization, the influence and rapacious speed of technological change and the emergence of the ‘new workforce’ where ‘tectonic shifts are taking place’ in its composition (Maitland & Thomson 2011, p. 3), not, of course, forgetting how these changes have battered and transformed society more generally. All these changes are, one way or another, with some more than others, ‘intimately about us’ (Gratton 2014, p. 34) as we experience their effect not just on our working lives but all aspects of our lives. They have infiltrated our feelings, how we relate to others, how we make sense of things and how they continually create the need to manage what we have, what we want and what we value. We also witness the effects that these changes have on others, and how these effects in turn affect us, our capacity to give, our energy levels, the priorities we set and how we manage and cope (Gratton 2014).

It is important when thinking about how these ‘forces of change’ shape and fashion the nature of work and working lives to take, as Gratton suggests, a ‘broad brush’ approach that acknowledges both the need for a global perspective that captures the ebb and flow of transactions between nations, whilst also recognizing that ‘work takes place in the context of families, expectations and hopes; it takes place within the context of the community and in the context of economic and political structures’ (2014, pp. 24–25). Gratton’s approach is rich in detail, strong in analysis, cogent and compelling. Gratton’s dictum, calling for a broad brush approach, seems to be reflected in those themes commentators point to when describing how work and working lives are being shaped, refashioned and at times transformed. These themes include the restructuring of organizations through acquisitions and mergers as a consequence of global competition, capital and production movements and the demands for rationalization and efficiencies; the shift in emphasis to ‘knowledge work’ and the impact of these forces of change on the ‘everyday realities of work’ (Noon et al. 2013, p. 47), in terms of how, when, and where we work, who we work with, the sort of work that we do and the rewards we derive from it.

None of these themes are mutually exclusive; each is part of a complex set of interrelationships, where boundaries merge, are re-established and reshaped and assume more or less potency than before. Each is defined by elements and items that are themselves subject to change, but each separately and all collectively reflect changes to the nature of work and working lives, expressing at the same time the costs such demands for change have on individual well-being. Our aim in this chapter whilst acknowledging the complexity of change, is to explore how, as work and working lives are reshaped and refashioned by change, work stressors also evolve to reflect the changing nature of the work experience and so present researchers with challenges as to the relevance of our measures, their interpretation, meaning

and significance to those completing them and their usefulness in capturing the work/well-being relationship. With this aim in mind we return to the first of the three themes outlined above, and consider the restructuring of work and working lives through mergers and acquisitions.

Restructuring organizations through mergers and acquisitions

The research on mergers and acquisitions comes with a long history that reflects its usefulness as a strategy to ‘rapidly respond to the demands of a changing global environment’ (Cartwright 2008, p. 583), a means of developing and growing global market economies, ‘a highly popular form of corporate development’ (Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006, p. S1) and an opportunity ‘for organizations to enhance profitability or to survive amid ever fierce global competition’ (van Dick, Ullrich & Tissington 2006, p. S69). The frequency with which this strategy is used continues to increase, as does the monetary value associated with each acquisition (Cartwright 2008; Cartwright & Cooper 2013; Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006). The complexity that accompanies such a strategy, together with the considerable difficulties in assessing their success and therefore the reporting of positive experiences and returns, the level of financial failures, and their mixed performance in relation to a range of stakeholders (Cartwright & Cooper 2013; Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006; van Dick et al. 2006), ‘presents a gloomy picture’ and ‘an issue of public concern’ (Cartwright 2008, p. 583; van Dick et al. 2006, p. S69). While the drive to understand variations in the performance and success of acquisitions has been at the heart of much research (Cartwright 2008; Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006; Cooper & Finkelstein 2016), it has always been accompanied by a growing research interest in the impact of this type of organizational change on those involved and ‘their emotional and behavioural response’ (Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006, p. S3).

It is clear that mergers and acquisitions are met with ‘apprehension and concerns’ (van Dick et al. 2006, p. S69), ‘uncertainty and fear of the unknown’ (Cartwright 2008, p. 586), ‘a diminished degree of predictability’ (Hellgren, Sverke & Näswall 2008, p. 46) and ‘clashes of culture, strategy, operations and personalities’ (Allred, Boal & Holstein 2005, p. 23). While individual responses to these fears, apprehensions and concerns have offered researchers a route to explain why mergers and acquisitions underperform (Cartwright 2008), the link between such feelings and stress has been confirmed (Ahammad, Tarba, Liu, Glaister & Cooper 2015). Job insecurity has emerged as the stressor most closely associated with the feelings emanating from mergers and acquisitions, has attracted a considerable empirical following, is regarded as a central construct in understanding ‘the dramatic changes’ in work and working lives and reflects, on the ‘brink of a new millennium’, a need to learn more

about employment uncertainty and 'the nature of job insecurity' (Sverke & Hellgren 2002, p. 23). Job insecurity falls, like job loss (Karren 2012) under the general rubric of economic stress – those stressors that refer to 'aspects of economic life that are potential stressors for employees and their families' (Probst 2005, p. 268). Job insecurity has, through the notion of job uncertainty, links with the earlier concept of merger stress (Cartwright & Cooper 2013) and has 'detrimental consequences' for employee attitudes and well-being (Sverke & Hellgren 2002, p. 24).

While it is important to focus on well-being, it is equally important, as Cartwright argues, when considering the impact of mergers and acquisitions to focus on how this type of organizational change 'threatens and challenges' social needs, particularly organizational identity (2008, p. 588), not forgetting the growing body of research 'directed at the cultural dynamics of mergers and acquisitions' (Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006, p. S3). Positive benefits also flow from mergers and acquisitions and researchers are catching the mood of positivity by exploring both the role of positive emotions (Cartwright 2008) and their cultivation (Kusstatscher 2006) throughout this type of organizational change. How individuals respond to the merger or acquisition depends on how the integration process is managed. Appelbaum and his colleagues offer a behavioural approach to guide managers through all stages of the merger and acquisition process, drawing attention to the importance of communication, the role of culture, the complexities surrounding the change process and the role of managers, as such a process 'assumes significant effort and dedication' (Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper & Jobin 2000a, p. 658; Appelbaum, Gandell, Shapiro, Belisle & Hoeven 2000b). These authors (Appelbaum et al. 2000a, p. 649), point to what they describe as the 'merger syndrome', characterized by the centralization of the integration process, a corresponding decrease in communications and stress so the 'level and quality of planning' (Nguyen & Kleiner 2003, p. 447) becomes crucial for success both in regard to those involved in the process and more significantly those who lead it.

While the 'influence of OB research continues to be overshadowed by that of financial scholars' (Cartwright 2008, p. 995), and while mergers and acquisitions are 'complex settings for research', three issues emerge from this brief overview: (a) that our knowledge of the emotional and behavioural responses to mergers and acquisitions continues to develop; (b) that leadership is key to the integration process; and (c) that researchers need to better understand and learn more about the properties, nature and consequences of job insecurity.

As work and working lives are reshaped and refashioned by change, work stressors also evolve to reflect the changing work experience presenting researchers with the challenge as to the relevance of our work stressors measures, their interpretation, meaning and significance to those confronted with completing such measures and their usefulness in capturing the work/well-being relationship. Three themes reflect the reshaping and refashioning of work stressors.

TABLE V.1

ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING THROUGH MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

- Mergers and acquisitions are a useful strategy ‘to rapidly respond to the demands of a changing global environment’ (Cartwright 2008, p. 583).
- While the drive to understand the performance and success of mergers and acquisitions has been at the heart of much research it has always been accompanied by a growing research interest in the impact of this type of organizational change on those involved and ‘their emotional and behavioural response’ (Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006, p. 53).
- It is clear mergers and acquisitions are met with ‘apprehension’ and ‘concerns’ (van Dick et al. 2006, p. 569), ‘a diminished degree of predictability’ (Hellgren et al. 2008, p. 46) and ‘clashes of culture, strategy, operations and personalities’ (Allred et al. 2005, p. 23).
- While ‘the influence of organizational behaviour research in mergers and acquisitions continues to be overshadowed by that of financial scholars’ (Cartwright 2008, p. 995) work stress researchers need to understand and learn more about the properties, nature and consequences of job insecurity.

The shift to knowledge work and the reshaping of work

Turning to the remaining two themes of this chapter, we first explore the growth of the service sector, where we saw the transition towards what became known as the ‘new economy’ quickly transformed into the ‘knowledge economy’ and where we are living and working in an age of information and knowledge. The story of the knowledge economy is, as Brinkley explains, a tale of how ‘general purpose technology’ combined with ‘intellectual and knowledge assets – the intangibles’ fuelled ‘a profound shift’ in demand ‘towards high valued added, knowledge intensive goods and services’ (2008, p. 9). The transformation of the economy, and in its wake, work and working lives rested on three changes: (a) the rise of knowledge intensive industries and high-tech manufacturing; (b) a shift away from investments in traditional physical assets to intangible assets such as ‘software, human and organizational capital, research and development, brand equity, design and copyright’; and (c) the demand for a highly skilled workforce (Brinkley, Fauth, Mahdon & Theodoropoulou 2010, pp. 5, 9–10).

Knowledge is now an economic good, and its 'most important property' is that it is 'the ultimate economic renewable' because 'the stock of knowledge is not depleted' and its value increases as it is shared with others (Brinkley 2006, p. 5). What's more, knowledge 'has become central to the production of organizational value' (Brinkley et al. 2010, p. 17). Nevertheless, because, as a commodity, 'knowledge' is everywhere, this immediately presented the need for improved measures of what is 'knowledge work', who are the 'knowledge workers', is 'knowledge work' good work (Brinkley et al. 2010), and how does the term knowledge economy help us understand the changing nature of work and working lives? Because we live in a world where the speed of innovation is so great, defining the economy or the age is fraught with difficulties. Whether we have ever left the information age or the knowledge economy remains a moot point for, as each generation of technological change brings with it new opportunities, so knowledge itself changes in the way it is created, how it is marketed, the demand for it, the way it is accessed, evaluated and assessed, the way we think about it and the way it is consumed and used.

Describing the economy as a 'knowledge economy' shouldn't be interpreted as implying that there is a 'non-knowledge economy' as this descriptor is used to describe 'a change in economic structures, and the way firms and people operate across all sectors affecting a very wide range of occupations' (Brinkley 2008, p. 13). So when we think of the many ways in which the economy has been described there is one common theme running through them, that is, that 'the economy is becoming increasingly weightless' (Coyle & Quah 2002, p. 8). The descriptor of weightlessness captures the idea that 'creating value depends less and less on physical mass, and more and more on intangibles, such as human intelligence, creativity, and even personal warmth' (Coyle & Quah 2002, p. 8). Using weightlessness as a descriptor leaves behind the undertones associated with the idea of knowledge, freeing us and helping us better understand the impact of ubiquitous technology, the notion of seamless interconnectivity, the significance of context, the nature of 'network individualism' and its role as a 'social lubricant' (Rainie & Wellman 2014, p. 107), and the potential of a technologically driven transformation of work, working lives and lives in general.

So what does this mean for 'work'? We begin by acknowledging as we have done before (Dewe & Cooper 2012, pp. 34–35), the growth of the service sector, the job-generating ability of knowledge-based industries, the importance of innovation and entrepreneurialism, research and development, value-added design, product differentiation, fashion and marketing, the intensity of competition and the ever presence of globalization (Brinkley 2008). At the same time, management development and skill enrichment will become 'even more crucial' (Confederation of Business Industry 2007, p. 10), requiring a constant need for a greater emphasis on human resource management (Saridakis & Cooper 2013), a shift to resource-based strategies (competing through people), the expression of human resources through forms of employee engagement, value-driven rather than control-driven organizational cultures, more socially responsible management styles, an emphasis on sustainability

that extends beyond the green agenda to sustainable working lives, the importance of facilitation, collaboration and lifelong learning (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, pp. 36–37), and the ideas of partnership being something more than ‘a well meaning slogan’ (Taylor 2005, p. 22). Work for many will become more intense, more goal and deadline directed, more project and team organized, assume an ‘emotional quality’, require the ability to boundary span, have the potential to be more flexible, will require a greater maintenance of work–life balance, and emphasize the importance of context, meaning and well-being (Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 37).

Three themes emerge from this change: (a) the reshaping of organizations to reflect more organic and network structures; (b) the emphasis on resource-based strategies, and human resource management’s pivotal role in bringing about sustainable success both operationally and strategically; and (c) the intensity of work itself, as the patterns of work change (Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 37). As we have noted before (Dewe & Cooper 2012, pp. 33–34, 37), the third theme encompasses how work is arranged in relation to both time and place, the way work goals are organized, set, achieved and evaluated, how it assumes a more emotional quality, how uncertainty is more likely to accompany the work experience, how the demands for a sense of work–life balance are achieved, how the social aspects of work become more complex in terms of establishing and maintaining working relationships, communicating and collaborating, how facilitation and cooperation become skills required at all levels of management, how changing work values reflect changes in the meaning of work, and the constant need to reconcile the conflicting demands between ‘what we want from work and what work provides’ (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, pp. 34, 37).

Many of the changes mentioned above ‘will be experienced [by workers] in different strengths across different sectors, industries and workplace’ (Donkin 2010, p. 248). Yet embedded in all the rough and tumble of this change, the turbulence it creates and the economic chaos that at times accompanies it, there has remained a constant theme to focus on ‘what makes good work’, to understand ‘why job quality in a changing economy matters’ (Coats & Lekhi 2008, p. 11), to recognize that ‘if we care about the capabilities of individuals to choose a life that they value then we should care about job quality’ (Coats & Lekhi 2008, p. 6), that ‘finding meaning in work matters to people’ (Parker & Bevan 2011, p. 5) and that while it is ‘a trickier task’ policy makers should be concerned with measuring progress towards ‘fulfilling employment’ (Brown et al. 2006, p. 1). The ‘good work’ agenda has also attracted the attention of those monitoring the scale, growth and importance of knowledge work. While acknowledging that job quality is a pathway to health and well-being, and accepting that job quality is important across the workforce ‘regardless of the degree of knowledge content in their jobs’, the question ‘is knowledge work better for us’ is one that demands attention (Brinkley et al. 2010, p. 6). Accepting the difficulties associated with terms like ‘knowledge worker’ and ‘knowledge economy’ Brinkley nevertheless, in trying to get to grips with whether knowledge work is good work, raises the all-important question of whether the knowledge economy has ‘a dark side’ (2008, p. 9).

While Brinkley's research to date is reassuring, in the sense that 'this new working elite' has not made worse those existing 'divides' in the labour market, it has not, he goes on to add, done anything to improve them, concluding that 'there is no room for complacency' (2008, pp. 9–10). It wasn't long before other researchers also began to point to the 'dual nature' or 'double-edged' side to technology (Day et al. 2010; Tarafdar et al. 2007), and 'these dual and sometimes dark, effects of the implementation and use of Information and Communication Technologies' (Tarafdar et al. 2007, p. 302). The 'explosive growth of [these] end-use computing and networking technologies' (Ragu-Nathan et al. 2008, p. 417), their implementation and application, was soon to be associated with stress and a phenomenon called technostress. Technostress described 'the state of mental and physiological arousal observed in certain employees who are heavily dependent on computers in their work' (Arnetz & Wiholm 1997, p. 36). Two avenues for research accompanied the concept of technostress. The first concerned the need to understand exactly what it is about these technologies that 'ultimately leads to stress' (Ayyagari et al. 2011, p. 832). The second explored the impact of technostress, the issue of computer anxiety (Shu, Tu & Wang 2011), its pathway towards technophobia (Thorpe & Brosnan 2007) and, not forgetting of course, techno-enthusiasts (Coget 2011).

The ubiquitous nature of technology, its networking and interconnectivity capabilities soon led researchers to look beyond the concept of technostress to other types of behaviours and attitudes when considering the role of technology and its impact on the nature of work and our working lives. A body of research was soon to grow around topics that ranged from problematic internet use (Hetzl-Riggin & Pritchard 2011), to internet abuse and internet addiction (Griffiths 2010), the quality, quantity and management of emails (Whittaker, Bellotti & Moody 2005), cyberbullying (Sabella, Patchin & Hinduja 2013), sensitivity to mobile phones (Rubin, Cleare & Wessely 2008), the benefits and dangers of social networking (Turel & Serenko 2012), cyberloafing (Lim & Chen 2012) and teleworking (Bailey & Kurland 2002). Researchers have not just limited their attention to the impact of technology on behaviours, attitudes and well-being. Technology's reach extends beyond organizational boundaries, and so researchers have continued to track and explore issues like work–family (life) balance (Brough & Kalliath 2009), extending that research from the more traditional focus on spillover to issues of crossover (Bakker, Westman & van Emmerik 2009), segmentation and integration (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate 2000; Kreiner 2006) along with the issue of flexible working (Pardey 2013). Since the boundaries of time and place of work have been blurred and at times lost in terms of how, when and where work is performed, it's not surprising to find that researchers have also been building a corpus of research around topics like workaholism (Snir, Harpaz & Burke 2006), counterproductive work behaviours (Sackett 2002), dysfunctional behaviour (Robinson 2008), corruption in organizations (Burke, Tomlinson & Cooper 2011) and employee morale (Bowles & Cooper 2009).

A transformed weightless economy with its emphasis on value creation through intangibles that embrace knowledge, skills and creativity, its reshaping of the nature and character of work where the emphasis is on resource-based strategies, the growing significance of human resource management, and management styles that emphasize value driven leadership, collaboration, facilitation and team work, provided the context (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 37) for the emergence of a new generation of work stressors. Before we turn to examine some of these new generational stressors in more detail we briefly turn our attention to the evolution of work stressors more generally, exploring how measures of more traditional stressors need to adapt and more importantly maintain their relevance in a world where work is constantly changing in terms of how, when and where work is performed and experienced.

TABLE V.2

THE SHIFT TO KNOWLEDGE WORK

- The transformation of the economy and in its wake work and working lives rested on three changes: '[t]he rise of knowledge intensive industries and high tech manufacturing, a shift from investments in traditional physical assets to intangible assets such as 'software, human and organizational capital, research and development, brand equity, design and copyright' and the demand for a highly skilled workforce, (Brinkley et al. 2010, pp. 5, 9–10).
- So when thinking of the many ways in which the economy can be described, a key concept is that 'the economy is becoming increasingly weightless' (Coyle & Quah 2002, p. 8).
- Using 'weightless' as a descriptor helps us to better understand the impact of ubiquitous technology, the notion of seamless interconnectivity, the significance of context and technology's role as 'a social lubricant' (Raine & Wellman 2014, p. 107).
- It wasn't long before researchers began to point to the 'dual nature' or 'double-edged' side to technology (Day et al. 2010; Tarafdar et al. 2007) with its implementation and application soon to be associated with stress and a phenomenon called technostress, questioning what it is about these technologies that 'ultimately leads to stress' (Ayyagari et al. 2011, p. 832).
- Technology's reach extends beyond organizational boundaries and so researchers have continued to track and explore issues like family-life balance (Brough & Kalliath 2009).

The evolving nature of work stressors

'In one way or another', argues Barling and his co-authors, work stressors 'have attracted considerable empirical attention and public fascination' (Barling, Kelloway & Frone 2005, p. 3), not least because each of us has a strong personal interest in understanding what the causes of work stress are, and what it means to experience them. This helps to explain why, despite significant advances in our understanding of job stressors, it still remains, according to one of the seminal writers in the field 'an unfinished enterprise' (Beehr 1998, p. 843). You can understand why there is such an interest as stressors are, by nature, products of environmental circumstances, and as these circumstances change, then so must stressors change both in form and structure if they are to maintain a relevance despite the fact that some appear to take on 'a timeless quality' (Jex & Yankelevich 2008, p. 498). It is these changing circumstances that also provide the context from which, as we have discussed (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 94), new generations of stressors emerge. So, to provide a sense of how work stressors, products of a changing environment, adapt we briefly explore what is a rich history of change before turning to describe in more detail a new generation of stressors. Finally we explore how the constancy of change challenges established measurement practices, questioning not only their capacity to capture the work context, but also their utility and relevance to express the work experience, its intensity, its meaning and its ability to convey affect.

TABLE V.3

THE RESHAPING OF WORK

- You can understand why there is such an interest in stressors as they are, by nature, products of environmental circumstances and as these circumstances change, then so must stressors change both in form and structure, if they are to maintain a relevance despite the fact that some appear to take on 'a timeless quality' (Jex & Yankelevich 2008, p. 498).
- So it is against a backdrop of social, economic and political upheaval demanding jobs, a greater urgency to restructure, a more complex human resource management environment, and the ever presence of technological change and innovation that these changes simply reinforce feelings of job insecurity, the intensity of work, the demands of technology and a deterioration in working relationships and work behaviours (Dewe et al. 2010).
- Work stress researchers have been 'confront[ed] with a something of a different challenge' (Barling et al. 2005, p. 3), that is, that there are a considerable number of issues – potential stressors (e.g. terrorism, organizational politics

and justice) – that organizations and employees face that have been explored in the general psychology literature but have not been addressed ‘from a work stress perspective’ and so haven’t yet received the empirical attention that this perspective offers (Barling et al. 2005, p. 3).

- A further challenge for work stress researchers is to ‘be alert’ to questions of whether ‘the standard ways of working’ still prevail and the need in terms of stressor relevance give adequate attention to the variety of ‘non standard ways’ of working that are rapidly increasing. So it is no longer the case that non-standard work can be assumed ‘to look like’ standard work – making ‘non-standard working’ a topic ‘in its own right’ (Ashford et al. 2007, p. 67), and raising implications for stressor identification.
- Also the reshaping of work means challenges for measurement – how the consistency of change challenges established measurement practices, questions their capacity to capture the contemporary work context, their usefulness and relevance to express that work experience, its intensity, its meaning and its ability to convey affect (Dewe & Cooper 2012).

Stressors: A brief history of change

Challenges and difficulties confront anyone exploring the history of stressors, for it is a history of the concept of stress itself, a history within a history, a history of change and a history that needs to confront, like the discipline itself, the old assumptions about the ‘images we carry of work’, and the new work that is emerging (Ashford et al. 2007, p. 67), and what it is that makes a form of organizing new (Puranam, Alexy & Reitzig 2014). The idea that the history of stressors is, in many ways, nothing more and no different from the history of stress itself arises because the role and significance of stressors has been simply enshrined in that history when stress, as an independent variable, was defined as a stimulus and identifying potential sources of stress became the principal theme of stimulus-based models of stress (Cooper et al. 2001, p. 15). Definitions offer a sense of time and place, and present researchers with an understanding of why particular approaches prevailed, and so this definition (stimulus) and this time gave researchers the licence to begin to identify and categorize the nature of stressors themselves (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, pp. 90–92; Dewe et al. 2010).

Identifying sources of work stress can be traced, as we have noted before (see Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 94), to the work of Kahn and his colleagues when they noted that ‘conflict and ambiguity are among the major characteristics of our society and we are marked by them’ (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal 1964, p. 3). Pointing to two ‘dominant societal trends’ (Kahn et al. 1964, p. 5) – the growth of large corporations with their rules, regulations and levels of bureaucracy and the

increasing significance of technology – Kahn and his colleagues laid the foundations, and the first category of stressors were expressed through the concepts of role conflict, role ambiguity and later role overload. Stressors that, even today, still have a remarkable presence and continue to attract considerable attention (Dewe et al. 2010), with researchers exploring how changing work roles and demands ‘continue to enrich and develop’ our understanding (Hellgren et al. 2008, p. 61) and where and why more research is needed before our work can be said to be complete (Beehr & Glazer 2005). Others were soon to contribute with frameworks for categorizing stressors laying the groundwork and setting the benchmarks against which change and evolution could be measured (Beehr 1985, 1998; Beehr & Newman 1978; Cooper & Marshall 1976, 1980; Ivancevich & Matteson 1980; McGrath 1970; Quick & Quick 1984; Sutherland & Cooper 1988). As noted in earlier chapters, as our understanding of the concept of stress developed and focused more on its ‘transactional’ properties, the definition of stress as a stimulus has taken on ‘more of a historical value’ (Dewe et al. 2010, p. 3), but the idea of continuing to understand the nature of stressors through their evolving properties remains crucial if the authority of the term is to be maintained and assume a level of relevance.

Before moving to the evolving nature of stressors, it is interesting to touch on the idea of a history within a history. As mentioned, the history of stressors is part of the broader history of the stress concept as it moved through various iterations from a focus on its interactional properties (stimulus–response) to the sequencing and unfolding of a stressful encounter, where definitions required researchers to explore the nature of the ‘transaction’, and those processes that linked the individual and the environment (Lazarus 1999). But the development of stressors has had its own history within a history as for a time research attention turned to the idea of the role and importance of critical life events (Holmes & Masuda 1974; Holmes & Rahe 1967; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend 1974). The debate that followed this work ranged (Cooper & Dewe 2004, pp. 41–51) across a number of issues but settled on two: whether life events were best measured objectively or subjectively (see Dohrenwend & ShROUT 1985; Jones & Kinman 2001; Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman & Gruen 1985), or whether ‘daily hassles and uplifts’ (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus 1981, p. 1) had more utility as a measure because they more closely reflected individual experiences (Jones & Kinman 2001). The debate ebbed and flowed for almost a decade before the interest in critical ‘life event research’ began to wane (Cooper & Dewe 2004, pp. 47–51). Two reasons are offered for this. Both touch a nerve when considering the measurement of stressors. The first offered by Lazarus (1999) concerned the failure to give enough attention to the meanings individuals give to such events, and the second stems from the view that the ‘list of events did not keep up-to-date or [remain] comprehensive enough’ (Cooper & Dewe 2004, p. 51).

We now turn to how stressor research has been nurtured and shaped by the forces discussed, not just in this chapter, but in those chapters that have preceded it. Looking

back over the 1980s, Burke points to what he describes as ‘increasingly important contemporary sources’ of stressors tempered by ‘the effects of the economic recession’ (1988, p. 93; Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 94) including mergers and acquisitions, job future ambiguity and insecurity and organizational locking-in where employees felt ‘boxed-in’. ‘It would not be an exaggeration’, Burke concluded from his review, to say that ‘occupational stress has become a central topic in the field of organizational behavior’ (1988, p. 106). The 1980s also witnessed the spread of computers through the workplace, with mounting concerns about how this innovation may ‘present more difficulties’ in terms of adaptation and coping ‘than many work situations’ (Briner & Hockey 1988, p. 135). By the 1990s Dewe and his colleagues noted that against a backdrop of social, economic and political change, more cognitively demanding jobs, a greater urgency to restructure, a more complex human resource environment, and the ever presence of technological change and innovation, these forces simply reinforced feelings of job insecurity, the intensity of work, the demands of technology and a deterioration in working relationships and work behaviours (Dewe et al. 2010, pp. 233–239; Dewe & Cooper 2012, p. 94). So by the time the new millennium was to mark its first five years the term ‘contemporary stressors’ had grown to cover, because of their salience and reach, those stressors that captured the impact of technology, the issue of job insecurity, the continually evolving nature of work–life demands, and the challenging behaviours they provoked (Barling et al. 2005; Sulsky & Smith 2005; Cooper & Robertson 2013).

Yet it was not to end there, as researchers were to be confronted by ‘something of a different challenge’ (Barling et al. 2005, p. 3). This challenge required researchers to recognize that there are a considerable number of issues – indeed potential stressors – that organizations and employees faced that have been explored in the general organizational behaviour/psychology literature, but have not been addressed ‘from a work stress perspective’ and so have not yet received the empirical attention that this perspective offers (Barling et al. 2005, p. 3). Examples of these issues and their potency as stressors include: terrorism (Inness & Barling 2005); poor leadership (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis & Barling 2005); organizational politics (Harris & Kacmar 2005); and organizational justice (Cropanzano, Goldman & Benson 2005); not forgetting the growing body of work on workplace violence (Budd, Arvey & Lawless 1996; Kelloway, Barling & Hurrell 2006; LeBlanc & Kelloway 2002). While our attention is on contemporary work stressors, their evolution and how they are expressed in work, we need also to acknowledge the research that continues on more established stressors and how they are refined and need to be continuity assessed to ensure that they maintain a sense of relevance and express the nature of the work experience. Examples here would include the work on refining our understanding of the nature of role stressors (Beehr & Glazer 2005; Hellgren et al. 2008), issues of crossover (Bakker et al. 2009) and segmentation and integration in relation to work–life balance (Ashforth et al. 2000; Kreiner 2006).

Finally, work stress researchers, like all in the discipline, need to be alert to the ‘change that is clearly afoot’ and how the assumption that the ‘standard ways of working’ still prevail, fails to give adequate attention to the variety of ‘non-standard ways’ of working that are rapidly increasing. It is no longer the case that non-standard working can be assumed to ‘look like’ standard working, making ‘nonstandard work a topic worthy of study’ in its own right (Ashford et al. 2007, p. 67). Researchers need now to ensure that meeting the challenges of capturing the nature and experiences of what is best described as a ‘blended workforce’, where standard and nonstandard workers work together, needs at the very least new theories and new measures that ‘are central to filling in a portrait of this new future’ (Ashford et al. 2007, p. 106). In a similar way, when the question of ‘what makes a form of organizing new?’ is posed, then, as Puranam and his colleagues suggest, this requires an exploration of what it is that is ‘novel and unique’ about solutions to the universal processes of organizations (Puranam et al. 2014, p. 177). The detailed analysis by Puranam and his colleagues, and their approach to the issue of novelty and newness, represents another challenge for researchers wishing to better understand the changing nature of how work is organized and how measures need to be attuned to those work features that make a difference. From here and from this context of change, history and evolution we turn in the next chapter to exploring a new generation of stressors and the measurement challenges that face researchers when attempting to capture the contemporary work experience.

Summary

Our aim in this chapter, whilst acknowledging the complexity of the forces of change, is to explore how, as work and working lives are reshaped and refashioned by change, work stressors also evolve to reflect the changing nature of the work experience and so present researchers with challenges as to the relevance of our measures, their interpretation, meaning and significance to those completing them and their usefulness in capturing the work/well-being relationship. By thinking in terms of three themes that express the forces of change we signal the importance of the context and the descriptive knowledge it provides to understanding why different stressors emerge when they do; the importance of refining our measures so they reflect the changing nature of the work experience endorsing the significance of the concept of relevance and reflecting its importance as a methodological tool. We suggest that three themes reflect the reshaping and refashioning of work stressors: organizational restructuring through mergers and acquisitions; the shift to knowledge work; and the reshaping of work. These three themes represent the ‘global focus’ (Gratton 2014, p. 24) but, as Gratton reminds us, ‘work takes place in the context of families, expectations and hopes; it takes place within the context of the community and in the context of economic and political structures’ (2014, p. 25).

So the identifying and measuring of stressors is all about us, because we have a strong personal interest in understanding what the causes of work stress are, and what it means to experience them; suggesting and endorsing the importance of refining stressor measures and the significance of the concept of relevance. But as we intimated in the beginning of this summary this prologue sets a context and offers through that context the prescriptive knowledge that gives us the opportunity to understand why stressor measurement is important, how stressors are anchored by a time and place and why tools like refining our measurement practices and establishing their relevance are so critical to meeting the obligations we have to those whose working lives we research.