

---

## Preface

---

For slaves, there is no leisure, (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1334a 21)

The rapid change in the economy and technology along with the strong competition worldwide has changed the way that we perceive the world and, consequently our life style. Working hours are becoming longer and technological changes taking place every day demand high levels of adaptability and flexibility. Jobs are no longer for life and the modern family has been transformed from a one to a two-earner structure, creating a situation where individuals are expected to balance work and home commitments. The question which arises at this point is: who shall survive this process? One could answer it is the 'fittest' employee who has the ability to adjust adequately to these rapid changes and can remain undistracted from external factors. Furthermore such a person manages to avoid the experience or to cope with the negative effects of stress.

Organizational health psychology has its share in contributing to the understanding of healthy behaviours within working environments and identifying parameters that can be the cause of health problems. For example, stress in the workplace can contribute to individual and organizational skill effectiveness but it is also an aspect which, in most cases, leads to undesirable effects. In general, organizational stress is by definition an unpleasant state of being that affects employees' creativity and work pleasure, while its results on physical and psychological well-being are evident. The undesirable effects of job-related stress occur when this acts as a barrier to employees' adjustment to the work setting. In addition to the impact of occupational stress on the individual's well-being, the consequences for organizations are particularly important: poor individual functioning, compensation claims, accidents, absenteeism, medical expenses and the reduction of workplace satisfaction and productivity. These are some of the most important factors which relate to workplace stress and affect the workers' psychosomatic status as well as the organizations in terms of productivity and effectiveness.

Although organizational stress constitutes only one of the major topics in the field of organizational health psychology, the need to raise awareness of this problem is emphasized worldwide with the aim of adopting direct measures to protect employees' hygiene and safety and advance their mental health cost-effectively for organizations. With the pressures of the competitive world market on working standards, workers are subjected to heavy workloads and pressing schedules. The recent redesigning of the traditional work structure is the cause of an increase in work rates, a boost in productivity, 'downsizing', underpromotion and job insecurity. Nevertheless individuals are expected to respond to these demanding and ever changing conditions in a positive and creative way.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his acclaimed work *Politics*, states that work is inevitable and people need to find the appropriate means to ease their heavy workload. Organizational health psychology can make a significant contribution in this direction by setting out the conditions for creative and 'healthy' jobs. (It is worth noticing that, in the Greek language the words 'job' and 'slavery' are identical apart from the intonation,

perhaps reminding us that without the right conditions there is a high risk that these two concepts will be misconstrued.) In our day, it has been demonstrated that the modern employee needs to determine a reasonable hierarchy of his or her life's values. According to Emmanuel Kant, individuals themselves are the purpose, not the means, and they are the reference point of other means and values. Accordingly, a job should be the means of serving people's needs and developing the values which will determine their principles and ethos. What needs to be achieved now is a solid theoretical framework for future research and systematic approaches towards practical actions and interventions applied to working environments.

Following this direction, this volume is an edited collection of theoretical and empirical papers, across 42 chapters which fall into six parts, written by distinguished academics working in Europe, the USA and Australia. Even though the majority of the contributions refer to stress-related issues (current theories of stress, stress management, stress in specific occupational groups, the relation of stress to well-being), the reader can also find leading-edge topics on the area of organizational health psychology such as professional burnout, workaholism and emotional intelligence. With a strong international framework (72 academics and professionals from over 50 different institutions) this volume is aimed mainly at an academic and postgraduate student readership from psychology and medicine, and is of value to researchers interested in the main study areas of organizational health psychology.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all contributors to this volume who very eagerly agreed to participate in this project and to cooperate during the period of its preparation.

*Alexander-Stamatios G. Antoniou*  
*Cary L. Cooper*

