



INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS  
IN IRELAND



# **Minding What Matters: Coping with COVID-19 Culture while Working from Home**

with Patricia Murray, Senior Psychologist, Health & Safety Authority

Morning and Evening Briefings Series: Kindly sponsored by Mazars



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# Webinar Outline

- Context: Covid -19 and its psychological consequences
- **Current environment:**
  1. How this altered reality alters our behaviours
  2. How new behavioural patterns influence our thinking, impact on new behaviours and existing functions
  3. What can we do to reduce negative behavioural patterns and stress reactions
  4. How can we practice new skills and solutions for resilience

# Covid Context: May 2020

- **Mandated containment of 4 billion people due to life threatening virus**
- Mandated – No choice/'ordered to'/must obey: Power/agency stripped
- Containment – reduce my scope/space/reach: remove my daily choices
- 4 billion people – global, 'way too big' to consider, reduces our attachment to 'meaning'; size matters
- Life threatening – existential, danger/pain/integral: fear of death and pain
- Virus – medical, deadly spread, superstition: unknown contagion

# Psychological Effects/altered behaviours

- Increased frustrations – From the macro to the micro
- Increased work-related fear – as above
  - Reduced range – world smaller and horizons limited
  - Reduced clarity – cannot plan or create future certainty
- Increased direct anxiety – everyday worry re health/family/capacity/finance/wellbeing/mood
- Increased sensitivity – easily offended/hurt/feeling left out/ignored/redundant

# Individual effects

- Some - > Heightened fight / flight – arousal
- Others - > Heightened surrender/despair – depression
- Many -> Chaotic unexplainable and tiring mix of the two: Monday to Friday no longer has the predictable, texture and flow of the week that was.
  - Disturbed psychic and social system
  - Calibration confusion
- We behave as a reflection of how we feel; we might not see it but others do

# Behavioural change phases

- There are many curves on-going now.....
- Curve of tolerance for lock down: week1 – week 8
- Behaviours associated with novel circumstances
- \* we stayed in – excited, afraid, watchful, expectant, irritated, angry, expert. ....
- \* we washed hands – all the time, at pivot points, along regular lines/times.....
- Behaviour is just **the act** –supported by knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, motivations- either promote or extinguish the act.
- Environment influences this behavior multi-directionally. Acts are unstable, highly volatile, socially mediated, coercible potentials.

# Social psychology research

- Our behaviour follows AFTER activities – often without our knowledge
- Doing a thing releases endorphins .....or stress hormones
- Mood is influenced by:
  - minor environmental visual details -colour/light
  - Minor aural detail -bird song, bin lorry, music
  - Triggered by words - positive skewed or negative skewed – with associations
  - Comfort - seating, aired, noise, temperature
- Social attachment bypasses intellect: we need to feel ‘part of’ even if we don’t know it or like it
- We learn by stretching...novel doing.....and repeating doing

# Promoting behavioural change *for work*

- To reduce fear and isolation
- To sustain performance
- To build long term resilience
  
- Mechanism:; Individual.....team.....organisation levels; leadership
- Identify and prioritise current goals
  - Consult, listen, discuss,
  - Time frame
  - Road map
  - Feedback
  - Reinforce
  - Monitor and support



# Re-frame work within the week

- Be strategic: what to do now: reflect, plan, execute, control
- Develop a system for the work week:
- Encourage employees to do same for weekends – day time and evenings – pleasures and soothers
- Friday late afternoon until Sunday late evening.
- Reflect on your own soothing escapes, quick fix motivators, 'holding place' activities and celebrations. Acknowledge that there will be dips.
- Leave a few spaces/gaps

# Building Resilience

- Resilience – > ‘doing’
- Identify **your** preferred activities - pleasures
- THEN I D your ‘beneficial’ activities – avoided... but **you feel good** AFTER doing them
- Calendar : schedule Monday - Friday
- Day VS Eve
- Weekends: Fri-Sun
- Active 20 min activities mental and physical
- Passive – as above
- Leave gaps on Sat and Sunday – innovate
- Prep for work week Sun evening

# Irritated people irritate people

- Look after your self - you will be easier on others
- Spread good habits - focus conversation on pleasant things
- How you imagine matters: remembering happier times is good.
- Reflect on them, don't ruminate - old photos a proxy for better mood.
- Be aware - your own increased sensitivity to hurt and irritation
- Allow others the same sensitivity toward you
- Avoid 'sorting out' a long standing pressing issue just coming to the fore now – park it, gently
- When in doubt, saying nothing – find something soothing to do, return gently

# Good principles for this time

- Reciprocity – return what is done for you
- Consistency – be reliable when old reliables are gone
- Social attachment – find ways to keep in touch with a few people
- Authority – there is no real authority here so pick your authority voices carefully; limit them
- Liking - find things to like and talk about that
- Control – exercise your own control over what you can – your time

# Personality-situational factors

- **Hurrying** towards getting things done
- Too many things **juggling** at once
- Not enough **knowledge/skill** of job
- Highly social/unsocial ->**avoidant** behaviour
- Low **self efficacy**, over-dependency ->waiting for sanction
- Low mood ->inattention -> careless, half done, 'just in time'!
- Low **rule-following**/very high rule following -> random/chaotic/rigid

# All Stress has negative behavioural consequences

- **Immediate effects;**
  - lack of concentration->increased errors
  - Memory lapse -/detail gone
  - Decreased emotional intelligence /ease of relating -> increased conflict -> (maybe increased complaints)
  - **Bypassing procedures -> Inc. risk taking, as above**
- **Slowly unfolding, long term effects**
  - Dissociation (from individuals/systems/groups)
  - Anger outbursts without follow-up learning
  - Time- saving, bad habit- forming (bypassing rules)
- **See WORKPOSITIVE.ie – a free HSA/SCA stress audit tool, on-line.**



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