

# **The Way We Work and Its Impact on Our Health**

## **- Introduction and Overview**

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# **Southern California Conferences on Work Organization and Healthy Work**

- Workplace Psychosocial Factors in Occupational Health – November 2002
  - Health professional training
- **The Way We Work and Its Impact on Our Health – April 2004**
  - **Stakeholder forum**
- The 4<sup>th</sup> International Congress on the Work Environment and Cardiovascular Disease (ICOH) – March 2005
  - International research conference

# Milestones in Organizing Forum

- Broad statewide participation of academic and public health professional in planning committee
- Stakeholder interviews and focus groups
- Sponsorship – financial and otherwise
  - Northern COEH, UCLA COEH, UC Irvine COEH
  - Northern California ERC, Southern California ERC
  - NIOSH
- Development of white paper as resource document
- Outreach and notification about forum
- Meetings, meetings, work, more work, meetings

# Forum Objectives

- Learn about the changing way we work
- Hear recent scientific evidence linking how the way we work impacts on our health
- Hear from stakeholders with multiple perspectives about the impact of work organization on health
- Hear about concrete examples of solutions
- Meet with other participants to discuss these issues and begin a dialogue about strategies to encourage healthy and productive workplaces

# Forum Topics

- Changing nature of work
- Work organization (work environment)
  - What does work organization mean?
  - How do factors related to work organization affect health and productivity?
  - Job stressors and effects of psychosocial factors
- Stakeholder views about work organization and healthy work – current status and obstacles
- Identifying strategies and approaches to encourage healthy work environments

# Forum Structure

- Thursday evening – overview on nature of work and potential impact on health and productivity
  - Keynote, panel presentation, open floor discussion
- Friday morning – stakeholder perspectives on work organization and health
  - Current status and obstacles to healthy work
  - Keynote, summary of stakeholder views, panel presentation, facilitated discussion
- Friday afternoon – identify strategies and solutions
  - Panel with case studies, breakout sessions, group reports on suggested strategies

# Organization of Work

# Work Organization

- Refers to the work process and organizational practices that influence job design
  - management style, production methods, and human resource policies
- Also includes external factors, such as the legal and economic environment and technological factors, that encourage or enable new organizational practices

# Work Organization

## External Context

*Economic, legal, political, technological, and demographic forces*

- Economic developments (e.g., globalization)
- Regulatory, trade, and economic policies (e.g., deregulation)
- Technological innovations
- Changing worker demographics and labor supply



## Organizational Context

*Management structures, supervisory practices, production methods, and human resource policies*

- Organizational restructuring (e.g., downsizing)
- New quality and process management initiatives (e.g., lean production, just-in-time)
- Alternative employment arrangements (e.g., contingent labor)
- Work/life/family programs and flexible work arrangements
- Changes in benefits and compensation systems

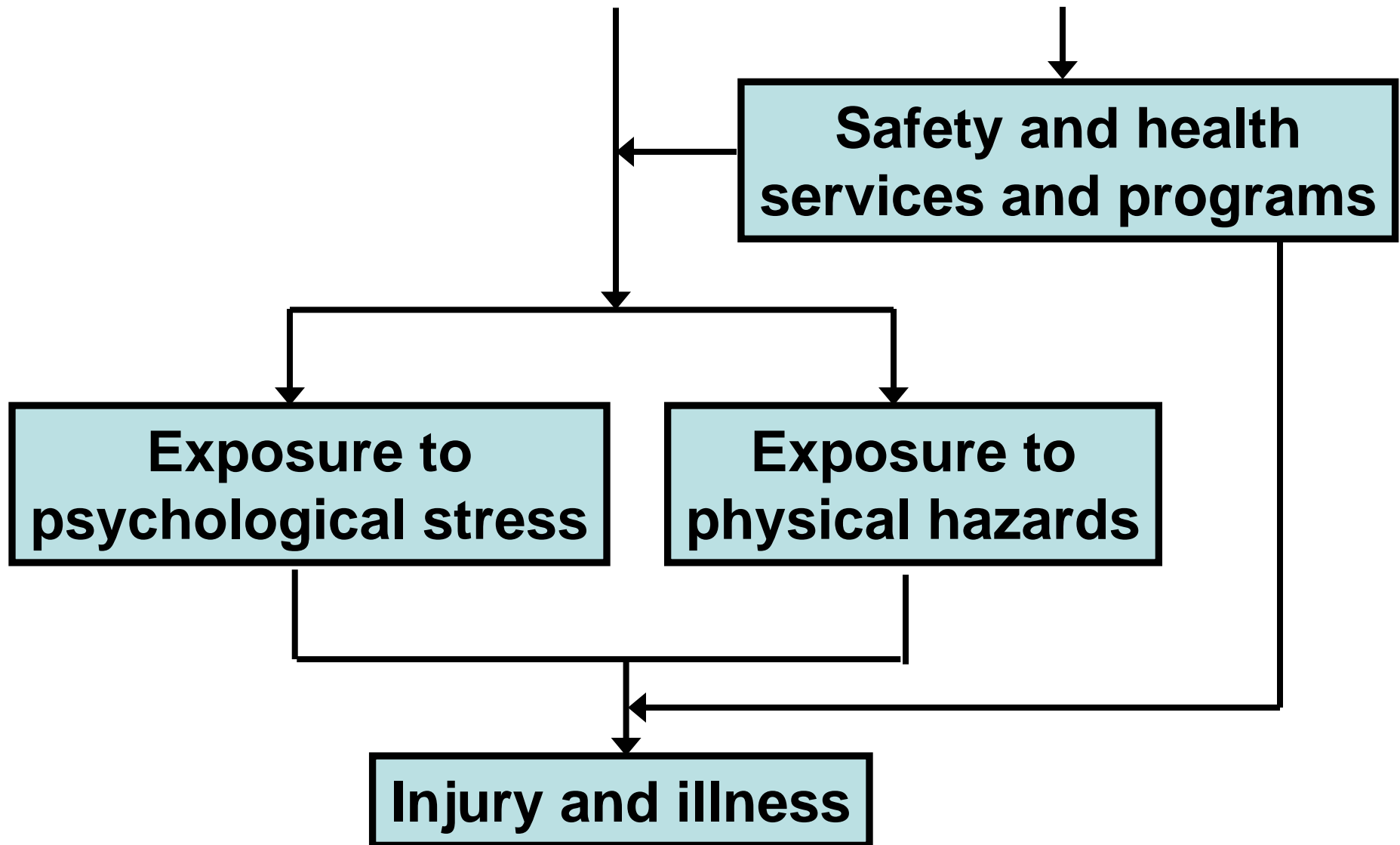


## Work Context

*Job characteristics*

- Task attributes: temporal aspects, complexity, autonomy, psychological demands
- Social-relational aspects of work
- Career development

# Organization of work can influence



# Changes in the Organization of Work over the Past 200 Years

- Craftwork replaced by industrial processes
- Skilled workers replaced by lower-skilled labor in machine-based production
- Emphasis on narrow performance and efficiency using techniques of assembly line at expense of broader worker involvement in work process
- White collar work has been shaped by principles of the assembly line

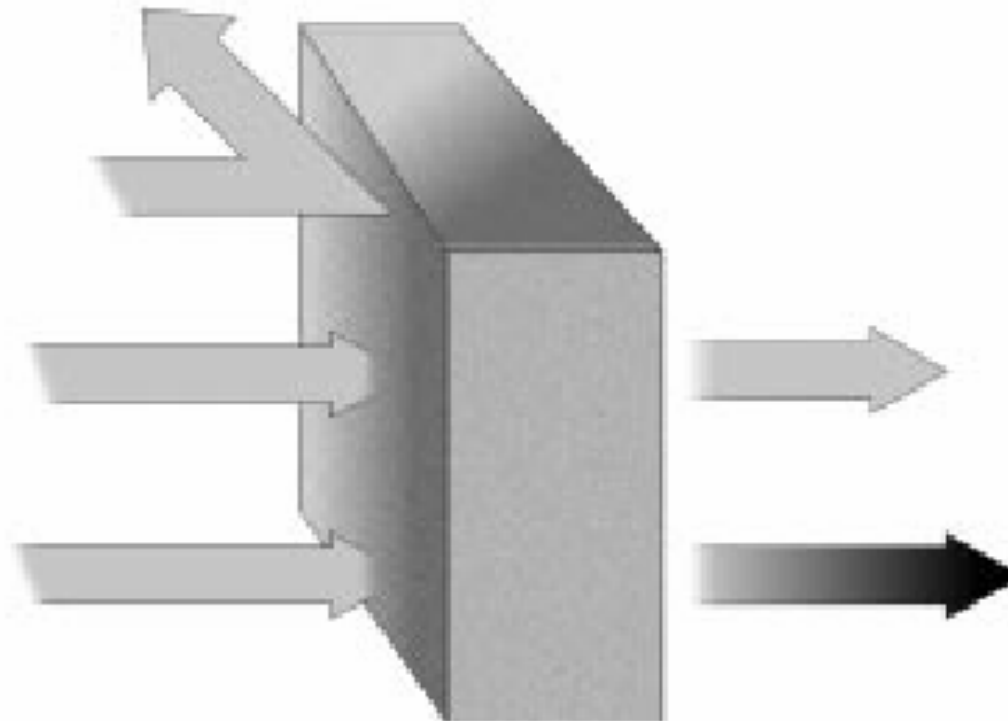
# Current Trends in Working Conditions

- Tele-working and increased use of information and communication technology
- Downsizing, outsourcing, subcontracting and globalization, with associated changes in employment patterns
- Increasing proportion of the population working in the service sector
- Longer work weeks
  - In the United States, average weekly work hours increased by 3.5 to 47.1 hours from 1977 to 1997.

# **Work-Related Psychosocial Factors**

**Stressful  
Job  
Conditions**

(Stressors)



**Individual and  
Situational Factors**

**Risk of  
Injury  
and  
Illness**

# Components of the Stress Process

- **Stressors**

- **Time Demands, Work Schedule and Pace** - task demands, overtime, shiftwork, machine pacing, piecework
- **Psychosocial Task Structure** - lack of control, skill underutilization, human-machine interface
- **Physical Conditions** - unpleasant, threat of physical or toxic hazard, ergonomic hazards
- **Organization** - role ambiguity, role conflict, competition and rivalry
- **Extra-Organizational** - community, job insecurity, career development, global economic
- **Non-Work Sources** - personal, family, community

# Outcomes of the Stress Process

- **Physiological**

- Short-term - catecholamines, cortisol, blood pressure increases
- Long-term - hypertension, heart disease, ulcers, asthma

- **Psychological (Cognitive and Affective)**

- Short-term - anxiety, dissatisfaction
- Long-term - depression, burnout, mental disorders

- **Behavioral**

- Short-term - job (absenteeism, productivity and participation), community (decreased friendships and participation), personal (alcohol, drugs, smoking)
- Long-term - "learned helplessness"

# Modifiers of Stress Process

- **Individual** - behavioral style and personal resources
- **Social Support** - emotional, value or self-esteem, and informational

# Core Message

- The way we work can affect our health and productivity above and beyond any effects of exposures to biological, chemical, and physical hazards
- Trends in the nature of work are increasing risk
- Growing evidence suggests that positive work environments promote health and productivity; it is possible to make work healthier
- Dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders are essential for us all to promote healthy work