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CHES: CHIEF EXECUTIVE STRESS SURVIVAL

A STUDY OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

IN

NEW ZEALAND TOP MANAGEMENT

BY

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

The work presented here was entirely completed by the author, no part of it has been submitted in support of an application of another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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ABSTRACT

This study develops and uses a CHES (Chief Executive Stress Survival) model developed from the occupational stress literature to predict variations in the psychological and physical stress experience and health risk of Chief Executives of New Zealand organisations. The model proposes that stress is a sequential process with identifiable phases and that variations are mainly due to the frequency of environmental experiences and stressor factors which are both "chronic" and "episodic", "at work" and "outside work". The model also assumes, however, that the impact of the environmental variables and stressor factors are moderated by individual personality differences, coping mechanisms and stress management practices. The model was tested on a sample of 107 male Chief Executive Officers and General Managers. It was found that the majority of the sample (80%) were relatively stress resistant and healthy. Stepwise multiple regression was used to test the model, and some evidence derived suggests that the frequency of environmental problems does predict various stress symptoms and that environmental stressors ultimately predict health risk profiles. Individual differences are shown as being largely independent variables predicting stress, rather than being moderating variables as suggested by the model. Coping and stress management variables are also shown to play a significant moderating role in the stress - outcome relationship. Some evidence derived suggests that there may be individual manager profiles, provisionally labelled "stress immune" vs "vulnerable" and "ill - health preventers" vs "non-preventers". Due to the depth of the cross-sectional data obtained on this rarely studied management level, some comparisons with published information on other researched groups are explored. A number of limitations of the study are noted. The practical implications for this senior management group of the findings of this study are also examined.

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