Employment, Working Conditions and Stress:
From Research to Practice

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Human Performance Management Group

21st September, 2012

EFPA Expert Conference

Psychology for Health

EFPA 2012
Brussels
Belgium

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Physical activity also important as an off-job recovery strategy…

Overview

- ◆ What is Work and Organizational Psychology?

- ◆ Why is 'work' important to look at?

- ◆ Changes in working conditions over time

- ◆ Job stress theories in W/O Psychology

- ◆ From research to practice

- ◆ Occupational stress management interventions

- ◆ Conclusions

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What is W/O Psychology?

- Work and Organizational (W/O) Psychology:

    - investigates determinants of human behavior in work situations

    - applies psychological principles, theory, and research to the work setting

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- Work and Organizational psychologists:
  - facilitate responses to issues and problems involving people at work by serving as advisors and catalysts
  - goal: 'healthy and sustainable work'

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Why is 'work' important to look at?

◆ Urgent need for increasing labour productivity

- Decreasing workforce

- Ageing population

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- Global competition and knowledge-based economy

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◆ **Urgent need for increasing labour productivity**

- Decreasing workforce

- Ageing population

- Global competition and knowledge-based economy

- Make new technology work through innovative work organization ('social innovation')

- Workplace innovation explains a larger part of innovation success than technological innovation

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- Employee health, well-being and performance are linked to psychosocial risk factors at work

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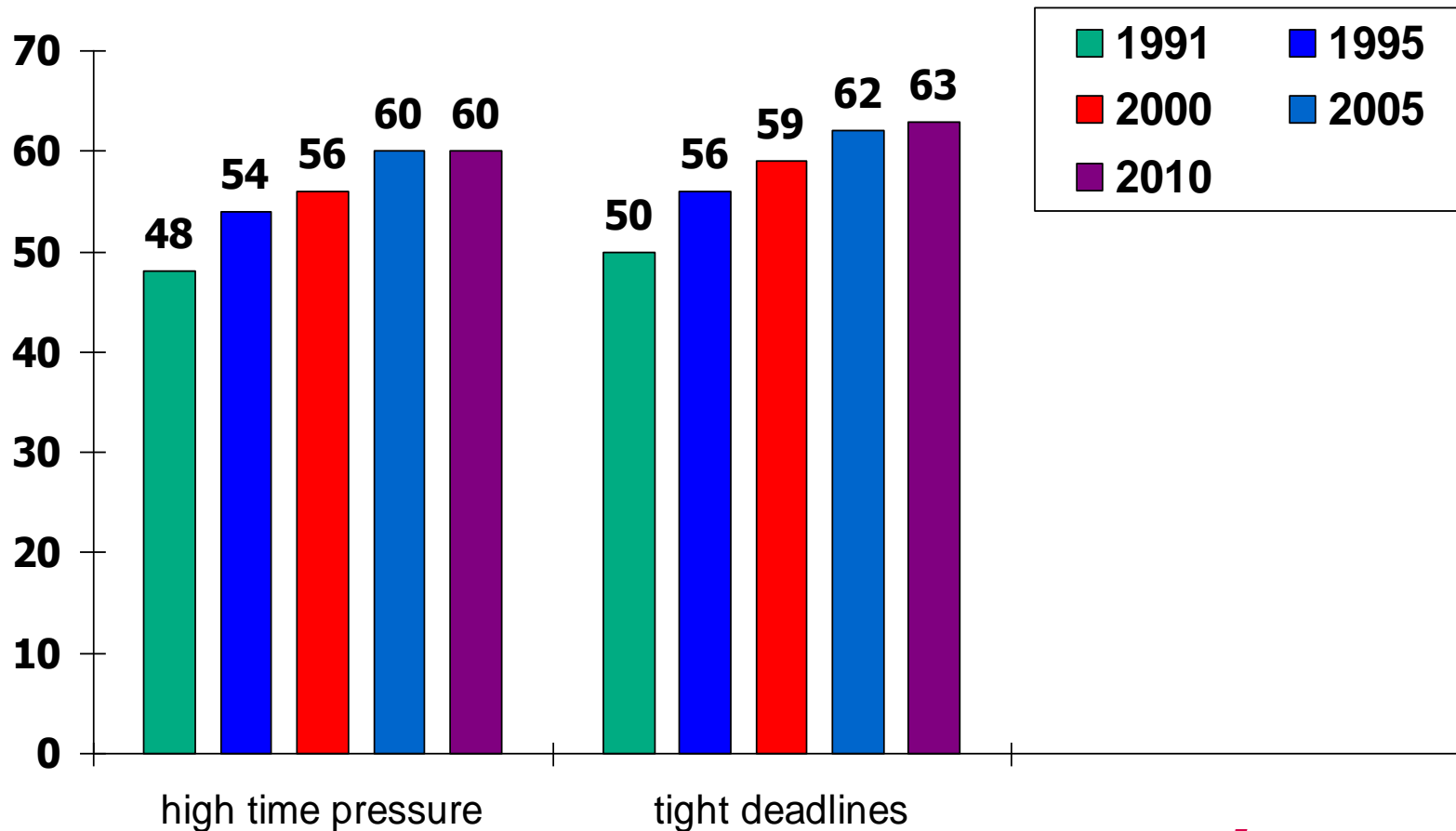
Changes over time in working conditions (EWCS, 2012)

◆ Key trends 1991-2010 (n=44,000):

- More temporary contracts and more job insecurity, particularly for manual workers
- Work intensity remains at a high level
- Pace of work particularly caused by clients ('emotion work')
- One fifth of workers have difficulties with work-home balance
- Level of job autonomy remains the same
- Social support from managers and colleagues increased, but merely for high-skilled workers
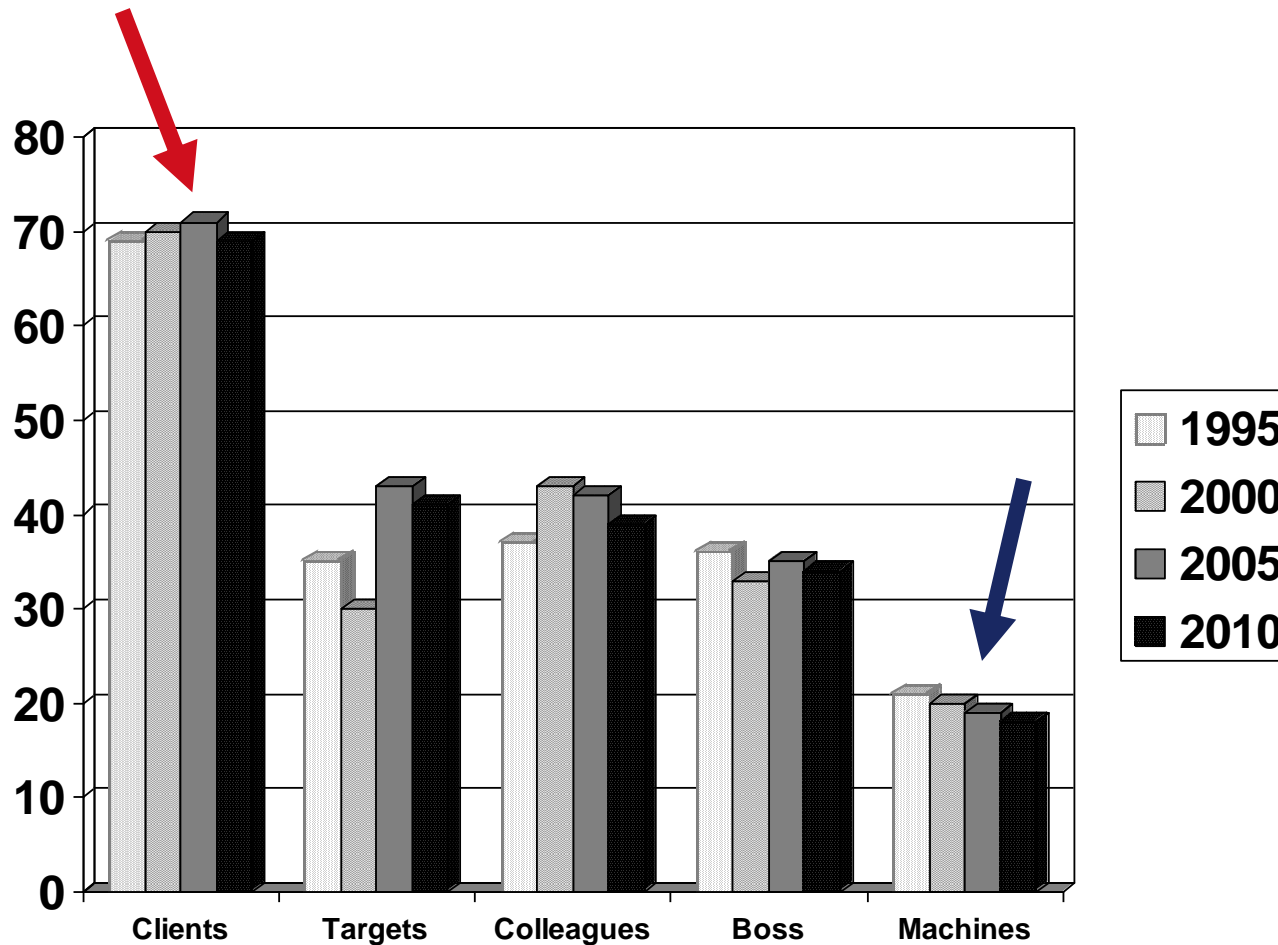- Fair salary decreased to some extent ('occupational rewards')

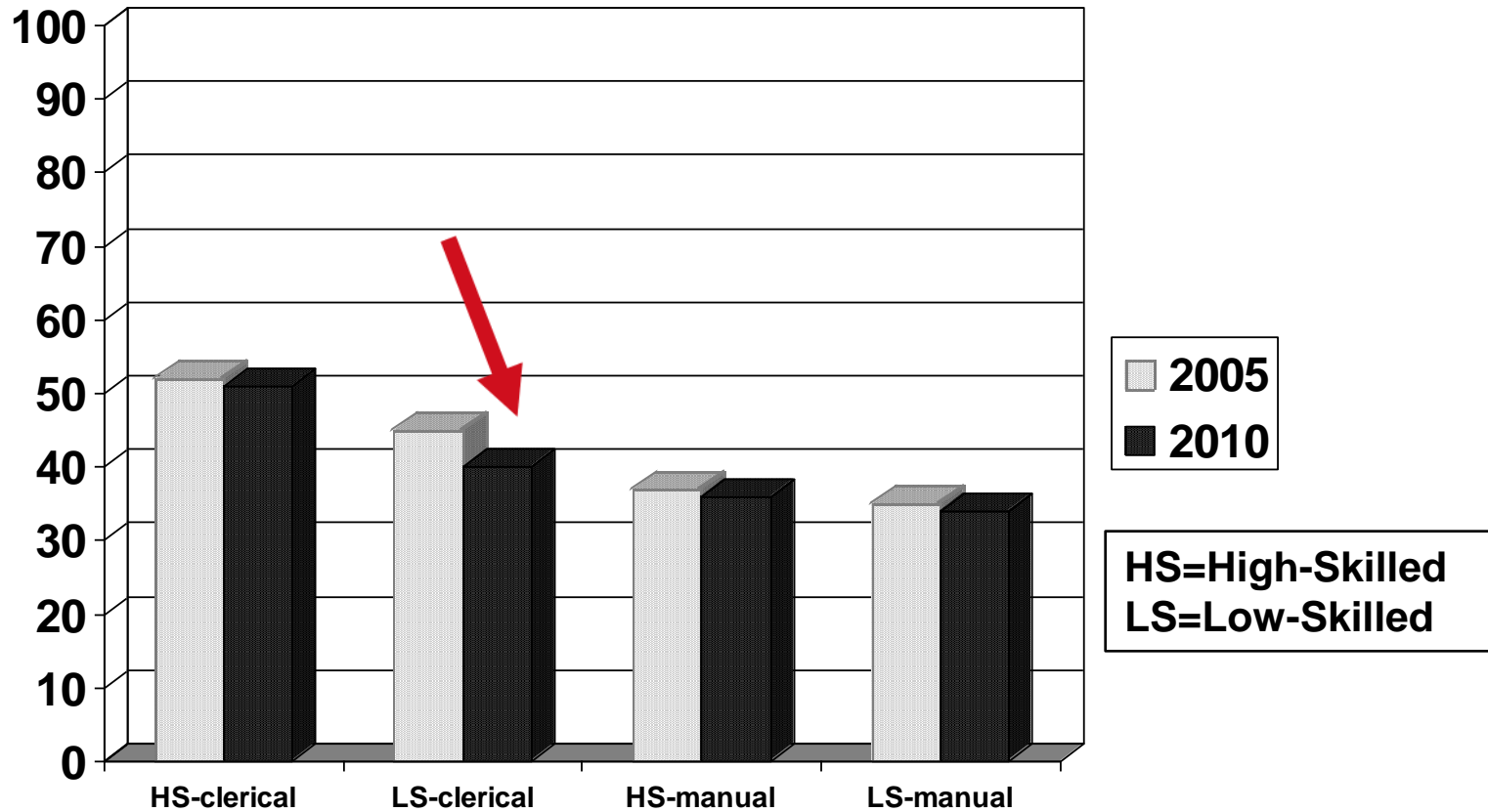# Perceived Job Insecurity by Occupation (EWCS, 2012)
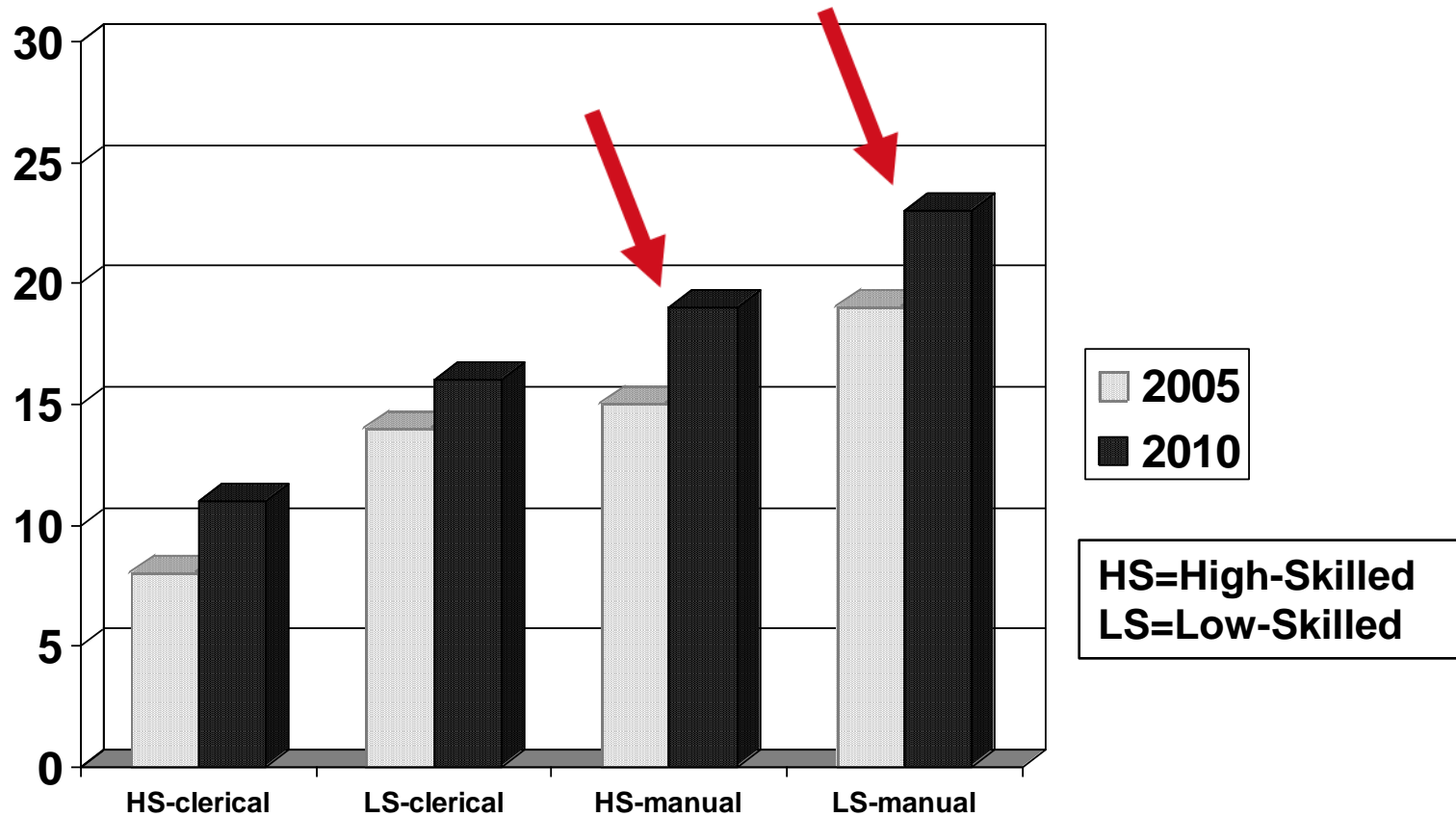
Work Intensity in European Union (EWCS, 2012)

Factors Dictating Pace of Work (EWCS, 2012)

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Perceived Occupational Rewards by Occupation (EWCS, 2012)

Legend: 2005, 2010

HS=High-Skilled
LS=Low-Skilled

Categories: HS-clerical, LS-clerical, HS-manual, LS-manual

◆ Theoretical frameworks in W/O Psychology have been advanced to explain job stress and health/well-being/performance relationships

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Development of Job Stress Models in W/O Psychology

- ◆ Theoretical frameworks in W/O Psychology have been advanced to explain job stress and health/well-being/performance relationships
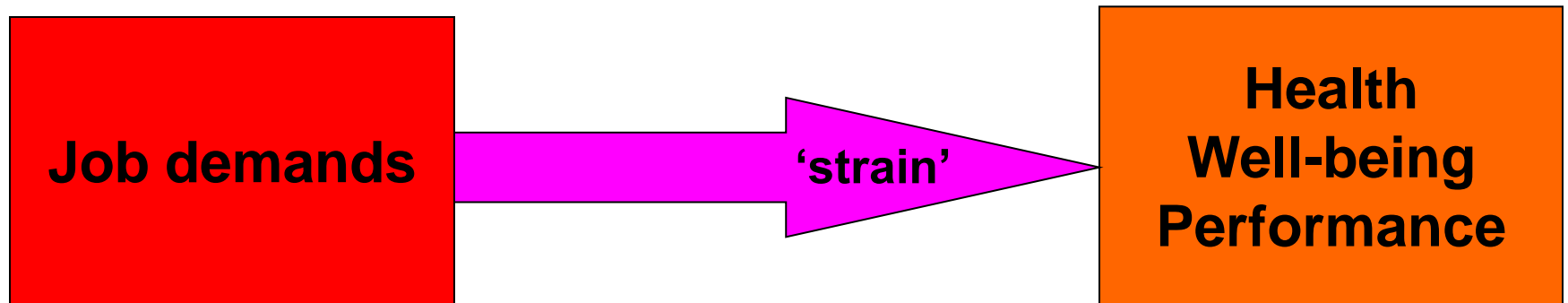
- ◆ Gold nuggets:
    - Job demands
    - Situational resources
        - Job resources
        - Occupational rewards
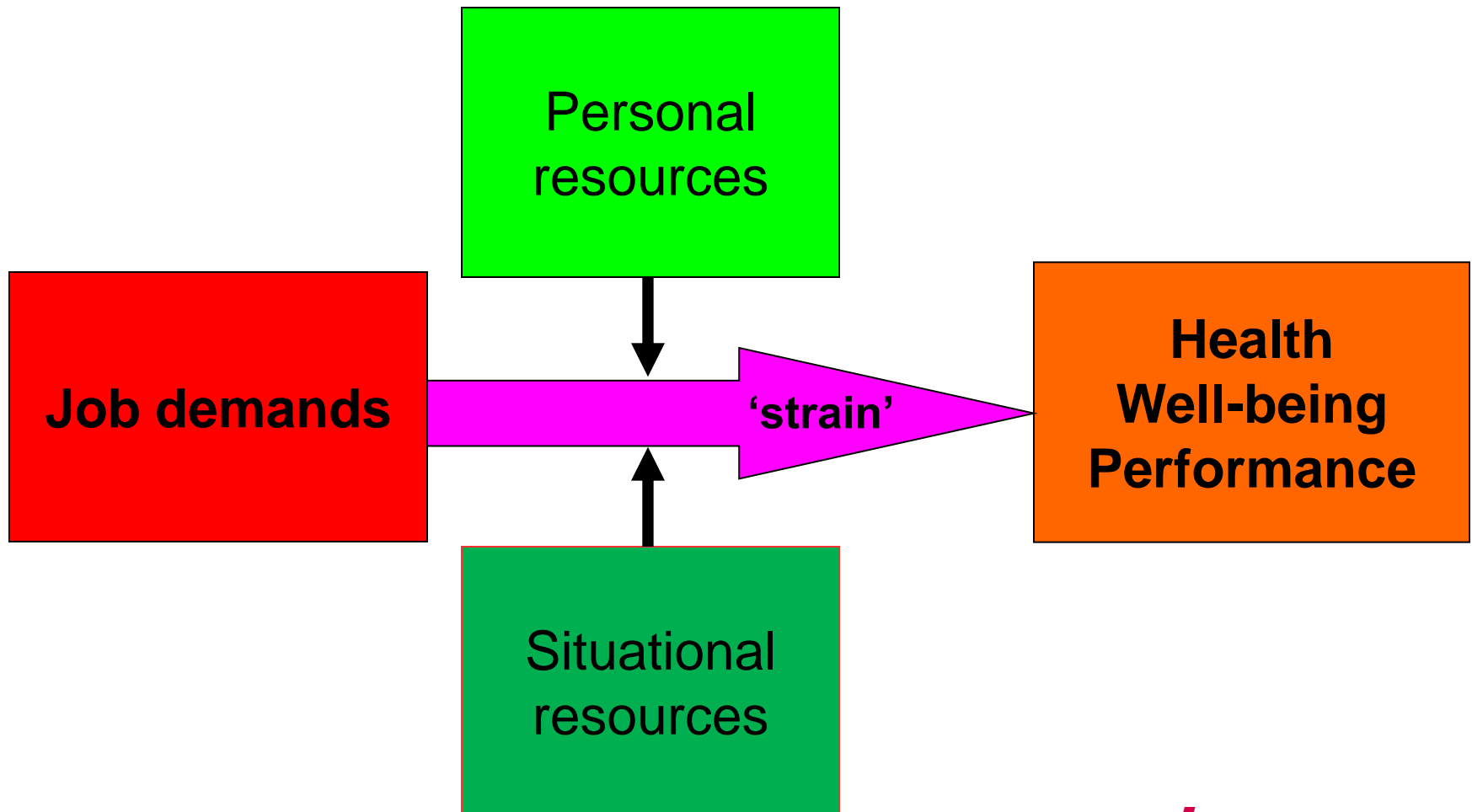   - Recovery at / after work
    - Personal resources

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Common job stress framework
(Le Blanc, De Jonge, & Schaufeli, 2008)

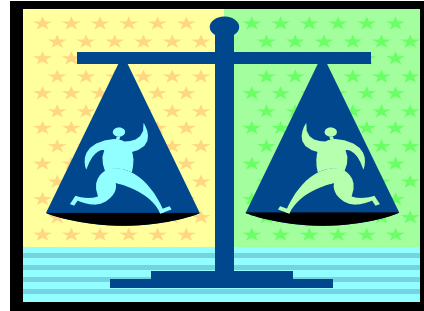# Common job stress framework
(Le Blanc, De Jonge, & Schaufeli, 2008)

Job stress due to imbalance

Job demands	⟷	Job control
	⟷	Skill opportunities
	⟷	Social support
Investments	⟷	Rewards
Effort	⟷	Recovery
W-H conflict	⟷	W-H support
Work load	⟷	Individual load potential

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Job stress due to imbalance
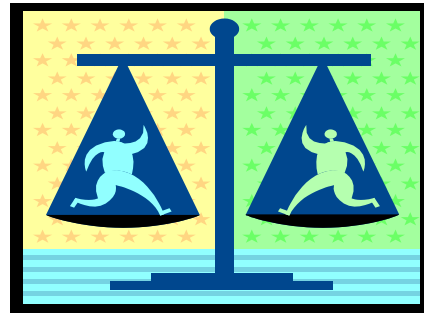
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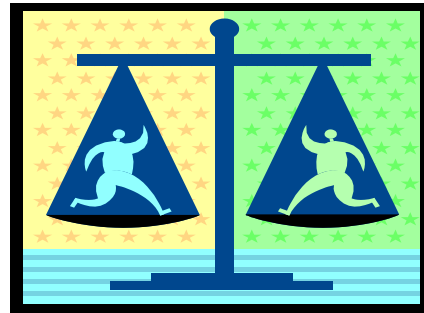
◆ Majority of research shows that <u>high</u> job demands accompanied with <u>low</u> situational resources will cause adverse health, poor well-being and low job performance
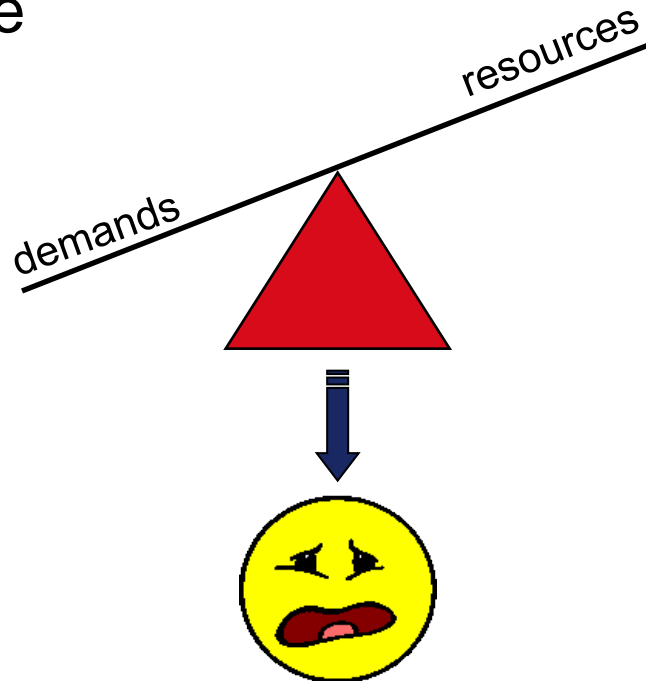
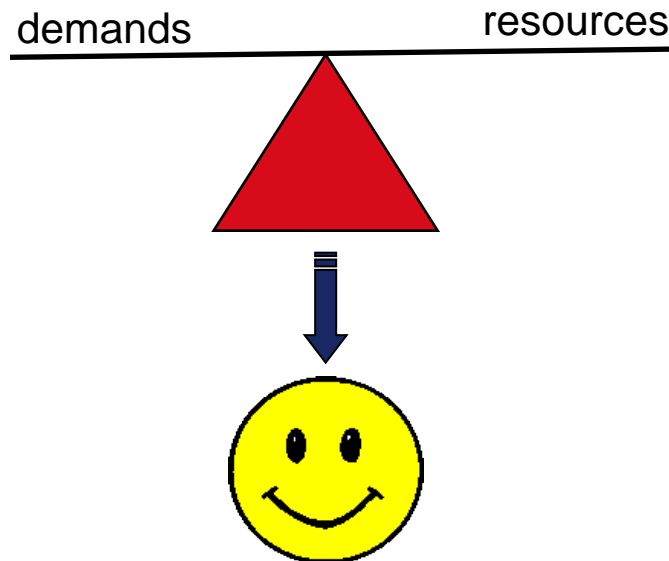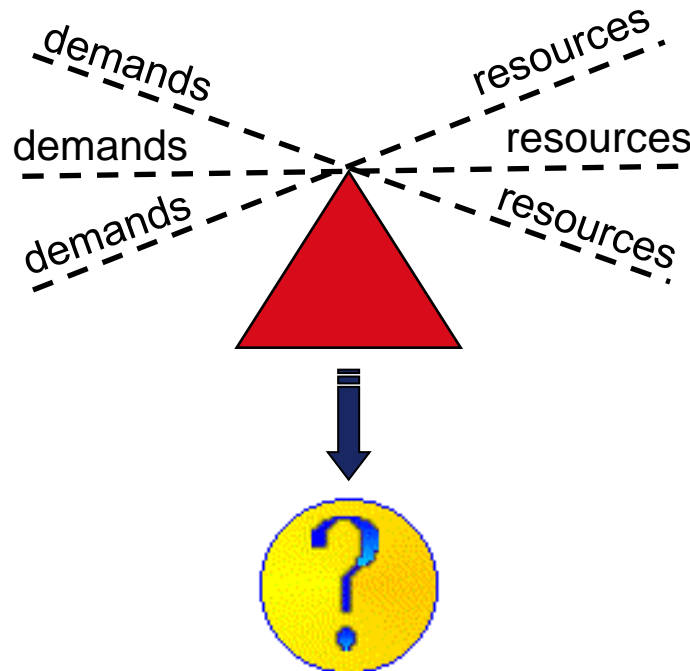◆ Research also shows that <u>high</u> job demands accompanied with <u>high</u> situational resources will lead to higher work motivation, creativity, active learning behavior, and job performance
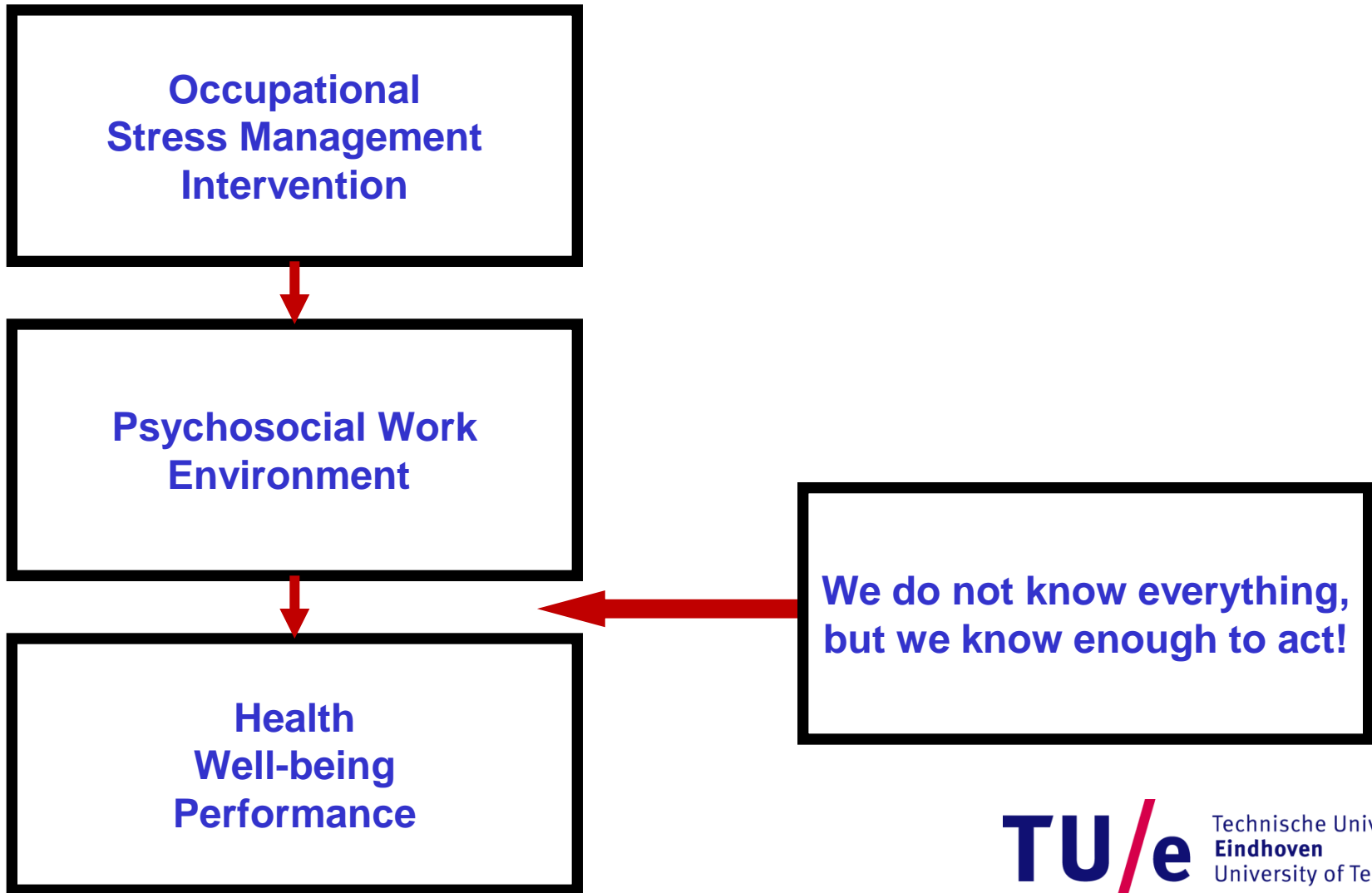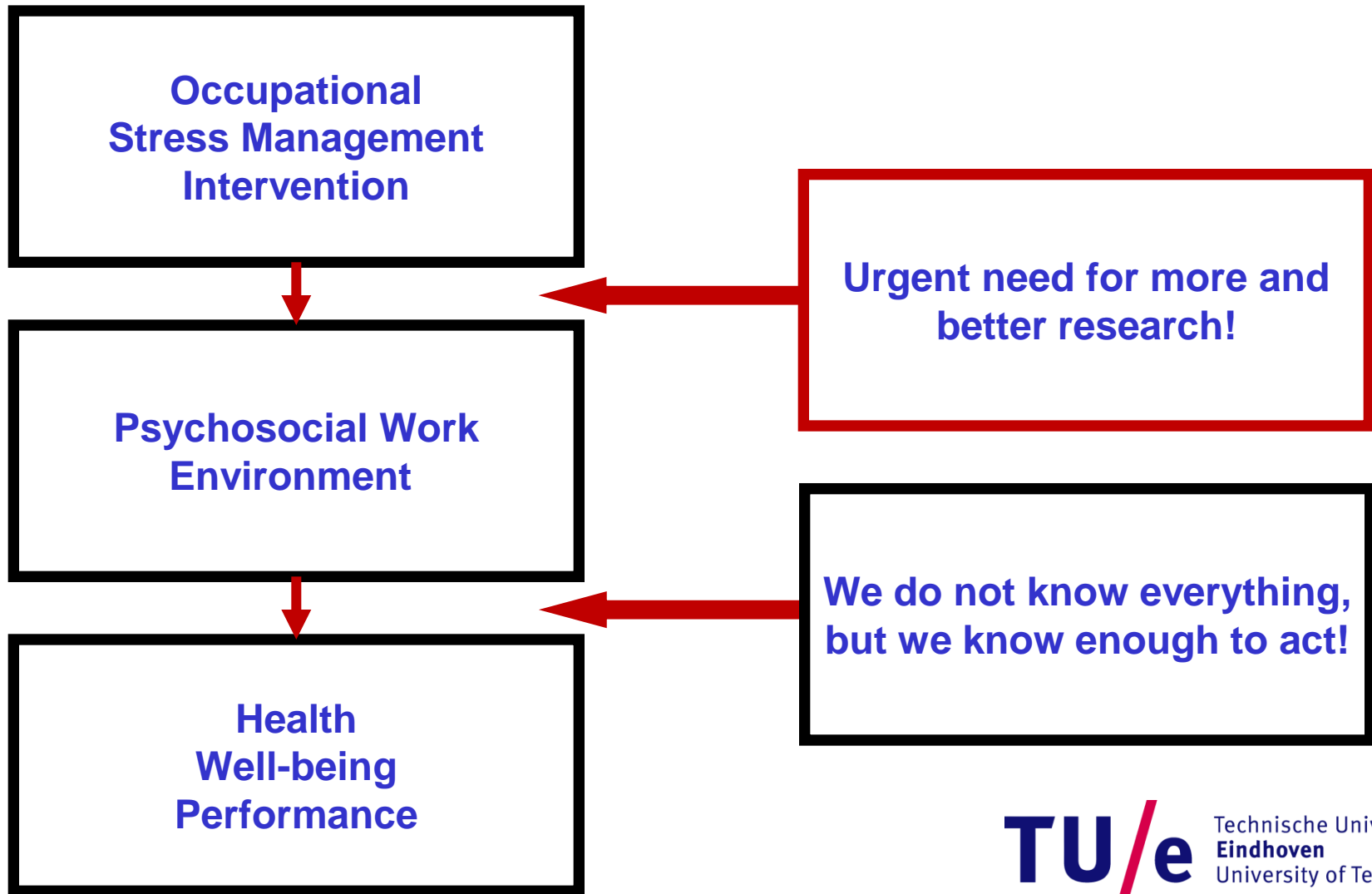
◆ Research on the buffering role of personal resources is still in its infancy and, hence, less conclusive

From research to practice…(2)

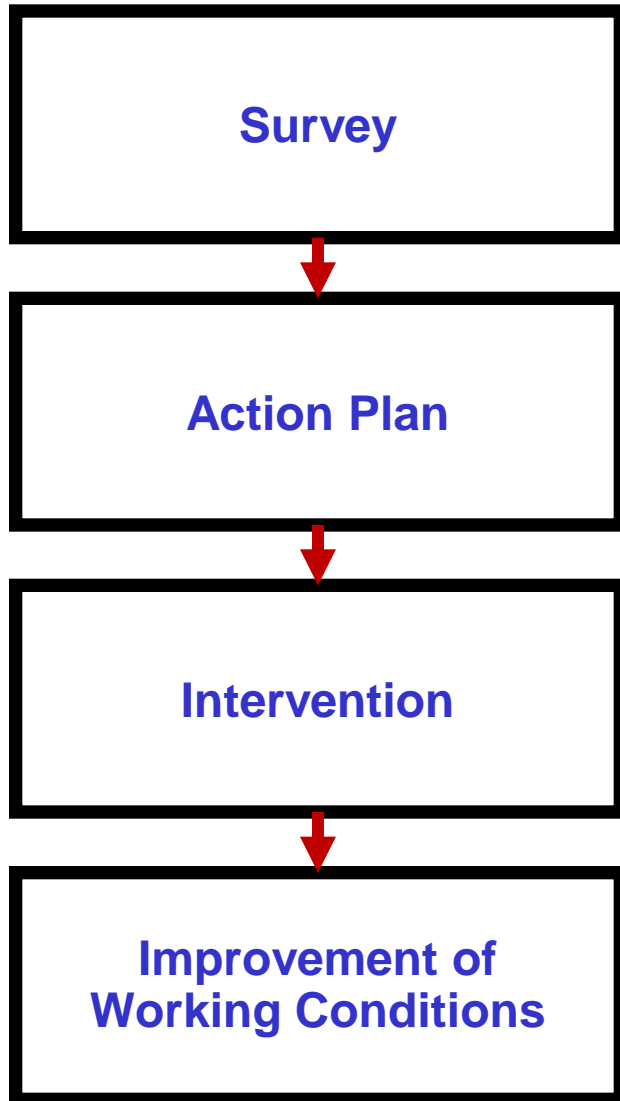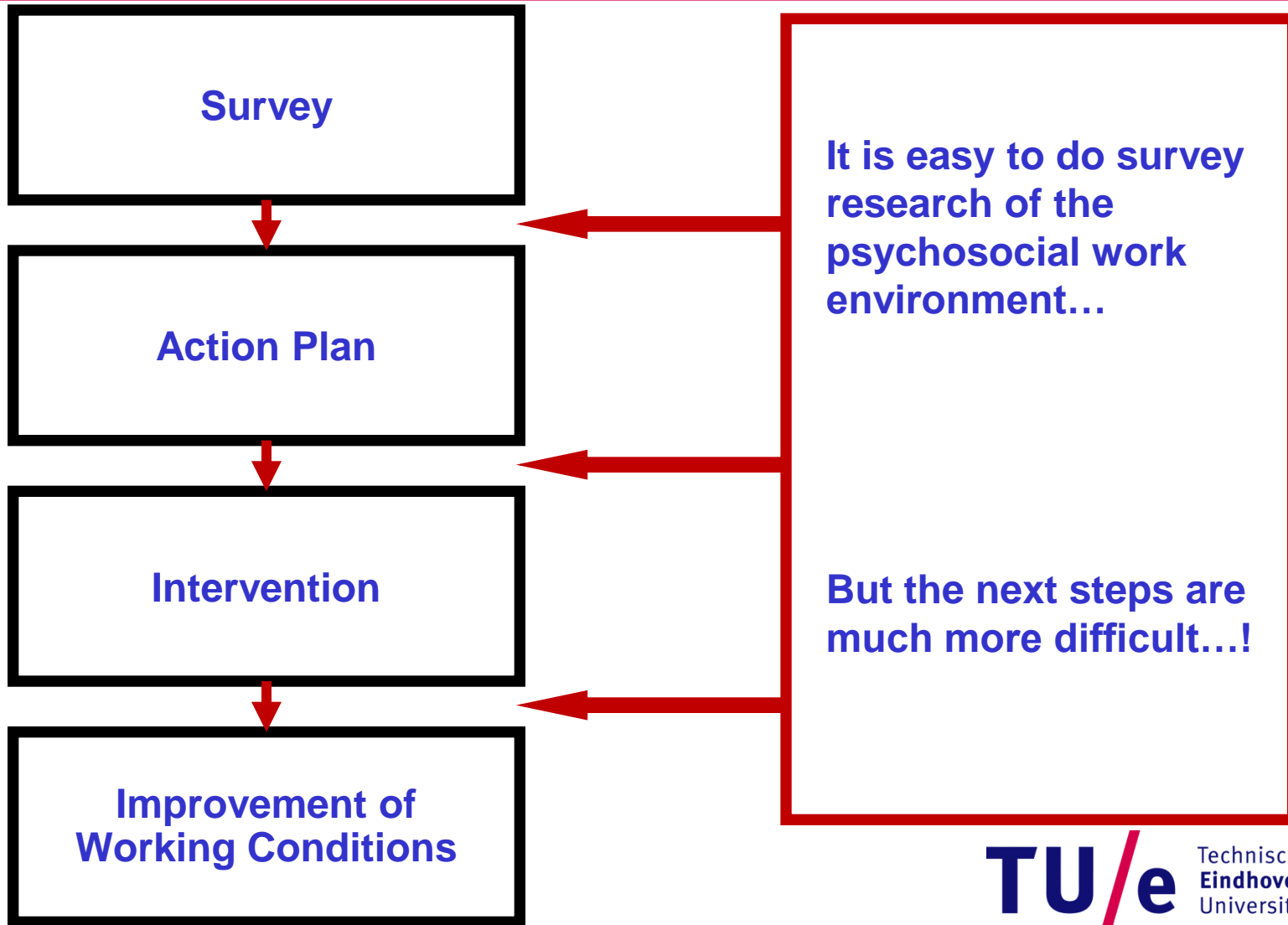```
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│   Survey   │   │   │
└──────────────────┘   │ It is easy to do survey │
         │   ◄── │ research of the   │
         ▼   │ psychosocial work   │
┌──────────────────┐   │ environment…   │
│   Action Plan   │   │   │
└──────────────────┘   ◄──│   │
         │   │   │
         ▼   │   │
┌──────────────────┐   │ But the next steps are │
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└──────────────────┘   ◄──│   │
         │   │   │
         ▼   └──────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────┐
│ Improvement of │
│ Working Conditions│
└──────────────────┘
```

**Survey**

**Action Plan**

**Intervention**

**Improvement of Working Conditions**

**It is easy to do survey research of the psychosocial work environment…**

**But the next steps are much more difficult…!**

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# General Framework for Reducing and Managing Job Stress
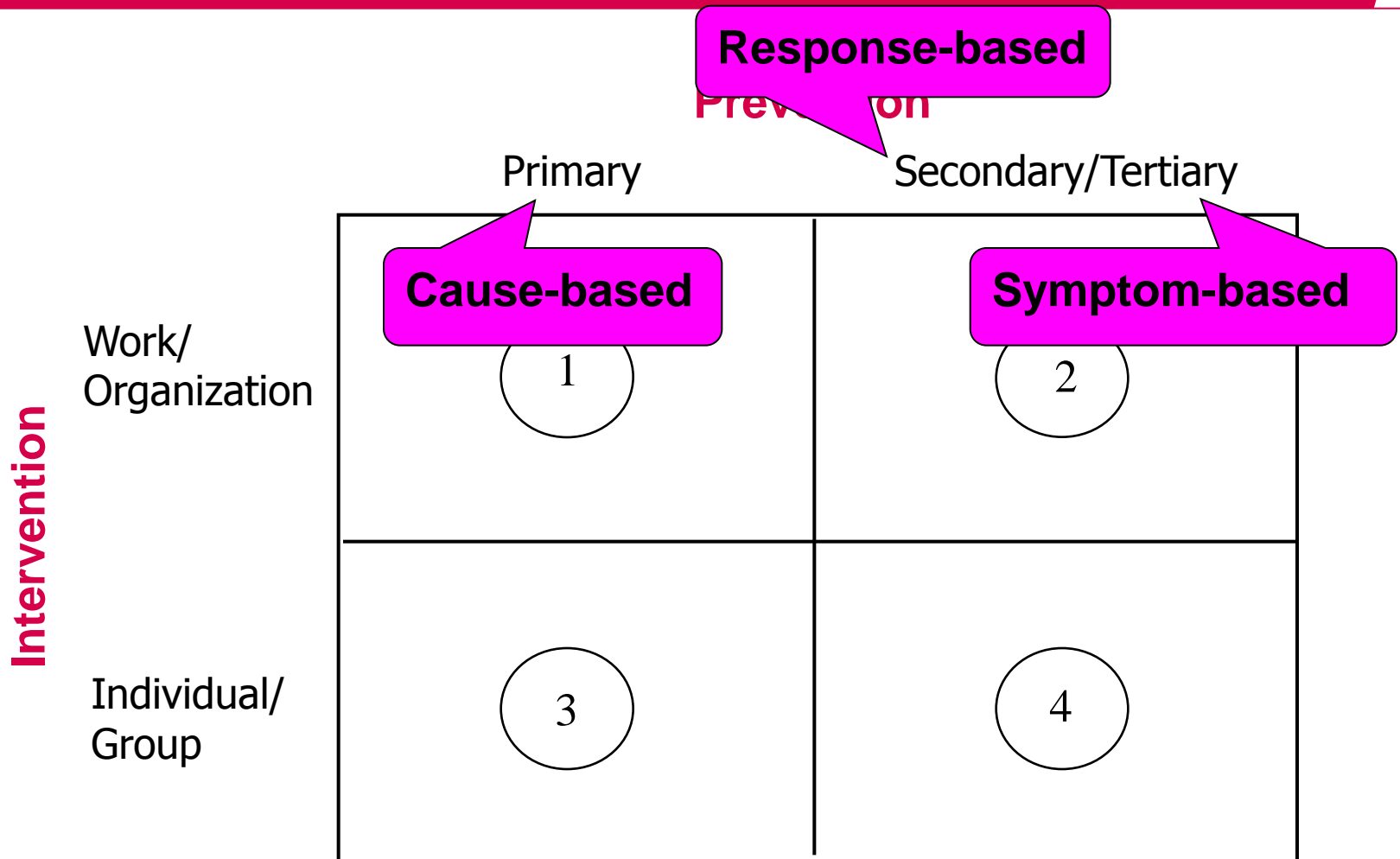
# Examples of prevention / intervention

◆ Primary prevention:

- Work: job (re-)design
- Individual: cognitive training

◆ Secundary prevention:

- Work: flexible work schedules for older employees
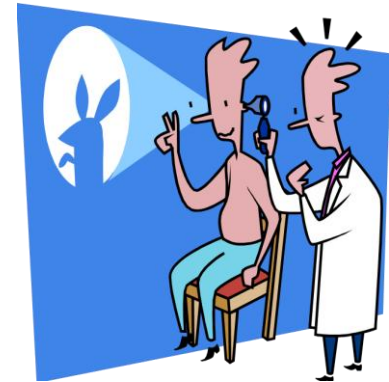- Individual: stress management training

◆ Tertiary prevention:

- Work: outplacement program
- Individual: disability management

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- ◆ Majority of interventions are individual and reactive

# Reducing and Managing Job Stress

**Prevention**

|  | Primary | Secondary/Tertiary |
|---|---|---|
| **Work/ Organization** | 1 | 2 |
| **Individual/ Group** | 3 | |

**Intervention**

# Review of occupational stress management interventions

- ◆ Majority of interventions are individual and reactive

- ◆ Though limited in numbers, organizational approaches seem to be more effective and have more significant en durable effects ('healthy work')
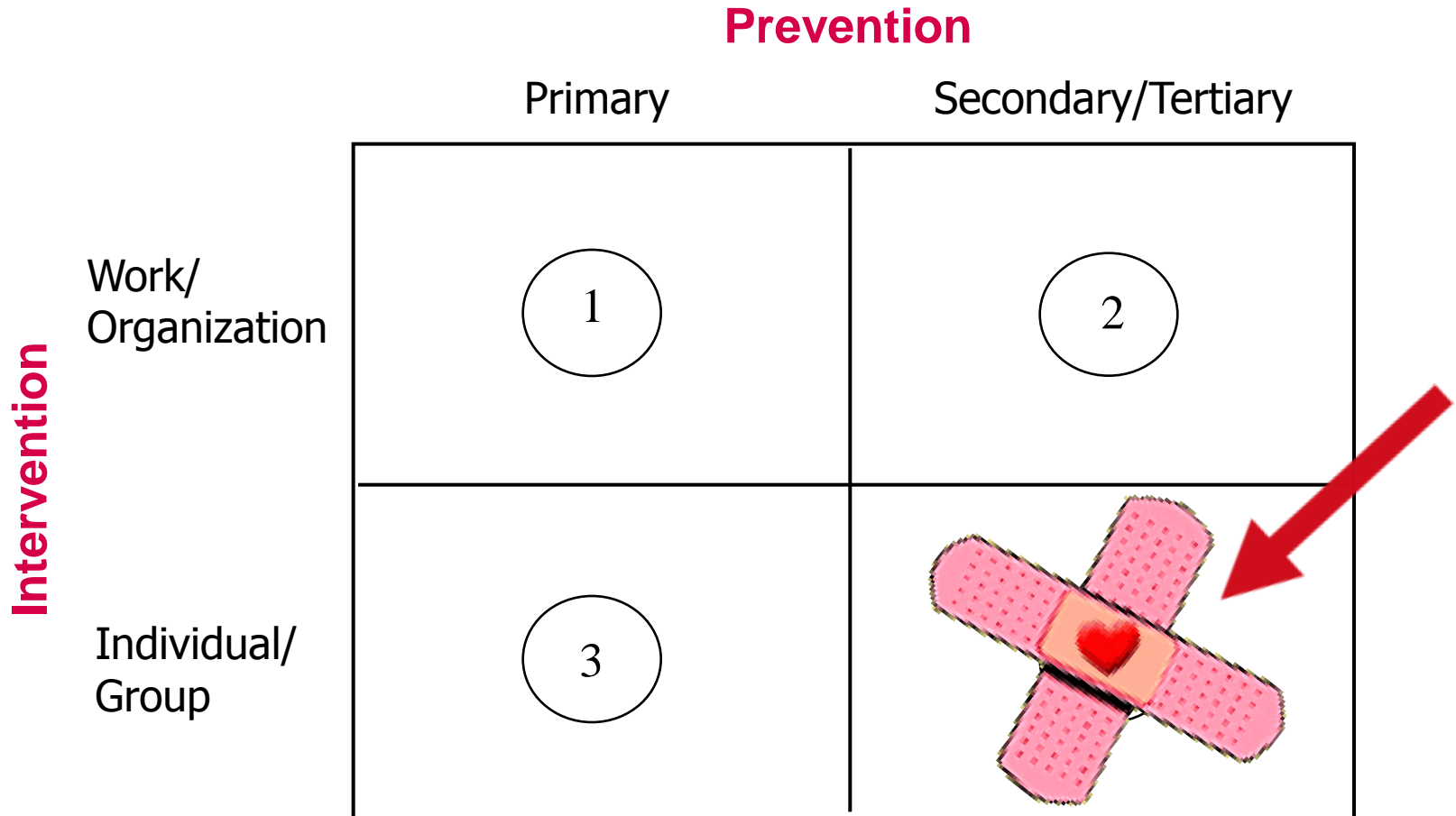
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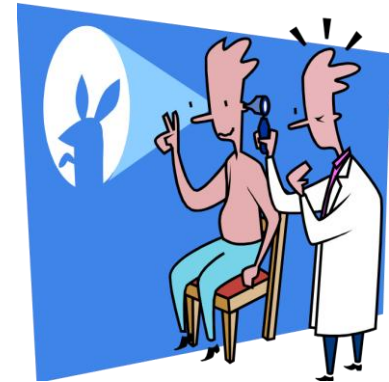Technische Universiteit
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# Review of occupational stress management interventions

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- Psychosocial risk factors can best be combated by work-directed approaches based on primary prevention

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# Reducing and Managing Job Stress

# Review of occupational stress management interventions

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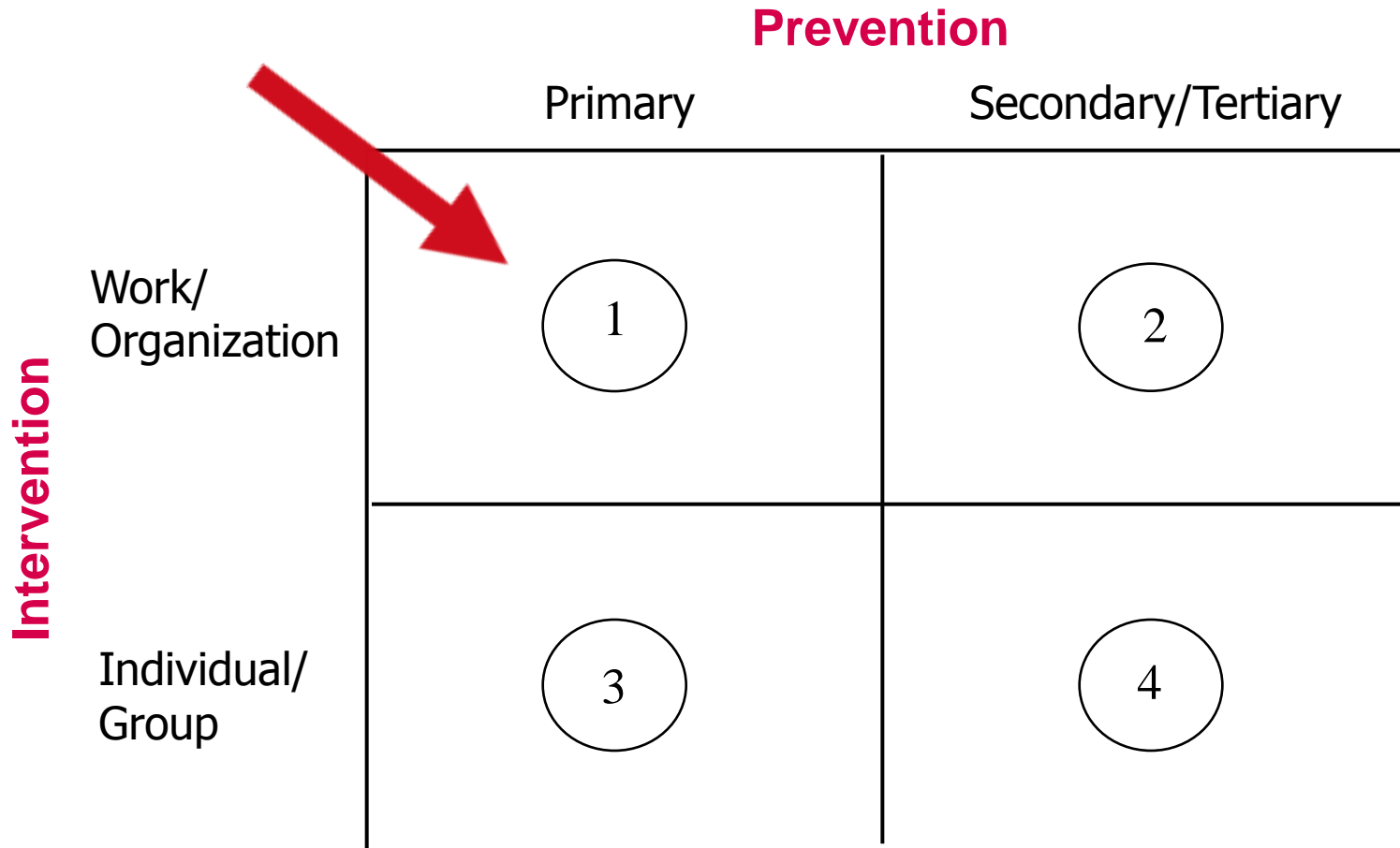
- Psychosocial risk factors can best be combated by work-directed approaches based on primary prevention

- The more rigorous the research design, the more modest the results of interventions



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# Ten elements of successful intervention studies (1)

- Use good, 'proven', theories as a solid base for any intervention

- Use multiple research methods to focus not only on *what* works *for whom*, but also *why* and *under what circumstances*

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- Use interventions that combine work-directed and individual-directed actions

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# Ten elements of successful intervention studies (2)

- ◆ Interventions should be ideally based on primary prevention (proactive rather than reactive)

- ◆ Use a participative intervention approach

- ◆ Use tailor-made interventions ('intervention-person fit' and 'intervention-environment fit')

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- ◆ Use tailor-made interventions ('intervention-person fit' and 'intervention-environment fit')

- ◆ Carefully develop an implementation framework:
  - • ongoing monitoring of processes
  - • SMART goals
  - • clear role allocation and responsibilities
  - • clear communication plans

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# Ten elements of successful intervention studies (3)

- ◆ Integrate solutions in normal business practice

- ◆ External pressure (senior management, government, legislation) may act as major stimulants:

  - • developing organizational responsibility

  - • ownership

  - • proactive approach to psychosocial risk factors, job stress, and health/well-being/performance

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# Conclusions

◆ Psychosocial risk factors at work are still prevalent, and appear to be extremely important for employee health/well-being/performance

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- ◆ Psychosocial risk factors at work are still prevalent, and appear to be extremely important for employee health/well-being/performance

- ◆ Workplace change is necessary and possible – keywords are multiple actors, solid theory, multi-method, work-directed, proactive, participative, tailor-made, process- and context-oriented, and external pressure

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- Workplace change is necessary and possible – keywords are multiple actors, solid theory, multi-method, work-directed, proactive, participative, tailor-made, process- and context-oriented, and external pressure
- **Interventions will benefit from not only focusing on *what* and *for whom*, but also *how*, *why* and *context***

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- Workplace change is necessary and possible – keywords are multiple actors, solid theory, multi-method, work-directed, proactive, participative, tailor-made, process- and context-oriented, and external pressure

- Interventions will benefit from not only focusing on *what* and *for whom*, but also *how*, *why* and *context*

- Urgent need for increasing labour productivity through <u>social innovation</u> induced by all parties involved

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# Smart, inclusive and sustainable work…
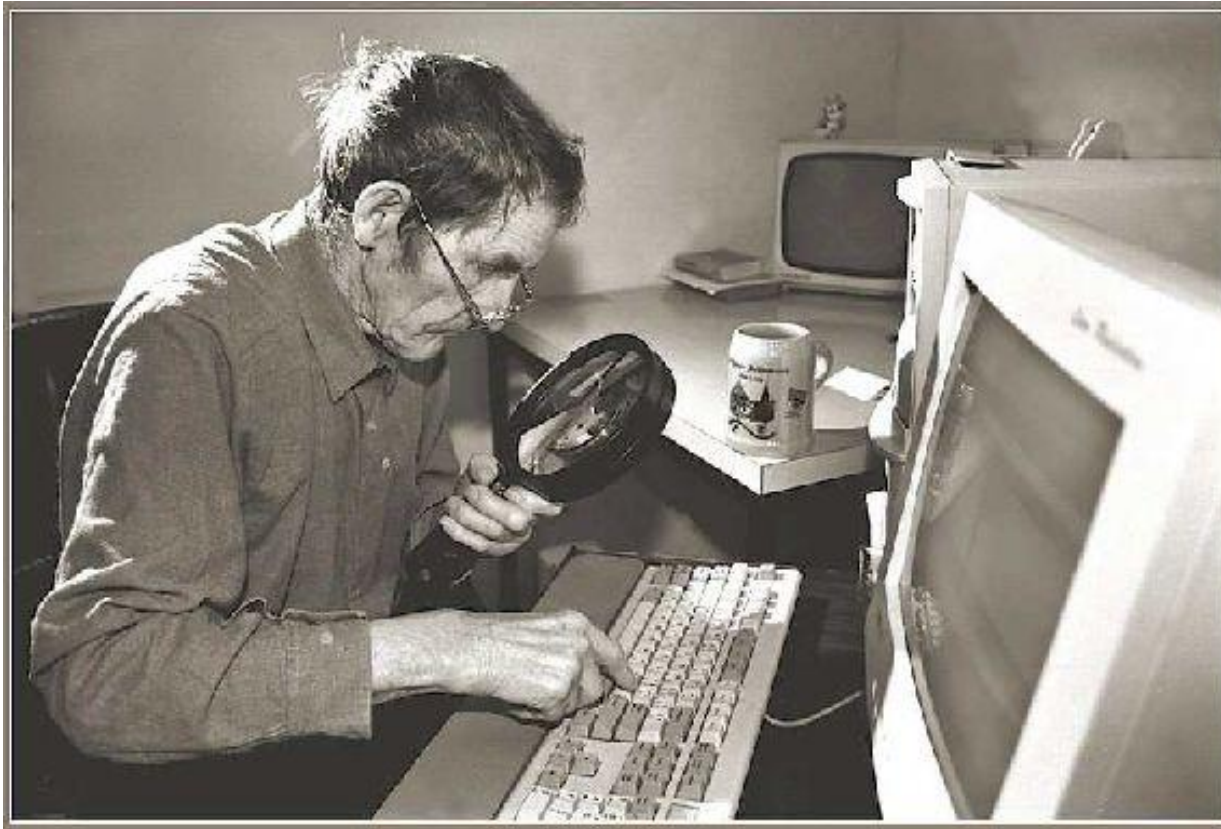
# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION...!

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