

Module
17W

Stress and the Management of Stress*

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, you should be able to

1. Describe the phenomenon of stress and its consequences.
2. Diagnose the sources of work–life stress.
3. Explain the relationship among stress, health, and performance.
4. Appreciate the role you can play in dealing with your own stress.
5. Describe the methods of coping with stress both at the individual and organizational levels.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Alarm stage	Job-related stress
Burnout	Negative affectivity
Conservation of resources (COR) theory	Perceived control
Coping	Resistance stage
Distress	Self-esteem
Eustress	Stress
Exhaustion stage	Stress audit
Fight-or-flight syndrome	Stress cycle
Fitness and wellness programs	Stress management interventions
General adaptation system (GAS)	Sustainable work system
Hardiness	Type A personality
Homeostasis	Type B personality
	Work-related stress

*This module was revised by Mina Westman, Associate Professor, Organization Behavior Program, Faculty of Management, Tel Aviv University. We are grateful to Professor Westman.

	<p style="text-align: center;">MODULE OUTLINE</p> <p>Premodule Preparation Activity 17–1W: Sources of Stress</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>What Is Stress? The Fight-or-Flight Syndrome The General Adaptation System Stress Defined</p> <p>Sources of Stress Critical Life Events and Challenges Personality Characteristics of the Stress–Strain Relationship Work-Related Stress Workplace Stress Audit</p> <p>Consequences of Stress Physical Outcomes Psychological Outcomes—Burnout Behavioral Outcomes—Performance</p> <p>Coping with Stress Individual Strategies—Self-Help Managerial Practices and Stress Reduction Organizational Strategies—Toward a Sustainable Work System</p> <p>Summary</p> <p>Study Questions</p> <p>Endnotes Activity 17–2W: The Social Readjustment Rating Scale Activity 17–3W: Methods of Coping with Stress Activity 17–4W: What Is Your Communication Style under Stress?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PREMODULE PREPARATION</p>
<p>Activity 17–1W: Sources of Stress</p>	<p><i>Objective:</i> To stimulate interest in the topic area by eliciting your perceptions of stress so they can be compared with our later presentation.</p> <p><i>Task 1 (Homework):</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Work life.</i> In your experience, what do you believe to be the five most important sources of stress? Rank these in importance from 1 to 5. b. <i>Personal life.</i> What do you believe to be five major sources of stress in nonwork life? Rank these. (<i>Note:</i> This can be done from the standpoint of people in general; you will discuss these in a team exercise and may not wish to reveal your personal stresses.) c. <i>University life</i> What are major sources of stress in university life? You can include both academic and nonacademic life on one list. Rank the first five of these.

	<p><i>Task 2 (Classroom):</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Each team will be assigned one of the three topics of Task 1. Team consensus is to be reached on a rank ordering of the five major sources of stress for the assigned area. (Time: 15 to 30 minutes) b. A spokesperson will report for each team, followed by class discussion.
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INTRODUCTION

	<p>The learning theories that we explored in Modules 2 and 3 tell us that the processes enabling individuals to adapt to their environment are critical to the economic success of the firm. Adaptable capabilities, although might be desired individual and organizational competency, have limits and risks attached to them. An individual who constantly struggles to master a new technology, build work-based relationships within a social network, or address a new complex task faces an increased risk of peptic ulcers, mental illness, hypertension, and coronary heart disease. Other symptoms might be eyestrain, headache, dizziness, depression, nervousness, and loss of appetite or inability to sleep.¹ At the same time, economic logic tells us that the more individuals and firms produce and the more efficient we are, the healthier and happier society will become. But this is not happening. In fact, many have begun to argue, based on research findings, that during the last 15 years we have witnessed increased levels of stress, burnout, turnover, absenteeism, injury, and heart disease. The phenomenon of stress and the balance between work and life emerged as a major concern for many.² The phenomenon of stress and the management of stress, in personal and work life, has been among the most frequent and popular topics of medical, biological, sociological, psychological, and management education for more than a decade. Work-related stress is recognized as a major health and productivity hazard. Some argue that a significant amount of the 600,000 deaths per year from heart attacks and the 29 million Americans who have some form of heart and blood vessel diseases can be attributed to work-related stress. Estimates on productivity loss arising from work-related stress run as high as \$300 billion per year in North America and about \$900 billion in Europe. A recent survey on working conditions of workers in the European Union indicates that 28 percent of all employees are exposed to stress.³ Furthermore, a major cost of health care in both the public and private sectors arises from job-related stress illnesses and disabilities. Figure 17–1W provides a synopsis of the effects of stress on health and performance.</p> <p>How seriously should organizations approach stress? Here is one example: “Weatherford Enterra’s stock dropped more than 10 percent Monday when the company revealed Chief</p>
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Figure 17–1W
The Effect of Stress on Health and Performance*

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	<p>Physical health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immune system—lessened ability to ward off illness and infection Cardiovascular system—high blood pressure; coronary artery disease Musculoskeletal system—tension headaches; back pain Gastrointestinal system—diarrhea and constipation <p>Psychological health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression; anxiety; anger/hostility; lower self-confidence <p>Behavioral problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased performance/productivity Decreased job satisfaction; absenteeism/turnover; sabotage Workplace injuries <p><small>*Adapted from R. S. DeFrank and J. M. Ivancevich, “Stress on the Job: An Executive Update,” <i>Academy of Management Executive</i> 12, no. 3 (1998), p. 58.</small></p>
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Executive Philip Burguieres will take the time off from work for ‘stress-related health reasons.’”⁴ The effect of stress on a high-level executive may have obvious repercussions on a company,⁵ but multiplying the damage that stress may do by the total number of employees should produce some real concern. What specific kinds of effects can stress have? Researchers have shown that it can contribute to physical, psychological, and behavioral problems, as shown on Figure 17–1W. These problems have a distinct monetary cost to business, often estimated at upwards of \$200 to \$300 billion a year.⁶ Beyond those costs lies the concern that excess stress distracts employees and management alike from exhibiting the drive, the customer focus, and the innovativeness required for organizations in today’s marketplace.

In this section, we shall define stress, emphasize the consequences of prolonged stress, identify some of its sources in personal and work lives, and suggest ways of coping with stress from the view of self-help and management practices.

WHAT IS STRESS?

We need to look at some body defense and adaptation systems before defining stress because dysfunctional stress arises from the excessive eliciting of these systems.

The Fight-or-Flight Syndrome

Our bodies reached their present state of design during the cave-dwelling, hunting, and -fishing epochs and are equipped with defense systems well-suited for stalking prey, countering vicious attacks, or plunging out of range of an onrushing foe. Those same reflexive responses still operate, but they serve us less well when aroused by an angry boss. The body’s instant response to the oncoming tiger, which produces sweating and increases rates in body metabolism, blood pressure, heartbeat, breathing, and flow of blood to the muscles is known as the **fight-or-flight syndrome**. Because these bodily functions are under the control of the involuntary nervous system, the employee, standing before the irate superior, feels helpless while experiencing a highly energized body overload because the effects cannot be appropriately relieved by running away or overpowering the tiger-boss. Consequently, for hours or days the employee may feel the effects of having failed to expend and direct the energy available at the time of the attack.

It is the cumulative effect of a prolonged bodily response to events of this type that brings us into the area of dysfunctional stress. However, we need further insight into the body’s adaptation to threats or hardships before discussing stress.

The General Adaptation System

The **general adaptation system (GAS)** is a defensive reaction to environmental demand that is perceived as threatening. Our body’s response to stressful incidents follows a fairly consistent three-stage pattern: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. The organizational literature on stress labeled the environmental demands as stress precipitators, or stressors.⁷ In an organizational setting, work overload, deadlines, changes in physical working conditions, and extreme changes in temperature (to mention a few) are likely to activate the GAS. In the **alarm stage** the external stimulus (stressor) elicits body defense mechanisms, in which glands release quantities of adrenaline, cortisone, and other hormones, and the coordinated changes described under the fight-or-flight syndrome take place. For example, a new deadline imposed on a supervisor may result in immediate energy to tackle the new challenge. At this stage the body shows characteristic changes when first exposed to the stressor.

In the **resistance stage** (the second stage), the supervisor starts to work on the newly imposed task and becomes more relaxed and starts to think more logically about the entire episode. Resistance is the tendency of the body to have the exact opposite reaction to the alarm response. This tendency to return to or to maintain stability in the normal body state is known as **homeostasis**. If the supervisor had remained in the excitement, or alarm, phase for an extended period, the third and final stage of general adaptation system,

Stress Defined

the **exhaustion state**, would have been reached. At this stage, under prolonged exposure to the stressor, the ability to resist is lost. At this point we are ready to define stress.

Hans Selye, the father of stress research, defines stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it.”⁸ *Nonspecific response* can best be understood by first considering specific responses. Selye sees each demand made upon the body as unique, or specific. For example, cold temperature causes shivers and other concomitant reactions, all in the direction of producing body heat or reducing loss of temperature. Likewise, a cigarette burn on the hand would cause a reflex withdrawal, pain, sweating, and so on. But all demands also activate, to some degree, the GAS previously described, and it is the fight-or-flight response (stage 1 alarm) that is the nonspecific response. In other words, each demand made upon the body results in a specific response, but in addition the body adapts to the new state by a more general call to arms of the body’s defense system—the nonspecific response or, in our terms, **stress**.

SOURCES OF STRESS

A comprehensive coverage of sources of stress would have to include those arising (1) from the individual’s personal life, for example, family; (2) from within the individual, for example, personality; and (3) from work life. We attempt to cover briefly some of the areas currently being highlighted in the literature.

Critical Life Events and Challenges

There are numerous studies indicating that important life events and changes, particularly when several occur close together, may produce a cumulative stress condition that makes the individual more vulnerable to illnesses. University students are familiar with the pattern of a couple breaking up after a love affair only to have one or both become intensely ill. Holmes and Rahe were pioneers in this area, and the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (see Activity 17–2W) evolved from their efforts.⁹ It is important to emphasize that studies in this area show only weak correlations between life events and illness, even though the relationships are positive. In other words, the effect of important life events may make people more susceptible to illness, but this may not hold true for all individuals because susceptibility may depend on personality.

Lazarus believes the effects of the dramatic events of life have been overestimated and that daily challenges—the more frequent but irritating everyday transactions—may play a greater role. To sum his findings:

As we expected, hassles turned out to be much better predictors of psychological and physical health than life events. The more frequent and intense the hassles people reported, the poorer their overall mental and physical health. While we found no significant relationship between life events that occurred during the study and the health of the participants at the end, we did find a moderate relationship between life events that occurred during the two and a half years *before* the study and people’s health at the end. In short, we found that major events do have some long-term effects, but in the short term, hassles seem to have a stronger impact on mental and physical health.¹⁰

Among a middle-aged group surveyed, Lazarus found the most frequent hassles to include (1) concern about weight, (2) health of a family member, (3) rising prices of common goods, (4) home maintenance, and (5) too many things to do. Students, on the other hand, were most hassled by anxiety over wasting time, meeting high standards, and being lonely.¹¹ The main reason for this finding is that when people confront life events they try to cope with them and in many cases use social support. However, with daily hassles, they do not feel the need to cope with them and usually ignore them; once they accumulate and are not attended to, though, they create health problems.

Personality Characteristics of the Stress–Strain Relationship

Whether or not an event produces stress depends on how it is experienced and perceived by the individual. What is a challenge for one person may not be for another. For example, the Type A personality has been found to moderate the relationship between stress and strain.

Friedman and Rosenman,¹² two cardiologists who formulated this construct, claim that the **Type A personality** is characterized by

1. An intense sense of time urgency; the need to do more and obtain more in the shortest possible time.
2. An aggressive personality that, in time, evolved into hostility; high motivation yet very easy loss of temper; a high sense of competitiveness.
3. An intense achievement motive, yet without properly defined goals.
4. Involvement in several different tasks at the same time.

Those with a **Type B personality** have some of the same characteristics but not the persistent compulsiveness that drives the time-ridden Type A. Activity 17–4W has been included at the end of this module so you may assess your own Type A personality tendencies. While for the most part, decades of research have supported the belief that the Type A personality is related to coronary heart disease, some research findings have shaken this belief. Glass et al. found that the incidence of coronary heart disease was twice as great among the individuals with Type A personality patterns as among their Type B counterparts.¹³ A study that followed more than 12,000 men between 1973 and 1982 whose high blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and smoking habits made them likely candidates for coronary heart disease, failed to show that Type A men were more likely to develop heart disease than anyone else in the study.¹⁴ The results of this study were supported by a few similar other studies with smaller-size samples. Although the controversy is yet to be resolved, the results of recent studies point toward the complex nature of the phenomenon of “stress personality” and toward the need to better understand its potential relationship with coronary heart disease.

Aside from Type A, other suggested characteristics have been found as moderators of the stress–strain relationships: self-esteem, control, hardiness, and negative affectivity.

People with high **self-esteem** may have more confidence in themselves and in their ability to cope. Therefore, they may evaluate the situation as less threatening and act accordingly. According to a review, one of three studies on self-esteem found a moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between stressors and strain.¹⁵

Perceived control has a central role in many theories of job stress.¹⁶ The degree of control an individual has, or perceives he or she has, over job demands has been demonstrated to be a salient dimension in determining the psychological or physiological impact of those demands. Research has consistently demonstrated that jobs that impose limitations on work control are associated with a range of negative physical, psychological, and behavioral responses. Furthermore, perceived control is said to moderate the relationship between stressors and strain. A more complex moderator role has also been suggested in the control/demand model. Another study proposed and found that work control buffers the negative physical effects of job stressors.¹⁷ Although the relation of control with health and well-being is well-established, the moderator role has not received consistent support.

Another modifier influencing vulnerability to stressors is **hardiness**.¹⁸ The concept of hardiness as a personality construct that moderates stress–illness relationships was first introduced by S. Kobasa. Three personality concepts were introduced as especially relevant to the hardy orientation: commitment, control, and challenge.

Commitment is the belief in the truth, importance, and value of what you are and what you are doing and is thereby related to the tendency to involve yourself fully in your total life space as a social being. *Control* is the tendency to believe and act as if you can influence the course of events within responsible limits. *Challenge* is based on the belief that change rather than stability is the normative mode of life. Change is anticipated as an opportunity and an incentive for personal growth. Hardiness was found to buffer the effects of stress on physical and psychological strains.¹⁹ Hardiness

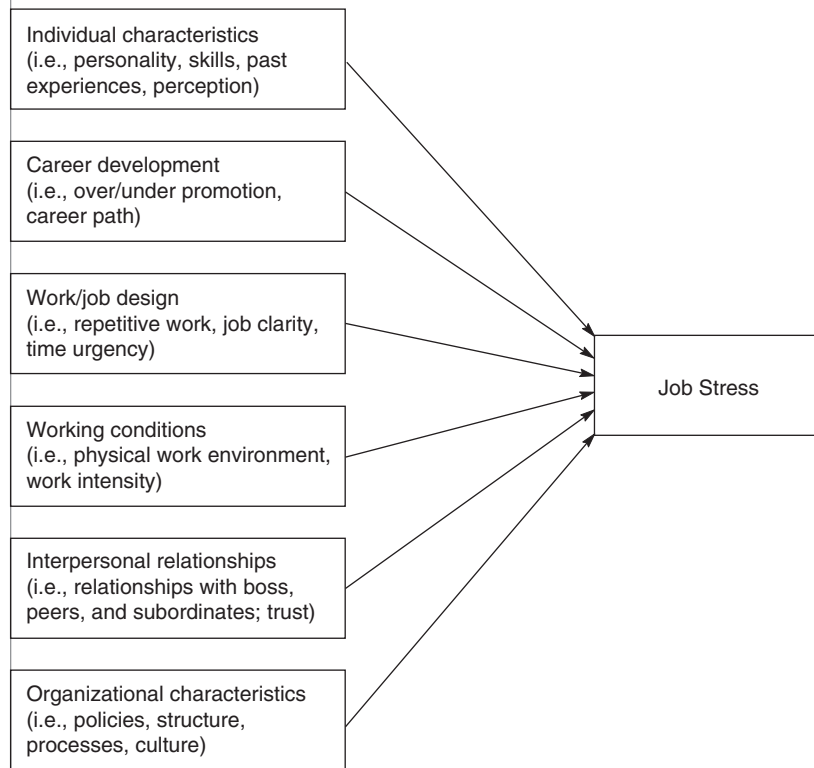
Work-Related Stress

was also found to be related to behavioral outcomes such as performance. Findings show that hardy persons are healthier, less depressed, less burnt out, and perform better than their nonhardy counterparts.

Individual differences in affective dispositions such as **negative affectivity (NA)** are important to the stressors–stress relation. NA is the tendency for an individual to experience a variety of negative emotions across time and situations.²⁰ People may differ in their tendency to respond emotionally to stressors. Some individuals have bigger reactions for the same stressors. The findings concerning NA and its effect on stress and strain are inconclusive. Some findings suggest that NA is a biasing factor in stress self-reports so that high-NA individuals inflate their self-reports of stressors and strains. Other researchers have not detected such effects. However, the conclusion from most studies is that NA may include variance in common with self-reported stress and may be associated with overreporting of job stress. Because individuals who tend toward aversive mood states interpret stimuli more negatively, their reports of stressors and stress outcomes may reflect a systematic negative bias.²¹

Three major sources of **work-related stress** can be identified: individual sources, work design sources, and organization-wide sources. At the individual level, stress can arise from personality (Type A behavior), tolerance for ambiguity, locus of control,²² rate of life changes,²³ ability to cope with change, motivation, and skill level and ability (see Modules 7 and 16W). At the work design level,²⁴ stress can arise from work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict,²⁵ time urgency, time management, scheduling, communications, and working relationships with relevant others (peers, subordinates, supervisors) (see Modules 4 through 6). Finally, at the organization-wide level, stress can arise from organization design, organizational and technological complexity, policies and procedures, political processes, management philosophy, company culture, and positioning in the industry²⁶ (see Modules 12, 14, and 18W). Figure 17–2W graphically presents the major sources of job stress.

Figure 17–2W
Sources of Job Stress



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The study of managerial work-related stress in recent years revealed some additional insight into the phenomenon of stress.²⁷ Typical of this research is an American Management Association survey of its members in which top management and middle management agreed on the four leading causes of stress:

1. Heavy workload/time pressures/unrealistic deadlines.
2. Disparity between what a person has to do on the job and what that person would like to accomplish.
3. The general “political” climate of the organization.
4. The lack of feedback on job performance.²⁸

The survey also showed that the respondents did not perceive themselves to be under the constant, hectic stress conditions usually attributed to their activities. The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of being under each stress condition on a scale of (1) seldom or never, (2) sometimes, (3) often, and (4) very often. The highest average rating was 2.6 for heavy workloads, which was between sometimes and often. Some insight into why this might be was their high self-ratings on scales related to self-assurance and interpersonal competence.

This latter finding was consistent with other studies that note there is a misconception that managers and executives are under an unduly high level of stress relative to other occupational groups. Executives frequently view their heavy responsibilities as invigorating challenges rather than as stress producing—and often they love the pressure. Job satisfaction has been found to be lowest among blue-collar unskilled workers, but it increases with occupational status from blue-collar unskilled to blue-collar skilled to white-collar nonprofessional to white collar professional.

Katz and Kahn found that as employees move from the lower to the higher occupational categories, there is an increase in job characteristics that are associated with satisfaction, for example, participation in decision making, social support, job security, complexity, and greater control over overtime and workload.²⁹ In conclusion, although managerial work is stressful, it also produces greater satisfaction than jobs lower on the occupational scale, thus compensating for job stressors. Other job categories can be equal to or greater than managerial work in terms of the stress relationship.

Workplace Stress Audit

Assessing the presence and effect of stress in the workplace is critical in any attempt to improve effectiveness and productivity. As we have seen, many sources of stress can be found in organizational settings. The 1990s ushered in additional stressful situations that are of particular concern in this day and age. Figure 17–3W provides a company audit form that can help identify some of the elements that have the potential for fostering stress at the workplace.

Assessing the presence and impact of stress in an organization is of substantial importance in any attempt to improve organizational effectiveness. There are many ways to carry out this assessment, as well as multiple areas and factors that should be included in such a **stress audit**. Figure 17–3W provides a sampling of questions that managers can ask themselves in order to begin estimating the levels of stress that exist in their companies. The more “yes” answers, the higher the potential for significant stress to be felt among employees. Please keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive list, that management perceptions of these concerns may differ quite dramatically from those of employees at large, and that an understanding of how these latter individuals view the work environment is crucial in developing meaningful approaches to enhance employee productivity.

Figure 17–3W
Workplace Stress:
A Company Audit Form*

Change

- Has considerable change taken place recently in your organization?
- Have changes had major impacts on employees' work processes, compensation, and perceived job security?
- Have employees been simply informed of the changes and told to implement them rather than being involved in the change process?
- Does change in your organization take place in a rather haphazard, unplanned, unevaluated manner?
- Has the organization not seen the need for change management training throughout the organization?

Downsizing

- Has the organization engaged in any downsizing in recent years?
- Were workers who were to be terminated given little or no advance warning?
- Were few severance and outplacement opportunities offered to those being let go?
- Have the survivors of the downsizing experienced significant increases in workload and job pressure?
- Has the issue of job security been avoided with the survivors?

Teams

- Has your company recently moved to a team format?
- Have your employees had minimal training in working in teams?
- Did you avoid involving workers in the development of the team approach?
- Are employees evaluated and compensated only on the basis of their individual work rather than team productivity?

Diversity

- Do you have a very diverse workforce? Do employees interact extensively?
- Have few efforts been made to improve employees' understanding of their coworkers' backgrounds, values, and perspectives?
- Do managers feel that they cannot talk about diversity issues without the risk of legal actions being taken?
- Are employees sent to diversity training without the opportunity to discuss these issues back in the organization?

Management/Employee Relations

- Are managers chosen primarily on the basis of their technical skills?
- Has little training been offered to managers identifying problems among their workers?
- Are few resources available to deal with worker concerns and problems, particularly those of a personal nature?
- Has the offering of a preventive health program for employees been perceived to be wasteful and unnecessary?

Violence

- Do employees perceive their workplace to be at risk for violence from outside agents?
- Are disagreements, arguments and fights among co-workers allowed to take place without intervention?
- Have no policies been put into place and publicized regarding response to violent episodes?
- Has the organization seen no need to provide training in the defusing of potentially violent confrontations?

*Adapted from R. S. DeFrank and J. M. Ivancevich, "Stress on the Job: An Executive Update," *Academy of Management Executive* 12, no. 3 (1998), p. 63.

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

To put stress into proper perspective, we must realize that it is essential for normal functioning of the body. Without stress, an individual would die. Stress is a response not only to threatening or abrasive demands but also to the pleasant and joyous. Selye drew a distinction between **distress**, which is the destructive form, and **eustress**, which occurs during euphoria. Both involve the outpouring of adrenaline and the fight-or-flight response. Think back on how excited and sleepless you can be in joyous circumstances—this is the

	<p>stress of eustress. Ideally, whether stress is positive or negative, the body maintains its equilibrium as the products of the defensive responses are expended. It is the intensity of stress and the chronic elicitation over extended time that can be destructive.</p>
<p>Physical Outcomes</p>	<p>A job strain is the reaction to the job stressor. Major job strains can be classified as physical (hypertension, coronary heart diseases), psychological (burnout, job dissatisfaction), or behavioral (smoking, impaired performance).³⁰</p> <p>Damage to the circulatory, glandular, and gastrointestinal systems has been frequently identified as stress related. Hypertension and coronary heart disease have been associated with stress. In fact, many claims assert that stress either causes or augments most modern-day illnesses and maladies. Researchers have long related high blood pressure, heart attacks, ulcers, migraines, and backaches to stress. More recently, illnesses such as sexual dysfunction, allergies, cancer, and diabetes are being studied for stress linkage. The evidence that work life is a major contributor to stress illnesses is strengthened by the increased incidence of heart attacks, high blood pressure, alcoholism, and so on among women as they assume more responsibility in business.</p>
<p>Psychological Outcomes—Burnout</p>	<p>The term burnout refers to a combined physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion arising from the cumulative effects of prolonged stress. It is a gradual wearing away, a fizzling out, of energy. During the progression, there is a physiological deterioration as the body's immune system fails to provide the necessary resistance to disease. Short-fused irritability and avoidance of social interaction become noticeable to associates. Difficulty with concentration and frequency of mistakes increase as the condition develops. In the later stages, heavy abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs may occur.</p> <p>The military has long been aware of burnout symptoms because soldiers are highly susceptible in the extremes of battle fatigue. But burnout is also associated with managerial work, difficult occupations, or even student life, although this has not been given emphasis until recent times.</p>
<p>Behavioral Outcomes—Performance</p>	<p>Stress researchers tend to agree that stress is related to performance.³¹ A review of the literature explored the following four major hypotheses concerning the relationship between stress and performance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The inverted-U relationship between stress and performance. 2. A negative linear relationship between stress and performance. 3. A positive linear relationship between stress and performance. 4. No relationship between stress and performance.³² <p>The first two hypotheses have received much support. The inverted-U hypothesis suggests that there is an optimal level of stimulus at which performance peaks. At other levels of the stimulus, both higher and lower than the optimum, performance deteriorates. The rationale for this relationship is that when an individual experiences a low level of stress, he or she is not activated and does not evince improved performance; when the individual experiences too high a level of stress, he or she may spend more time and other resources in coping with the stress and invest less effort in performing the task, resulting in a relatively lower level of performance. Thus, a moderate amount of stress causes the individual to be activated and to expend maximal energy in job performance. Although there is some evidence from laboratory experiments for the inverted-U relationship between stress and performance in work situations, the inverted-U hypothesis has rarely been tested. A typical example of researchers who failed to support the inverted-U hypothesis points toward negative linear relationships between stress and performance.³³</p> <p>The rationale for the negative linear relationship between stress and performance is that stress causes a narrowing of attention, resulting in poor judgment, a propensity to commit errors, and an inability to distinguish the trivial from the important. Previous</p>

research on the stress–performance relationship was conducted among managers, blue-collar workers, bus drivers, officer cadets, and welfare workers. The findings of these studies support the linear negative relationship between stress and performance.

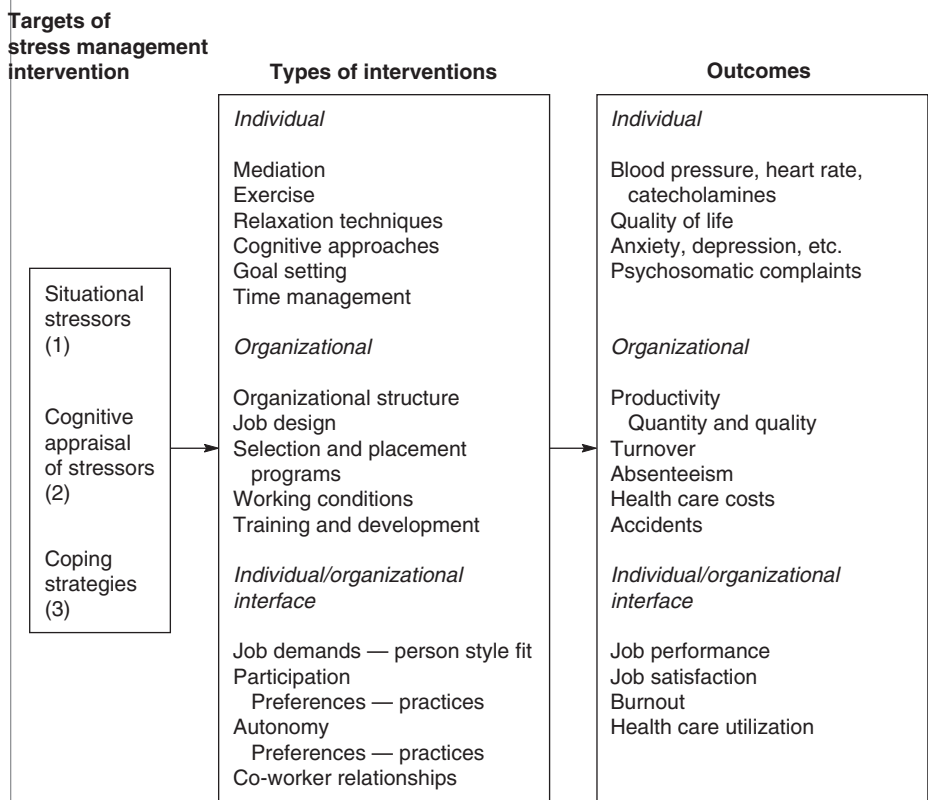
COPING WITH STRESS

The literature on coping with stress is voluminous and diverse, deriving from the fields of personality (individual differences), clinical psychology, organizational psychology (person–job fit), military psychology (adaptation to and coping with war conditions), psychiatry, behavioral medicine (biofeedback), and political science.

Coping has been defined as “problem-solving efforts made by an individual faced with demands that are highly relevant to his welfare,”³⁴ and as “a process, involving effort, on the way towards solution of a problem.”³⁵ A distinction is made between *coping* and *adaptation* on the basis of whether or not the individual has a well-established, automatic response readily available (adaptation) as opposed to being in a situation in which the adequate response is unclear, unavailable, or difficult to mobilize (coping).³⁶ Based on a literature review of stress management interventions, Ivancevich et al. proposed a heuristic framework that encompasses three target points in the **stress cycle**.³⁷ Figure 17–4W proposes three targets for **stress management interventions**: those that attempt to change the degree of stress potential in a situation by reducing the number and intensity of the stressors present, those that help the individuals modify their appraisal of a potentially stressful situation, and those that help the individuals cope more effectively with the consequences of stress.

A variety of interventions and programs, as can be seen from an examination of Figure 17–4W, have been developed: meditation, exercise, relaxation techniques, cognitive

Figure 17–4W
Stress Management
Interventions: Targets,
Types, and Outcomes*



*Adapted from J. M. Ivancevich, M. T. Matteson, S. M. Freedman, and J. S. Phillips, “Workside Stress Management Interventions,” *American Psychologist* 45, no. 2 (1990), p. 254, with permission.

Individual Strategies— Self-Help

approaches, goal setting, and time management are some of the interventions at the individual level; organizational structure, work design, selection and placement programs, working conditions, training and development programs are found at the organizational level; and individual job fit, participation, autonomy, and co-worker relations are some of the interventions at the individual/organizational interface. The discussion that follows explores three levels of coping with stress: individual, managerial, and organizational.

There are no methods for preventing and reducing stress that work for everyone. Individuals must take full responsibility for understanding the three interrelated aspects of their own stress life by asking the following questions:

1. What causes me stress? In work life, some people may be continuously concerned about their competencies and skills, while others may be more threatened by interpersonal relations.
2. How do I respond to stressful situations? Important aspects of this were discussed when we analyzed our responses to the frustrations elicited by Activity 6–2: Nonverbal Communication. Do you typically move away (withdraw), move against (become aggressive), or move toward (become more conforming and compliant) when interpersonal conflict arises?
3. What methods of stress reduction work best for me?

(*Note:* No further information on self-help in coping with stress is presented here because Activity 17–3W generates recommendations from the participants, which will be followed by additional input from the instructor.)

Managerial Practices and Stress Reduction

Managers concerned about stress reduction should (1) be aware of the dynamics and consequences of stress, as discussed earlier in this module; (2) adopt practices for preventing and ameliorating stress, such as more open communication and feedback; (3) be aware of the vulnerability to stress of each employee when making and supervising assignments; and (4) utilize any one or the appropriate combination of the interventions identified in Figure 17–4W.

What do managers typically do in the face of stressful experiences in their working lives? An investigation of the coping responses of managers found that the majority of all coping responses fell into five categories: (1) talking to others, (2) working harder and longer, (3) changing to an engrossing nonwork or play activity, (4) analyzing the situation and changing the strategy of attack, and (5) withdrawing physically from the situation.³⁸ The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a particular coping response depends on the individual using it. In another study involving managers, the effectiveness of various coping methods was investigated by relating their use to indicators of health (blood pressure, cholesterol, triglyceride, and uric acid) and stress symptoms. It was concluded that the five most effective techniques for coping were to (1) build resistance by regular sleep, exercise, and good health habits; (2) compartmentalize work and nonwork life; (3) engage in physical exercise; (4) talk through problems with peers on the job; and (5) withdraw physically from the situation.³⁹

As of late, behavioral and medical scientists have demonstrated that individuals have a far greater capacity to control psychological and somatic stress responses than was earlier supposed. These findings led to the development of new technologies or utilization of activities such as yoga, the relaxation response, meditation, and behavioral rehearsal techniques.⁴⁰ The potential for enhancing managers' coping capacities in work situations with these skills has not yet been fully explored and awaits empirical research support.

Organizational Coping Strategies— Toward a Sustainable Work System

At the most basic level, a **sustainable work system** is viewed as a system that can (1) regenerate and develop the human system; (2) promote a balance between quality of working life and competitive performance; (3) sustain change processes, renewal, and learning; and (4) foster long-term employability for its employees.⁴¹ Organizations may

be more sustainable, effective in reducing stress, and better at coping with stress by utilizing any one or any relevant combination of the following strategies:⁴²

1. Strategies aimed at changing organizational structures and processes (for example, decentralization of authority, flexible design).
2. Strategies aimed at changing role characteristics⁴³ or conditions (for example, engage in new role activities, reduce role overload, redefine focal person's role).
3. Strategies aimed at changing job/task characteristics (for example, redesign the job, redefine task characteristics).
4. Strategies aimed at the "wellness" or "balance" and physical fitness of organizational members.

The number and variety of employee **fitness and wellness programs** has been increasing exponentially over the past 15 years.⁴⁴ Fitness and wellness programs can be implemented at four levels: *Level I* consists of awareness programs that include newsletters, health fairs, screening sessions, and educational classes. *Level II* programs involve lifestyle modification by providing specific programs that are available to individuals on a regular basis (such as a self-administered fitness program, membership at a local fitness program, classes related to proper performance of physically demanding work tasks). *Level III* programs have as their goal the creation of an environment that assists individuals in sustaining their healthy lifestyle and behaviors.⁴⁵ *Level IV* relates, among other things, to vacations.

It was recently suggested that vacation planning be considered part of stress management.⁴⁶ A study that investigated the impact of vacation on job stress and burnout supported this recommendation.⁴⁷ The researchers had 76 clerical employees complete measures of perceived job stressors and burnout twice before a two-week companywide vacation, once during the vacation, and twice after the vacation. They detected substantial declines in burnout during the vacation and a return to prevacation levels of burnout by the time of the second postvacation measure, three weeks after returning to work. However, the return to work showed gradual fade-out, as burnout returned part way toward its prevacation level by three days after the vacation and all the way by three weeks after the vacation. Women and those who were satisfied with their vacations experienced the greatest relief; however, both of these subsamples also experienced the quickest fade-out.

One explanation of the respite effect can be seen in terms of **conservation of resources (COR) theory**.⁴⁸ COR theory makes novel predictions about what happens in the absence of stress. Accordingly, vacation may alleviate burnout by halting the resource loss cycle and generating a resource gain cycle. Relaxation between stress periods allows regrouping of resources such as sense of control and social support, thus replenishing resource reservoirs.

Because vacation time is limited, management should seek additional ways to facilitate resource replenishment. These might include brief respites at work such as time off for physical exercise, meditation, "power naps," and reflective thinking. Short daily respites might be efficient on-the-job tools for combating burnout.

The good news contained in these results is that burnout is not a constant; remove the stressors that cause burnout, and you reduce the burnout. The bad news is that the relief is also transitory. We need to find practical ways to prolong respite relief.

Research indicates that when companies implement fitness program levels II and III, employees show a significant reduction in coronary heart disease risk factors such as body weight, body fat, and blood pressure,⁴⁹ and the companies achieve health cost savings.⁵⁰

Much has been written about organizational stress—the pressure generated by bureaucratic/industrial life. In general, it might be said that organizational effectiveness programs include, as an explicit or implicit goal, stress reduction and prevention. Recently, it has been argued that organizations need to adopt an "organizational health" perspective that simultaneously focuses on employees' well-being and organizational performance.⁵¹ Organizational development in particular places primary emphasis on facilitating the human interaction components of industrial life and on achieving organizational goals by producing the climate to permit individuals to more completely apply their skills and talents. Organizational development and change is the subject of Module 16 in this book.

SUMMARY

As intensity at work increases, so does the need to design and develop more sustainable work systems.⁵² Job-related stress has been estimated to be responsible for major financial losses to industrial productivity. It is also a major cost factor in the nation’s health care system. Research studies have related stress to numerous illnesses, including high blood pressure, heart attacks, ulcers, and sexual impotence.

Managing stress, our own and that of others, requires an understanding of some body defense responses. Under pressure or threat, the body responds with the fight-or-flight syndrome, an outpouring of glandular secretions (such as adrenaline) into the bloodstream, and a multitude of related reactions. These responses are great for aiding us to evade danger, but as a reaction to an unpleasant job or an angry boss, they can leave our bodies overenergized and overburdened. Continuous pressures over time may result in too many of these excessive outpourings, causing damage to physical and emotional health.

Sources of job stress are quite varied. They can include inappropriate organizational design, poor management practices, and boring work.⁵³ Important events in personal lives or daily hassles may be stressors for everyone, but the degree to which a person finds them frustrating depends on personality factors. Studies of Type A personalities and individuals highly susceptible to burnout support this conclusion.

Coping with stress can be studied from the viewpoint of either self-help or management practices. Self-help approaches to reducing stress and promoting wellness must be custom designed to the individual because there are no methods that are effective for everyone. Basically, organizational effectiveness programs, and organization development in particular, aim at maximizing work satisfactions and minimizing frustrations as the quality of work life is enhanced.

Study Questions

1. “Stress should be a concern for every manager at the workplace.” Do you agree? Why?
2. Describe the three stages of the general adaptation system.
3. What do personality and/or personality type have to do with stress dynamics?
4. Describe a stressful situation that you have observed or that you have experienced at work. What were the stress precipitators? How was the situation handled? What would you have done to reduce the stress?
5. Discuss the relationship among life change, personality, and behavior at work.
6. What does the American Management Association list as the leading causes of stress among middle and top managers?
7. How do managers cope with stress in their working lives?
8. How can an organization develop a more sustainable work system?
9. What are the major strategies that organizations can utilize in coping with stress? What would be some of the potential roadblocks in the implementation of each?

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**Activity 17–2W:
The Social
Readjustment
Rating Scale**

Objective:
To provide the learner with the opportunity for a self-diagnosis.

Task 1 (Individual):

- a. Complete the instrument and total your score.
- b. Interpret your score.
- c. Identify possible causes of actions based on your score.

Task 2:
Complete the Glazer Stress Questionnaire.

Name _____ Date _____

THE SOCIAL READJUSTMENT RATING SCALE*

You may complete “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale” by circling the “mean value” figure to the right of each item if it has occurred to you during the past year. To figure your total score, add all the mean values circled (if an event occurred more than once, increase the value by the number of times).

Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation from mate	65
4. Detention in jail or other institution	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Major personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being fired at work	47
9. Marital reconciliation with mate	45
10. Retirement from work	45
11. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual difficulties	39
14. Gaining a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, oldster moving in, etc.)	39
15. Major business readjustment (e.g., merger, reorganization, bankruptcy, etc.)	39
16. Major change in financial state (e.g., a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual)	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Changing to a different line of work	36
19. Major change in the number of arguments with spouse (e.g., either a lot more or a lot less than usual regarding child-rearing, personal habits, etc.)	35
20. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a major purchase (e.g., for a home, business, etc.)	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g., promotion, demotion, lateral transfer)	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home (e.g., marriage, attending college, etc.)	29
24. In-law troubles	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Wife beginning or ceasing work outside the home	26
27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
28. Major change in living conditions (e.g., building a new home, remodeling, deterioration of home or neighborhood)	25
29. Revision of personal habits (dress, manners, association, etc.)	24
30. Troubles with the boss	23
31. Major change in working hours or conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
33. Changing to a new school	20
34. Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
35. Major change in church activities (e.g., a lot more or less than usual)	19
36. Major change in social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.)	18
37. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a lesser purchase (e.g., for a car, TV, freezer, etc.)	17
38. Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep)	16
39. Major change in number of family get-togethers (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual)	15
40. Major change in eating habits (a lot more or a lot less food intake, or very different meal hours or surroundings)	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Christmas	12
43. Minor violations of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace, etc.)	11

*T. H. Holmes and R. H. Rahe, “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale,” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11 (1967), pp. 213–18. Complete wording of Table 3, page 216. Reprinted with permission of Pergamon Press and Dr. Thomas H. Holmes, M.D.

Interpretation of results: The research tends to support the conclusion that the more change you have, the more likely you are to get sick. (Remember that both negative events and positive events, such as marriage, cause stress.) Among those people having a total score of more than 300 in mean values, almost 80 percent would be expected to get sick in the near future; with 150 to 299 the figure is reduced to 50 percent; and with less than 150, only 30 percent. Of course, these percentages are only probabilities for the total sample studied and may or may not apply to you as an individual.

Name _____ Date _____

SELF-EVALUATION: THE GLAZER STRESS CONTROL LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE*

As you can see, each scale below is composed of a pair of adjectives or phrases separated by a series of horizontal lines. Each pair has been chosen to represent two kinds of contrasting behavior. Each of us belongs somewhere along the line between the two extremes. Since most of us are neither the most competitive nor the least competitive person we know, put a check mark where you think you belong between the two extremes.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Doesn't mind leaving things temporarily unfinished	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Must get things finished once started
2. Calm and unhurried about appointments	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Never late for appointments
3. Not competitive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Highly competitive
4. Listens well, lets other finish speaking	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Anticipates others in conversation (nods, interrupts, finishes sentences for the other)
5. Never in a hurry, even when pressured	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Always in a hurry
6. Able to wait calmly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Uneasy when waiting
7. Easygoing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Always going full speed ahead
8. Takes one thing at a time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Tries to do more than one thing at a time, thinks about what to do next
9. Slow and deliberate in speech	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Vigorous and forceful in speech (uses a lot of gestures)
10. Concerned with satisfying self, not others	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Wants recognition by others for a job well done
11. Slow doing things	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Fast doing things (eating, walking, etc.)
12. Easygoing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Hard driving
13. Expresses feelings openly	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Holds feelings in
14. Has a large number of interests	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Few interests outside work
15. Satisfied with job	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Ambitious, wants quick advancement on job
16. Never sets own deadlines	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Often sets own deadlines
17. Feels limited responsibility	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Always feels responsible
18. Never judges things in terms of numbers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Often judges performance in terms of numbers (how many, how much)
19. Casual about work	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Takes work very seriously (works weekends, brings work home)
20. Not very precise	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Very precise (careful about detail)

Scoring: Assign a value from 1 to 7 for each score. Total them up. The categories are as follows:

- Total score = 110–140: Type A₁. If you are in this category, and especially if you are over 40 and smoke, you are likely to have a high risk of developing cardiac illness.
- Total score = 80–109: Type A₂. You are in the direction of being cardiac prone, but your risk is not as high as the A₁. You should, nevertheless, pay careful attention to the advice given to all Type A's.
- Total score = 60–79: Type AB. You are an admixture of A and B patterns. This is a healthier pattern than either A₁ or A₂, but you have the potential for slipping into A behavior and you should recognize this.
- Total score = 30–59: Type B₂. Your behavior is on the less-cardiac-prone end of the spectrum. You are generally relaxed and cope adequately with stress.
- Total score = 0–29: Type B₁. You tend to the extreme of noncardiac traits. Your behavior expresses few of the reactions associated with cardiac disease.

This test will give you some idea of where you stand in the discussion of Type A behavior. The higher your score, the more cardiac prone you tend to be. Remember, though, even B persons occasionally slip into A behavior, and any of the patterns can change over time.

*This questionnaire was designed by Dr. Howard I. Glazer, director of behavior management systems at EHE Stresscontrol Systems, Inc. Reprinted from *Executive Health*, © 1978, By McGraw-Hill, New York, 10020. All rights reserved.

**Activity 17–3W:
Methods of Coping
with Stress**

Objective:

To share among participants their views of effective techniques of coping with stress.

Task 1 (Homework):

Write a list of techniques for coping with stress. (*Note:* This can be done from the standpoint of people in general; you will discuss these in a team exercise and may not wish to reveal your personal stresses.)

Task 2 (Classroom):

- a. Team members are to discuss their suggestions and compile as complete a list as possible. If time permits, indicate the three most helpful stress reducers. (Time: 15 to 30 minutes.)
- b. Presentation to the class will be done by rotating from one team spokesperson to the next, each giving one item not already reported by another team.

Task 3:

The instructor will comment on the reports and lecture on coping with stress.

**Activity 17–4W:
What Is Your
Communication Style
under Stress?**

Please see http://www.mhhe.com/business/management/management_tutor_series/styleStress/exercise.html.