International Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing

Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

ADNIC

Managers Managing Wellbeing: Part 1

2021

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WELCOME

Stress is the driving force that keeps us on our toes and ensures that we push to be the best we can be. However that is only valid up to a certain point. If we have too much stress and endless wear and tear, it can drive us into physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Certainly we can't avoid the problem. Situations arise on a day-to-day basis, which make physical, mental and emotional demands on us. There may be decisions that need to be made, deadlines that need to be met, and lessons to be learned.

Unreasonable stress affects one in five of the working population and after acute medical conditions it is the most common cause of long term sickness absence from work (CIPD Absence Management 2014).

Stress undoubtedly makes people ill. It is now known to contribute to heart disease, hypertension and high blood pressure, it affects the immune system, is linked to strokes, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), ulcers, diabetes, muscle and joint pain, miscarriage, allergies, alopecia and even premature tooth loss.

Therefore it is imperative to strike the right balance. As individuals, we must take stock of all aspects of our life and situations and learn to cope better.

Treat it early, and your prospects are good. Ignore the problem, and there is a risk that 'burnout' may become a permanent state of affairs.

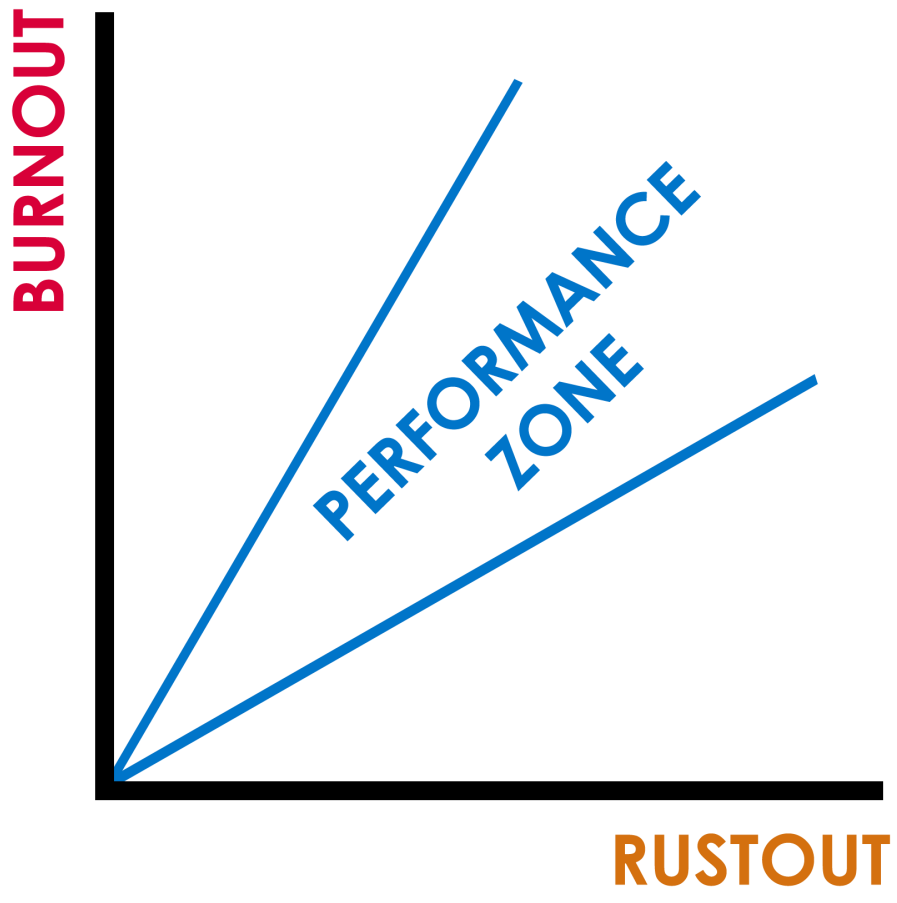
THE PERFORMANCE ZONE

Manageable levels of stress are not a problem, a stress-free environment is not the ultimate goal - we need pressure in our lives in order to perform. The issue is long stages of inactivity causing distress from stagnation or prolonged exposure to high levels without a rest or reset period.

The Performance Zone is the area that drives optimal performance, whether applied to sports, work or even driving. Burnout and Rustout present in different ways but are both as traumatic to experience.

When our stress levels move beyond the Performance Zone and edge towards Burnout we will struggle; problem solving, lateral thinking and creative thinking diminish. We are unable to think clearly and make good decisions, and can become reactive, angry and sometimes even aggressive.

Below the Performance Zone is Rustout where we may find ourselves unable to motivate ourselves; energy and enthusiasm will be low and we will be bored sluggish and lethargic.



THE BRIDGE ANALOGY

The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

This links very closely to one of our definitions of stress; a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that:

"DEMANDS EXCEED THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES THE INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO MOBILISE."

International Wellbeing Insights uses 'The Bridge' analogy to approach the topic of mental health, wellbeing and stress. When a Bridge is carrying too much weight, it will eventually collapse. It is possible to see the warning signs before this happens, 'The Bridge' would bow, buckle and creak.

The same principle can be applied to human beings, with excessive demands and challenges placed on our bridges. There may be early warning

THE TEAM BRIDGE

HOW TO SPOT STRESS AT WORK

If you consider yourself stressed at work, it is important to do something. It is not worth risking your health just because of your job. After all, no-one at the end of their life ever said "I wish I'd worked harder".

If you work with other people, learn to recognise the symptoms of stress in others and if necessary refer the problem upwards to someone who can deal with it. Not only is it the ethical thing to do, to help a colleague, but it will also benefit you too, improving your

CERTAIN FACTORS MAY INDICATE A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

- AN INCREASE IN SICK LEAVE
- PRESENTEEISM (ATTENDING WORK WHEN UNFIT FOR DUTY)
- 'THEM & US' LANGUAGE
- A TENDENCY TO WORK LATE AND NOT TAKE BREAKS
- A LOSS OF SENSE OF HUMOUR, REPLACED BY IRRITABILITY
- SILO MENTALITIES
- MISTAKES AND BLAMING
- SCOPE CREEP
- A DECREASE IN WORK STANDARDS
- INDECISIVENESS AND POOR JUDGEMENT
- A PROBLEM WITH DRINKING OR DRUG TAKING
- MORE ACCIDENTS AT WORK
- GOSSIP AND RUMOURS

ADVICE FOR MANAGERS

If you are trying to help someone who you think is suffering from stress, remember that a person in this position is in full 'Fight, Flight or Freeze' mode. They will be unable to deal with the problem on their own.

In fact, they may strenuously deny they have a problem at all and be very sceptical about offers of help. And if you are the person's manager, you may be causing the stress yourself.
Therefore involve your staff in discussions about stress and ask for openness with you about challenges. You can gauge a lot in a relaxed environment by asking a simple question – "What are the three 'best' and three 'worst' aspects of your job?"

Please approach with caution; talk to your HR department or follow good practice guidelines about the best way of approaching the problem. Or talk to a professional organisation such as International Wellbeing Insights.

THE 7 Es FRAMEWORK TO CREATE A CULTURE OF WELLBEING

1 ENGAGE PEOPLE IN A CULTURE OF WELLBEING

2 EXEMPLIFY THE VALUES YOU WISH TO EMBED INCLUDING A WORK LIFE/BALANCE YOURSELF

3 EMPATHISE WITH YOUR TEAM AND PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

4 EMPOWER YOUR TEAM TO BE LESS RELIANT ON YOU AS A MANAGER

5 ENCOURAGE TEAM BY CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

6 EMBED THE VALUE IN EVERYTHING YOU DO

7 EVALUATE THE EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OVER TIME

ENGAGE

Engaging staff means interacting with them so they have the opportunity to raise any challenges and concerns. It also means reaching out to encourage positive or constructive feedback and positive communication.

A study by researchers at Kingston University found evidence that engaged employees perform better than non-engaged staff, that they take less sick days and are less likely to leave their employer. The author of said study also distinguishes between three types of staff engagement:

INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT (IQ: *INTELLECTUAL INTELLIGENCE)*

The extent to which individuals are absorbed in their work and think about ways performance can be improved.

EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT (EQ: *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE)*

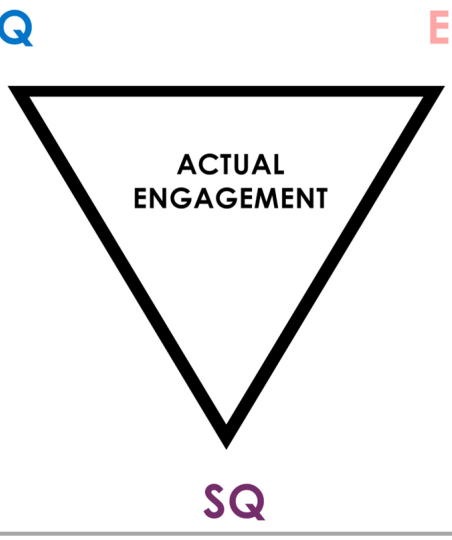
The extent to which people feel positive, emotional connections to their work experience and therefore with the company.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT (SQ: SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The extent to which employees talk to colleagues about work related improvements and change, but also non-work related topics to create connections.

Examples on how to engage your staff

- Keep staff informed regarding large company decisions and changes
- Let yourself be seen, take time out whenever possible to walk around the office to catch up with individuals.
- Annual appraisals: where are their strengths working? When are they overplayed?
- Regular non-work based activities to give staff the opportunity to interact with yourself and each other in an informal environment
- Short team huddle (informal meeting) where each team member can discuss their weekends and what they need to do that week
- Regular team meetings (monthly catch-up if possible). Giving staff the opportunity to have their say (WARNING: do not take over your staffs calendars with constant meetings. A 'meetings culture' will take staff away from the main objectives of their role)



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MORE EFFECTIVELY AND MORE REGULARLY ENGAGE YOUR TEAM?

INTELLECTUALLY

How to engage individuals so they become excited by their work and think about ways experience and performance can be improved

EMOTIONALLY

How to engage individuals so they feel positive emotional connections to their work experience and therefore with the company

SOCIALLY

How to engage individuals in both work AND non-work related topics to create connections., a sense of team spirit and group accomplishment

THE 7 Es FRAMEWORK TO CREATE A CULTURE OF WELLBEING

EMPATHISE

As a manager it is important to put yourself in your team's shoes and provide emotional support. It allows team to feel safe with their failures and not feel they are blamed for them and encourages management to understand the cause of poor performance.

When engaging with your team, consider Professor Albert Mehrabian's communication model, which states the following percentages when communicating feelings or attitudes:

- **TONE OF VOICE ACCOUNTS FOR 38% OF MEANING**
- **BODY LANGUAGE ACCOUNTS FOR 55%**
- **WORDS ACCOUNT FOR JUST 7%**

Understanding someone's body language is vital when communicating and empathising with an individual.

- **Recognise differences between the individuals in your team and appreciate them.**
- **Embrace the traits that the individuals have e.g. approach an introvert differently to an extrovert to gain the best response from them.**
- **Listen to your team. Create opportunities for team to tell you their opinions and feelings without judging or interrupting them.**
- **Ask questions to better understand the individuals in your team e.g. "do you prefer structure or flexibility"?**

HOW CAN EMPATHISING WITH TEAM HELP US TO BECOME A BETTER MANAGER?

WHAT ARE WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN SHOW EMPATHY TOWARDS YOUR TEAM?

ENGAGE IN CONVERSATION AND ASK BETTER QUESTIONS

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HOW ARE YOU...GOING TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

Why bother asking a question that is almost guaranteed to generate no new information? That's why the question, "How are you?," is in need of a drastic makeover.

When asking "How are you?", 99% of the time—what is the response? "...alright" Sometimes, the respondent doesn't even answer, they simply bounce the question back.

Let's think about asking better questions, particularly in a way that shows you are genuinely asking about the person's life. Or better yet, in a way that shows genuine care and leads to new information that can inspire positive action.

Some of those questions might be:

- **"What's on the Bridge?"**
- **"How's your Bridge?"**
- **"What's your current state of mind?"**
- **"What are you looking forward to this week?"**
- **"What is going well this week?"**
- **"How are you feeling?"**

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF A BETTER QUESTION THAN 'HOW ARE YOU?'

HOW COULD WE USE THIS?

LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

SYMPATHY: feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune.

EMPATHY: the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

It is important to put yourself in other people's shoes and provide emotional support. When engaging with your colleagues, consider Professor Albert Mehrabian's communication model, which states the following percentages when communicating feelings or attitudes:

- **BODY LANGUAGE /FACIAL EXPRESSION ACCOUNTS FOR 55% OF MEANING**
- **TONE OF VOICE ACCOUNTS FOR 38%**
- **WORDS ACCOUNT FOR JUST 7%**

Understanding someone's body language is vital when communicating and empathising with their current state.

Some ways that you can show empathy to your colleagues are:

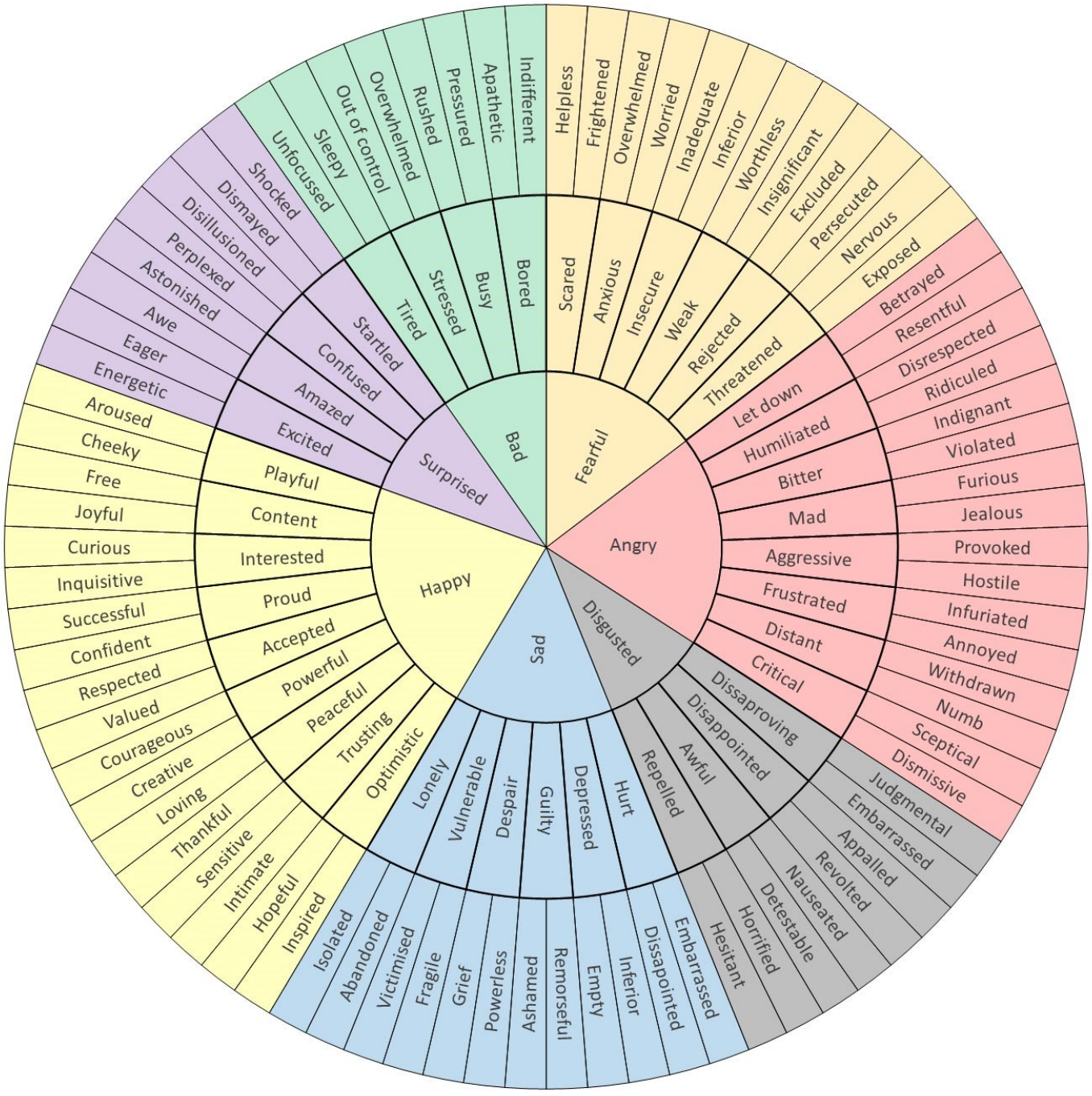
- **Recognise each others differences and appreciate and respect them. Embrace the traits that each individual has e.g. approach an introvert differently to an extrovert to gain the best response from them.**
- **Listen to your colleagues. Creating opportunities for colleagues to tell you their opinions and feelings without judgement or interruption.**
- **Ask questions to better understand the individual in your teams**

THE FEELINGS WHEEL

All of us can probably become more precise in identifying what we feel. There is no one way to "map" emotions and how they relate to each other, but the Feelings Wheel, developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox, illustrates the wealth of emotions available to us.

As you can see, the middle wheel contains more specific versions of the feelings in the central wheel. The outer wheel contains common responses to those feelings. So for instance when you're excited you might be more daring, and when you feel hurt you might become more distant.

As Managers; how could we use this? As a guide to identify our own emotions? Identify someone else's or help them to determine how they are feeling?



PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

How many times have you been amazed at how communication can go badly wrong?

How easy it is for the slightest gesture or tone of voice to be taken the wrong way?

Providing emotional support doesn't mean acting as a counsellor or therapist, but as allies you have an interest in maintaining good relationships and a productive workplace, so there are many practical ways you can support your colleagues.

For example:

Inform yourself about mental ill health such as depression and anxiety in order to pre-empt any misunderstandings should colleagues approach you about this.

Promote and exemplify personal resilience including work/life balance.

Use a buddy system to support younger, less experienced employees who may be less able to cope with emotional demands. Pair them up with an experienced 'buddy' within the company; someone they can turn to during the early stage of their career and ask for advice when needed.

Establish regular meetings where employees can share and 'offload' their emotional issues and support each other. Peer support is a great mechanism to alleviate emotional stress.

Encourage an open, honest discussion about mental health, wellbeing and stress that acknowledges that it is not a weakness but common human trait.

Acknowledge that each employee has different levels of resilience/different bridges.

Be visible and accessible, regular communication of availability allows for flexibility within your team, make sure you all inform when you are available or can contact each for any support.

Ask questions and listen actively or empathetically, validate their difficulties or problems and avoid judgement.

MY ACTION PLAN — 30 DAY CHALLENGE

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KNOWLEDGE IS POWER…ONLY IF YOU APPLY IT OR TAKE ACTION

WRITE DOWN A PLAN WITH POINTS OF ACTION:

WHAT DO YOU AIM TO ACHIEVE OVER THE NEXT 30 DAYS AS A RESULT OF THIS WORKSHOP?

HOW WILL YOU ENGAGE WITH YOUR TEAM? HOW WILL YOU BE EMPATHETIC TOWARDS YOUR TEAM? HOW WILL YOU BE SUPPORTED?

Action Point 1: ENGAGE

Action Point 2: EMPATHISE

Who will you make yourself accountable to over the next 30 days?

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

Stress is a much used (and abused) term these days. You frequently hear people say "I'm stressed" or "I'm depressed", yet there is still much confusion about what these terms actually mean and how best to tackle them. This is where we can help. We are the UK's leading authority on stress management issues, which is why you will regularly hear us talking about this topic in the media.

International Wellbeing Insights is dedicated to leading effective universal change by maximising your resilience, happiness, productivity and success with our passionate approach to reducing stress and promoting wellbeing. Our extensive knowledge of stress and wellbeing and our cutting edge interventions have made us the primary organisation dealing with work-related stress reduction and wellbeing promotion in the UK since 2003.

For years, we've been empowering individuals to take charge of their wellbeing through our workshops, guides and regular updates. We also act as a trusted advisor for many companies such as British Airways, Allianz and Shell, guiding them through the mental wellbeing solution maze.

For more information see
www.stress.org.uk or www.wellbeing.work.
You can also call 0203 142 8650
or email info@stress.org.uk

If you want to promote wellbeing in your company using branded stress management products, go to www.stressmoodcards.com.

NOTES

We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

Find Us Here:
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We have supported many organisations, *including*: