

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 12, 1985

## DEVELOPING THE COMPETENCIES OF "RESISTANCE TO STRESS" AND 'ACCURATE SELF-ASSESSMENT''

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an experiential exercise designed to permit students to: (1) determine their overall level of stress and their stress profile (the competency of accurate self-assessment); (2) explore sources of stress (stressors) and (3) diagnose the level and types of stress inferred from a brief biographic "lifesketch" provided as part of the exercise. The point of the exercise is to have students understand the nature and sources of stress before various stress reduction techniques can be effectively utilized.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past half decade or so the competency-based approach to business and management education, both at the undergraduate and MBA levels, has been gaining recognition. It has been suggested as an approach to more effectively prepare students for radically different types of management jobs in the twenty-first century.

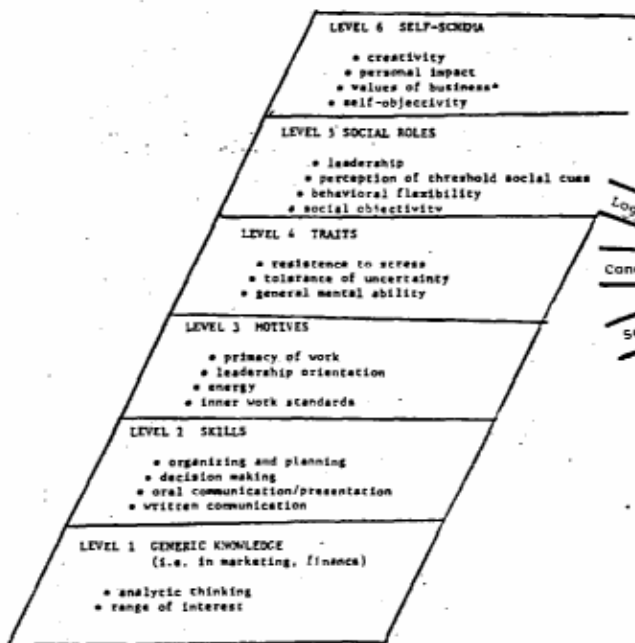
The root concept of this approach to business and management education, training, and development--Life-Long Learning for the manager--is a competency. A working

definition of this term is provided by Klemp ("Identifying, Measuring, and Integrating Competence," in *Defining and Measuring Competence*, Paul S. Pottinger and Joan Goldsmith, editors. New Directions for Experiential Learning, No. 3, 1979.) "a competency is a generic knowledge, skill, trait, self schema or motive of a person that is causally related to effective behavior references to external performance criteria."

At the college/university level, two models have been developed. The first is the result of work being completed by the Accreditation Research Committee (ARC) of the American Assembly of Collegiate School of Business (AACSB). The competency-based approach (focusing on outputs or "value added") is being considered as an alternative path to accreditation of undergraduate and graduate business programs by the AACSB. This is in contrast to the more traditional path to accreditation, the "inputs" approach, which focuses on number of "terminal" degrees faculty and number of volumes in the library.

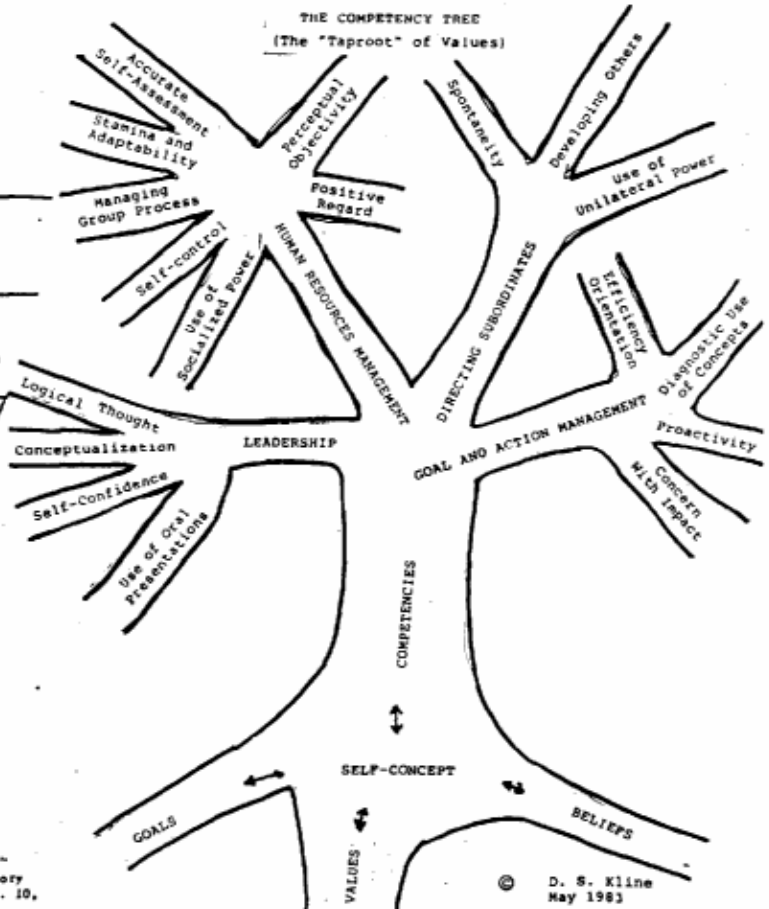
Phase I of the ARC research identified a number of "non-cognitive" attributes (competencies), one of which is "resistance to stress". This competency is defined

FIGURE 1  
A LADDER OF COMPETENCY LEVELS  
(BASED UPON AACSB PHASE I ACCREDITATION RESEARCH)



\* Largely "manipulative" but needing to evolve to "existential." See: Clare Graves, "Levels of Existence: An Open System Theory of Values." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Fall 1970, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 131-155.

FIGURE 2



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as “stability of performance under pressure and/or opposition”. It is located within the cluster of competencies labeled stability of performance and is viewed, within a hierarchy model of managerial competencies (see Figure 1) as a (personality) trait.

The second competency based-model has been developed by the American Management Associations (AMA) as a graduate management program initiated in New York City in the fall of 1981. One of the competencies within the cluster of human resources management is “accurate self-assessment. It is defined by the AMA as “the ability to appraise one’s strengths and weaknesses realistically”.

Accurate self-assessment by any manager of both his or her strengths and weaknesses is an integral part of a person’s “self concept”. Figure 2 shows the AMA competencies as an analogy of a tree. The four parts of the base of the tree are the four key components of self-concept: Competencies (the trunk), goals, beliefs, and values (the “taproot”). The four main branches of the tree represent the four AMA clusters. Accurate self-assessment is shown as one of the competencies in the human resources management cluster.

Thus, it would seem that knowing ones strengths and weaknesses including the sources of stress one is exposed to would be important to the development of both job and managerial effectiveness and productivity. One cannot pick up an issue of a business or general publication without seeing some article referring to stress. In addition, consultants are prospering by delivering seminars and workshops on the topic to organizations which have discovered that overly high personal and organizational stress leads to falling productivity and poor job satisfaction.

The principle source utilized for this exercise is Daniel Girdano and George Everly, Controlling Stress and Tension: A Holistic Approach, Prentice-Hall, 1979. Other sources (not at all an exhaustive list on the topic) are (not in alphabetical order)

Seyle, Hans. Stress Without Distress. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1974

Levinson, Harry. Executive Stress. New York: New American Library, 1975

Tanner, Ogden. Stress. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1976

Pelletier, Kenneth. Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer. New York: Dell, 1976

Levi, Lennart, Preventing Work Stress. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1980

Moss, Leonard. Management Stress. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1980

Yates, Jere E. Managing Stress: A Businessman’s Guide. New York: American Management Associations (AMOCN), 1979

“Stress: Can We Cope” (Cover Story). Time, June 6, 1983

## AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

### DEVELOPING THE COMPETENCIES OF “RESISTANCE TO STRESS” AND “ACCURATE SELF-ASSESSMENT”

#### Goals

1. To examine the sources of stress
2. To complete a self diagnosis of one’s own composite stress level and areas of high vulnerability to specific types of stress.
3. To role play a stressed individual in order to better understand the sources of stress and some stress reduction techniques

#### Group Size

Any number of even-sized groups of four, six, or eight persons.

#### Duration of Exercise

About one hour.

#### Materials Needed

1. A nine-item self diagnostic, self administered stress questionnaire (Source: Girdano and Everly)
2. A personal stress profile summary sheet (Figure 3)
3. Additional information sheets-one for each of the nine stress areas (Attachment A is an example of one area)
4. A biographic “life sketch” for each of two stressed individuals (Attachment B is an example of one)
5. Black, red, green and yellow felt pens for each group

#### Process

1. Prior to the exercise, the instructor passes out the nine-item stress questionnaire. It is to be completed by each individual and brought to class the day of the exercise.
2. At the beginning of the exercise, the stress profile summary sheet is handed out to each student. Subtotals from each of the nine items of the self-administered questionnaire are transferred to the

FIGURE 3  
PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE SUMMARY SHEET

Exercise:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Adaptation	Frustration	Overload	Depression	Nutrition	Noise	Self Perception	Type A Behavior	Anxiety Reaction
	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40	- 40
	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30
Severe	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20
Indicative	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10
of High	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
Vulnerability	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
to Stressors	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30	- 30
Line A	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20
Moderate	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10
Vulnerability	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
to Stressors	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
Line B	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20	- 20
Low	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10
Vulnerability	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
to Stressors	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5	- 5
	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10	- 10

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summary sheet, as points on each of the nine vertical scales (see Figure 3).

- A. The black felt pen is used to connect points to form a "stress profile."
  - B. Red felt pens are used to block in the area above line A on the stress profile summary sheet.
  - C. Yellow felt pens are used to block in areas between the lines labeled A and B on the stress profile summary sheet.
  - D. Green felt pens are used to block in the area below the B on the stress profile summary sheet.
3. Group members may share and/or compare their personal stress profile summary sheets (about 7 minutes).
  4. Group discusses and decides about which two stress areas it would like to have more information.
  5. Supplemental information sheets on two areas selected are obtained from instructor (enough copies for each group member). (See Attachment A for sample information sheet on #8 type A patterns of behavior.)
  6. Supplemental information is discussed by group.
  7. Groups break up voluntarily into two equal size sub groups (of two, three or four, maximum, each). Sub groups designate themselves as "orange" or "blue" groups.
  8. One member from each sub group picks up two items from instructor: (1) either an "orange" or "blue" life sketch about a hypothetical person and (2) a blank personal stress profile summary sheet. (See Attachment B for sample of "orange" life sketch.)
  9. Sub-group members read their respective life sketch.
  10. Sub-group members diagnose their respective life sketch in terms of the nine stress areas in order to:
    - A. Identify major high stress areas operating in the life of the individual.
    - B. Using red felt pens, block in high stress area above line A on personal stress profile summary sheet.
  11. Within groups, one person from each sub-group briefs other sub-group on stress profile, e.g. an "orange" sub-group person briefs "blue" sub-group on stress profile of "orange" life sketch; similarly, a "blue" sub-group person briefs "orange" sub-group on stress profile of "blue" life sketch.
  12. Spokesperson from "orange" sub-group in each group reports to class. Instructor may use blank personal stress profile summary sheet on transparency to "build up" stress profile of person depicted in "orange" life sketch.
  13. Spokesperson from each "blue" sub-group reports to the class. Instructor may use blank stress profile sheet on transparency to "build up" profile of person depicted in "blue" life sketch.
  14. Time permitting, instructor leads discussion of sources of stress (stressors) and selected stress reduction techniques.

### ATTACHMENT A

#### Component 8

#### TYPE A PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR

A highly utilized approach to the diagnosis of stress contrasts two diametrically opposed patterns of behavior. The model, developed by two California cardiologists (Myer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, Type A Behavior and Your Heart. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) posits Type A behavior which carries high vulnerability to heart attack and Type B which does not. In general, the list of so-called cardiovascular risk factors includes: smoking, lack of exercise, obesity, and high fat diets.

More specific to organizational processes and the manager's job are such Type A behaviors and personality traits as:

1. Great concern with the urgency of time; trying to do as much as possible in the shortest period of time
2. High achievement motivation-(the need to excel in everything one does) at times almost out of control deteriorating into unnatural aggressive behavior; tendency to lose temper easily
3. Inability to have "fun"; not very humorous; failure to let the "child" in all of us escape at times
4. Involvement in many and diverse activities at the same time (called "polyphasic" activity); a lot of "balls" (projects going) in the air at the same time.

Evident in the Type A behavior pattern is the perception that work is an end in itself. Personal goals are intensely focused upon (becoming very wealthy, constant enhancement of one's ego, gaining power over others).

The mistaken notion is held by Type A people that hard work in terms of the quantity of time and energy spent on a task is the appropriate approach to life. But appropriate for what? Such behavior may lead to high position, status, above average income and the exhilaration of winning battles on the job. But such behavior may also generate symptoms of heart trouble ahead. Such symptoms manifest themselves via the following categories: mood/disposition (worry, sleeplessness, forgetfulness), visceral (upset stomach, pounding heart, headaches, moist hands), and musculoskeletal (shaking hands, twitches, tense muscles).

Type A behavior is learned behavior in the sense that a person is socialized into such a pattern by early family, school, church, and peer pressure experiences. The behavior patterns are then reinforced by many business organizations which purposely create a "Type A organizational culture." But, to a degree, Type A behavior may be "unlearned."

Stress reduction techniques which help to shift Type A patterns to Type B (low cardiovascular risk) are:

1. If relevant, reducing weight to what is medically appropriate to one's age, height and bone structure
2. Stop smoking
3. If appropriate, reduction or elimination of caffeine via coffee, tea, soft drinks
4. Dietary change away from high fat foods
5. Learning "biofeedback" methods of relaxation

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6. Development of effective time management skills to:
  - A. reduce the urgency of time
  - B. to balance your "supply" of time (to do various tasks) with the "demand" on your time by your spouse, your boss, your job.
7. Reduce or remove ego involvement from its dominant role in behavior
8. Learning to plan tasks, set priorities realistically, and allocate your scarce resources (time and energy) carefully
9. Reduction of tendency to do or think about many things at the same time by developing the power of concentration focused on a challenge (read a difficult book instead of a superficial novel)

It is generally estimated that stress on the job in America costs employers between \$75 and \$100 billion in absenteeism, company medical expenses and lowered productivity. Beyond that, stress is a killer; stress contributes, directly or indirectly, to death by coronary heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidental injuries, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide. It can no longer be ignored as a factor in the quality of life in the 20th century America.

### ATTACHMENT B Orange Form

#### SAN SELIGMAN: FINANCIAL ANALYST

Sam is a 28-year-old financial analyst with a large bank in a major U.S. east coast metropolitan area. He has been with the company for five years (two years in the present position). During that time he has had one promotion, from junior to senior financial analyst. His office is in an "environmentally controlled," high rise office building in the downtown area. The office décor is quite modern with sound-proofing panels separating office cubicles, green plants all around, and bright colors for walls, furniture and equipment.

Sam has never been married and leads, by his own admission, a somewhat "lonely" life. His main complaint is that "nothing very exciting ever happens to me." In fact, during the past year, very little out of the ordinary has taken place in his life--no personal injury or illness, no death in the immediate family or of a close friend, no change in financial status.

Sam was born the only son of a high achieving father and homemaker mother. His father owns and manages a chain of four retail clothing businesses. Although he had his own apartment for two years, he became lonely and now lives with his mother and father in a high rise apartment building within the city, about 20 miles from work. Besides his parents his companions are two dogs, a cat, and several tanks of tropical fish.

Sam has a tendency toward obesity; he is about 90 pounds over the weight appropriate for his age, height (five feet, ten inches) and bone structure (medium). He loves his mother's cooking, especially her highest content soups and stews. He smokes about one and the half packs of "real" cigarettes a day and drinks about nine cups of coffee during an average, frustrating day. He has, on occasion, been able to lose about 50 pounds of weight by going on one of the "fadish" diets he reads about in popular magazines. But the nature of his work (demanding), the supervisory style of his boss (autocratic) and the attractiveness of his mother's cooking (the aroma from the kitchen when he comes home from

work) have lured him back to his rather permanent obese condition.

The Seligman's family doctor has advised Sam to stop smoking once and for all, to reduce weight, and stop eating large quantities of white flour, salt, white sugar, and potatoes (especially his mother's famous dumplings). The doctor has warned that failure to do this generates an 80% above average probability he will suffer a major (possibly fatal) heart attack by the time he is 33 years old. Poor Sam is in a real quandary. Can he so radically change his entire life style?

Because he is frequently frustrated at home (the apartment is "cluttered" his mother's extensive collection of early American antiques) at the office (where he works as part of a team and where there are frequent interruptions to his concentration in the form of phone and face-to-face requests for financial data) and in his social life (where he is shy and almost afraid of women).

Although he holds a bachelor's degree and a master of business administration degree (MBA) both from a prestigious eastern U.S. university, he tends to believe he is not very intelligent. At work he is not comfortable in his dealings with superiors. At home he frequently confides to his mother (he rarely has serious talks about anything with his father) that he does not "feel in control" of his life, that he avoids crowds during lunchtime in the city, and that when things "go wrong" in different areas of his life, he blames himself.

Then Sam looks at his total life, his roles as son, financial analyst, commuter (he travels about 20 miles one way to work via car, train and subway), he does not feel "overwhelmed." He paces himself through the day, avoids crowds, sleeps or reads on the train and subway. He is pursuing no additional formal studies in business. On his job as financial analyst, he is well supported by the bank with more than adequate secretarial, research librarian and other staff resources.