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Stress is an important fact of life. Stress experiences vary according to kind, intensity, frequency, duration, and effect. No one is immune from stress; everyone has to cope with it somehow. How well we manage stress in our work life largely determines whether its effects will be beneficial, benign, or harmful to us and others. (U)



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In order to learn more about work-related stress in various Agency environments, OMS conducts stress studies of certain groups of personnel. Completed studies include OC Telecommunicators and CIA Operations Center personnel. Studies in progress are DDO Operations Officers, DDO O/S clericals, and [Redacted] employees. An O/S Wives study is in the planning stage. The purpose of these studies is to identify, measure, evaluate, and report the sources, kinds, amounts, and effects of work-related stress and how personnel perceive, respond, and cope with stress-producing stimuli (stressors). Each study is based on hypotheses, ideas, and techniques which are derived from various sources, particularly pilot samples of personnel who suggest areas to be explored. Each study involves coordination and liaison with senior management. Individuals undergo an extensive stress evaluation and a structured interview with a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. Privacy is respected and confidentiality is assured. Only qualitative

and statistical group results are reported. These ground rules provide for free and full cooperation. (C)

Organizational stressors studied are those associated with reassignment process, assignment locale, work activities, job conditions, interpersonal relationships, critical events, management factors, career development, and esprit de corps. Individual factors include motivations for assignment, coping tactics, need-satisfaction, personality styles, morale, stress experiences, and support systems. Effects of different stress variables on the spouse, family, productivity, health, behavior, and morale are also assessed. Interpretations, suggestions, and recommendations about work-related stress offered by research subjects are collated with other research data. Results of representative sampling are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed, evaluated, and reported. (C)

OMS Stress Studies draw on theories, approaches, and findings of the general field of stress research but depart from some basic theoretical and methodological positions. Most stress research and testing is based on the disease model which defines stress as a nonspecific, undifferentiated, stereotyped biochemical response of the body to any demand for adaptation made upon it. The stress reaction is the same, regardless of the kind of stressor. What counts is the intensity of the demand to readjust. Any and all stressors, pleasant and unpleasant, cause stress because they disturb the balance of one's total system. Thus, most stress researchers and testers consider all

stressors, desirable or undesirable, to be noxious agents which cause some biological or psychological insult (wear and tear). For example, being promoted, getting fired, taking a vacation, or being held hostage are considered to be additive stressors because each requires readjustment to changes in one's life situation. (U)

This way of conceptualizing and measuring stress is like saying that mushrooms and toadstools are additive because they are similar in some respects. Instead, OMS Stress Studies split stressors into those which cause Positive Stress and Negative Stress for each individual. The processes and effects of each kind of stress are qualitatively different in ways that have serious import. A vivid example of the important differences between Positive Stress and Negative Stress is the second WBC welterweight championship bout of Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran. Although this rematch was an intense stressor for both prizefighters, each experienced a qualitatively different kind of stress. Leonard exhibited Positive Stress, which is perceived as pleasant, attractive, invigorating, challenging, manageable, exhilarating, motivating, enhancing, and rewarding. He performed like a champion. In contrast, Duran evidenced Negative Stress, which is perceived as unpleasant, upsetting, threatening, confusing, distressing, uncontrollable, frustrating, sickening, and disabling. He quit in the middle of the fight because he couldn't take any more Negative Stress. (U)

OMS Stress Studies also find that both Positive Stress

and Negative Stress involve adaptation to critical changes in the status quo. It is not the stressor but the individual's appraisal of the stressor which determines the kind and degree of stress which is experienced. The stressor is judged as more of a danger than an opportunity if it poses a potential threat or frustration of one's important needs or goals. Thus, our anticipation of an unfavorable serious consequence triggers the state of Negative Stress. By the same token, Positive Stress occurs when we judge a stressor to be more of an opportunity than a danger as regards our important needs or goals. We are more competent and confident about a challenging, potentially rewarding stressor which we think we can master. How we view a crisis determines whether or not our stress is Positive or Negative. Our perception and judgment make a big difference in our psychological, physical, and behavioral responses. For example, Duran stripped Leonard of his welterweight crown in June 1980. Leonard seemed too nice and lacking in the killer instinct whereas Duran was known as El Animal because of his aggressive fury and atavistic rage to win in the ring. Leonard trained properly and got up for the fight. His mission, which he never lost track of, was to prove himself. For Leonard, this heroic challenge and opportunity was like going to the Olympics. Psyching out Duran and making him quit was more satisfying to Leonard than knocking him out. During the fight, Duran viewed his crisis-situation more as a danger than as an opportunity to satisfy his needs. His burning intensity waned and he

became weak, embarrassed, confused, and bewildered as Leonard outboxed, mercilessly laughed at, taunted, and humiliated him. In essence, Leonard made Duran a foolish spectacle and laughing stock of the hooting crowd. Duran's frustration, anger, and shame got the best of him. In the eighth round of the 15-round bout, he turned his back on Leonard and told the referee "<sup># for!</sup> No mas, no mas!" This startling and controversial ending of the Leonard-Duran championship prizefight was a stunning surprise to everyone, including Leonard. Afterwards, Leonard said Duran was like a clock that was so wound up, it blew a spring. His bewilderment and helplessness typifies incapacitating Negative Stress. (U)

OMS Stress Studies maintain that both Positive Stress and Negative Stress can have serious consequences. For example, Duran's response to Negative Stress resulted in a swift devastation of his professional reputation which was built on machismo, a daunting 72-1 career record, including 55 knockouts, and a previous victory over Leonard. One of the fiercest and finest lightweights and welterweights of modern time, Duran lost his will, heart, pride, name, and control of his destiny because of his response to Negative Stress. For the first time in professional life, Duran suffered shame and fell into sustained disgrace. Because Leonard capitalized on Positive Stress, he regained his crown, but his triumph and jubilation were overshadowed by the persistent question of why Duran packed it in. In short, fight or flight is a generic reaction to the

opportunity/danger in a crisis. (U)

Stress is a function of the interaction of individual's situations, response states, support systems, and consequences. OMS Stress Studies are designed to measure and evaluate these multivariate phenomena and their relationships. Individual Differences is a crucial principle in this holistic model of stress. Simply stated, we are similar, but we also vary in significant aspects. These important differences influence one's anticipations, sensitivities, perceptions, judgments, actions, and reactions to different stressors. For a combination of personal reasons, the individual <sup>perceives</sup> ~~apprehends~~ ~~whether~~ the outcome of stress <sup>to</sup> ~~will~~ be harmful, benign, or beneficial. Thus, Positive and Negative Stress is in the eye of the beholder. What is one person's meat is another's poison.

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We also live and work in complex dynamic and demanding environments. Situational changes tax our adaptive capacities. These stressors vary in frequency, intensity, duration, and danger/opportunity ratio. However, stress cannot be defined exclusively by a stressor. The capacity of any stressor to produce Positive, Negative, or Mixed Stress depends upon the interaction of critical individual and situational variables. This interaction may or may not result in stress. (U)

When triggered, stress usually exhibits a complex response pattern of arousal, disequilibrium, and mobilization. When a stressor is thought to be

significantly important, immediate, challenging, or threatening, the individual will become aroused, e.g., alarmed, apprehensive, or keyed up about the anticipated consequences of the situation. The person's total homeostatic state goes out of balance, and defenses and coping responses are activated. Their purpose is not only to restore the individual's normal steady state by resolving or adapting to the stressful situation but also to achieve new and different experiential levels. The more the individual's important needs or goals are challenged or endangered, the more intense and extreme the total stress response will be. Thus, the amount of subjective arousal, upset, mobilization, adaptation, and action involved in the total response is an index of the intensity of the crisis. The kind of stress--Positive, Negative, or Mixed--depends on one's judgment of the outcome of the crisis in the context of factors such as one's values, abilities, confidence, resources, and needs. The total stress response eventuates in an outcome which is effective or ineffective, harmful or beneficial, costly or economical, frustrating or fulfilling.

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How effectively we perceive, appraise, respond, and perform under work-related stress depends upon the adequacy and availability of our support systems which prepare, sustain, motivate, and help us to cope with stress. General examples of support systems are helpful persons such as spouse, colleague, or boss; recreational activities such as a mental break, hobby, or sport; and organizational

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services, e.g., selection, placement, training, preparation, support, esprit de corps, and leadership. As a rule, inadequate support from these external resources weakens our ability to cope with stress. Conversely, any sign of helpful support will strengthen our capacity and resolve to master stress. Generally, support systems can be beneficial or harmful in various ways. Their availability and adequacy hold important meanings for the individual, family, and organizational unit. (U)

In short, OMS Stress Studies measure, understand, and communicate the nature, causes, and effects of Positive and Negative Stress. Results and recommendations contribute to managing stressors and controlling stresses. Most personnel who have participated in OMS Stress Studies consider them to be useful in various ways. Results can be applied to selection, training, preparation for assignment, support activities, and services. Almost all Subjects have found their participation in the Studies to be personally helpful. They appreciate the Agency's recognition of stressors, interest in stress, and concern for them as persons who experience work-related stress. OMS Stress Studies could not succeed without the cooperation and contributions of Subjects who bear witness to both Positive and Negative Stress. (U)