PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND EXECUTIVE STRESS:

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Personal effectiveness is defined as a distinct set of behavioural competencies (qualities, skills and attributes) that are associated with effective management behaviour or embedded within all work-related activities. It includes key behaviours required for a competent manager to perform.

In order to achieve personal competency it is important for you as a manager to understand your own strengths and to maximise them as well as identify your own weaknesses and learn how to overcome them. Once you take responsibility of self-development, you are able to help others to develop themselves through reviews, daily interaction, informal feedback, advice and guidance.

Being effective as an individual and organisation is no longer an option but a price for entry into the playing field of life. The greater the change the more challenges individuals face and therefore the more the demand for personal effectiveness.

"If only I had a different boss..." "If only the developers weren't so hard to work with..." "If only residents would get involved in the process earlier, rather than at the last minute..." "If only we had more resources to work with... more money to attract good employees... more time to juggle the demands…" *If only.*

Such are the frustrations of life in the twenty first century. Too many demands, not enough time or resources, and the increasing feeling that so many things are simply beyond our control. Customers, bosses and constituents expect more, delivered faster and better than ever before. Simultaneously, employees are demanding more and are ready to take advantage of abundant job market alternatives if they don't get it with current employer. All the while, changes in technology and the competitive landscape keep us continuously off-balance.

In the past, working hard and fast was all that was needed to guarantee success. Now, it's increasingly apparent that an entirely new approach is required.

If we continue to apply old notions to new world standards, we anchor our energies to the past. We become blinded to approaching signals and immediate feedback. We keep our critical attentions turned backward. It's like trying to drive along an unfamiliar road while looking only at the images in the rear view mirror, a strategy that can produce more than frustration and burn-out at best, or total obsolescence, failure and wreckage at worst.

This article advocates that a whole new approach to effectiveness involving "state of being," attitudes and behaviours is indeed required for success in this changed and changing world. It presents some strategies for personal and organizational effectiveness that combine to create a new capacity for success.

Personal and Organizational Effectiveness strategies

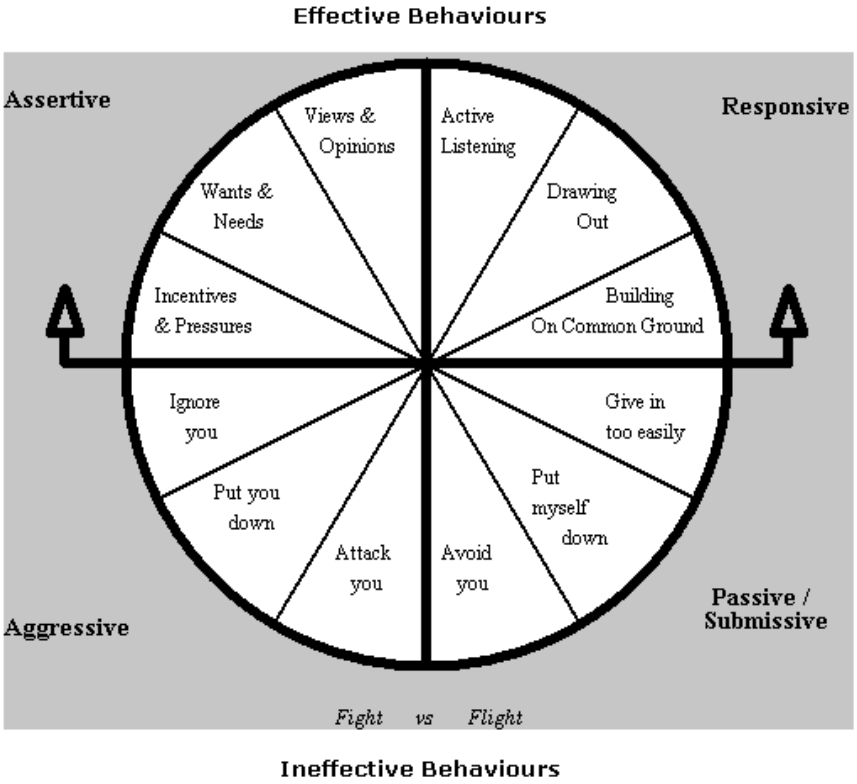
Whether in government, the non-profit sector, or private industry, everyone is experiencing the effects of acceleration. The pace of business, rate of

change, and emergence of unprecedented challenges have begun to overwhelm our sense of order, threatening us with chaos. And the trend shows no sign of abating.
Many individuals and organizations are beginning to recognize that a long-term solution to the emerging chaos requires something more than yesterday's part answers: "work faster," "be smarter," "get more resources"... They recognize that an entirely new approach must be used to create success in this entirely new and rapidly changing world.
In order to be effective going forward, we must reframe the way we view ourselves and our world. This requires changing the way we think about our challenges, the ways we collaborate with others, and the means by which we strive for results.
We are learning that certain fundamental approaches to effectiveness can transform both organizations and the individuals within them. These elements create the framework within which success and results can be achieved in an entirely different way than used to occur in the past. Just as significantly, people are taking these concepts out of the realm of business and organizations, and applying them in their personal lives to achieve entirely new levels of success in their families and communities.

Covey1989 suggests seven habits of highly effective people as follows:

- Be proactive
- Begin with the end in mind
- Put first things first
- Think win/win
- Seek first to understand then seek to be understood
- Synergies
- Sharpen the saw
- Find voice and inspire others to find theirs (2004)

Dr. Trezise in her website on personal growth and effectiveness defines effective and ineffective behaviours in the table below.



Adopted from www.growthworkscoaching.com

Effective behaviours include all behaviour that is assertive and responsive while ineffective behaviours include aggression and passive submissive. Effective behaviours facilitate you to express views and opinions concisely and supported by reasons relevant to the situation. You do this when you want to simply and clearly let someone know what your view or opinion is on a subject. When carried out most effectively, the statement is short, concise and not repeated. Words include:
'I think'
'I believe'
'In my opinion'
Supported by reasons why.
Ineffective behaviour includes expressing the negative views e.g. 'attacking' the other person's opinion. For personal effectiveness one needs to do the following:

- Vividly Define Purpose, Vision and Mission.
- Clearly Define—and Demonstrate—Core Values.
- Create, Develop and Nurture Productive Relationships.
- Change Relationship with Results.
- Take Responsibility.
- Recognize and Practice "the Power of Choice."
- Refuse to Be "Victim.
- Take Risks.
- Commit yourself 100 percent.

Personal Effective Model
This model identifies behaviours and skills that are necessary for managers to develop before they are able to prove competency in the functions of

management. Key behaviours and skills are identified for learning, development, assessment and application across all areas of life and at different situations. Murdock, A. and Scutt, S. N. 2003 identify sample behaviours and skills necessary for managers' effectiveness and relative indicators to include:

- Acting assertively – gets things done through others, show resilience and determination in the face of pressure and difficulties
- Acting strategically – managing and obtaining commitment of others, identifies the way forward in complex environment without loosing focus of vision and objectives
- Ethical behaviour - identifies concerns and resolves complex dilemmas in open reasoned manner
- Team building skills – relating and showing sensitivity to others encourages and builds group cohesion necessary for motivation
- Communication skills – share information, ideas and arguments with diverse audience
- Result oriented – being proactive and take responsibility for getting things done
- Self control – adaptable to changing world while taking advantage of new ways of doing things
- Ability to search information – gather information from multiple sources, develops better working relations and make better decisions
- Ability to thing and make decisions – analyse, deduce from information in order to form judgement and take decisions.

Stress Management

Stress is a state of physiological, psychological and behavioural reaction that serves as adaptive function to environment Franken 1994. What do we mean when we say we are "stressed out"? We may just be having a bad day, or feeling pressured by too many things to do and too little time to do them. Or we may also have had a fight with a friend or family member. Or our job may be making us feel that it is just a rat race without a purpose, or feeling too much pressure and a lack of support and companionship. In many cases, we are "bummed out" and "fatigued" and tend to think about how we feel at the moment and how to make it better right away. Rarely do we give much thought to the longer time frame and how our body is handling or not handling the pressure. Yet, it is the longer time frame of months and even years that is important for understanding the bad side of stress.

Stress activates adaptive responses. The body marshals its forces to confront a threat and generally, does a good job of protecting us in the short run. So why can stress be so bad for our bodies and brains?

Stress can prematurely age us and leave us chronically fatigued or depressed. When exposure to stress whether from a traumatic event to just the daily hassle of rush hour traffic or too much email disrupts the body's internal balance ("**homeostasis**"), it can go one of three general ways: the body can regain its normal equilibrium once the stress has passed, or it can become stuck in an over or under-aroused state.

How some people cope with stress by reaching for a beer or cigarette as opposed to heading to the gym also plays a big role in the impact stress will have on our bodies.
When the body is challenged by almost anything that happens to us, from getting out of bed in the morning or running up a flight of stairs or having to stand up and give a talk, the brain activates the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). This is the involuntary system of nerves, which controls and stimulates the output of two hormones, cortisol from the adrenal cortex and adrenalin from the adrenal medulla. These two hormones and the activity of the ANS help us cope. The ANS and the adrenalin keep us alert by increasing our heart rate and blood pressure and quickly mobilizing energy reserves. In contrast, cortisol works more slowly, helps replenish energy supplies and, at the same time, helps us to remember important things. For example cortisol readies our immune system to handle any threat from bacterial/viral or injury.
Another aspect of cortisol action is called "containment." Many physiological systems are pitted against one another so that neither system can get out of control. The initial first line response to many noxious or pathogenic agents is normally "contained" by circulating levels of cortisol. This is why we take corticoids for an inflammation or skin irritation. Cortisol also contains acquired immune responses and this is particularly useful when those responses are harmful, such as in an allergy or an autoimmune disorder.

The autonomic nervous system consists of sensory neurons and motor neurons that run between the central nervous system (especially the **hypothalamus** and **medulla oblongata**) and various internal organs such as the:

- heart
- lungs
- viscera
- glands (both exocrine and endocrine)

It is responsible for monitoring conditions in the internal environment and bringing about appropriate changes in them. The contraction of both smooth muscle and cardiac muscle is controlled by motor neurons of the autonomic system.

The actions of the autonomic nervous system are largely **involuntary.**
The organs (the "viscera") of our body, such as the heart, stomach and intestines, are regulated by a part of the nervous system called the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS is part of the peripheral nervous system and it controls many organs and muscles within the body. In most situations, we are unaware of the workings of the ANS because it functions in an involuntary, reflexive manner. For example, we do not notice when blood vessels change size or when our heart beats faster. However, some people can be trained to control some functions of the ANS such as heart rate or blood pressure.

The ANS is most important in two situations:

1. In emergencies that cause stress and require us to "fight" or take "flight" (run away)
2. In non-emergencies that allow us to "rest" and "digest."

The ANS regulates:

- Muscles
  - in the skin (around hair follicles; smooth muscle)
  - around blood vessels (smooth muscle)
  - in the eye (the iris; smooth muscle)
  - in the stomach, intestines and bladder (smooth muscle)
  - of the heart (cardiac muscle)
- Glands

The Autonomic Nervous System

Structure	Sympathetic Stimulation	Parasympathetic Stimulation
Iris (eye muscle)	Pupil dilation	Pupil constriction
Salivary Glands	Saliva production reduced	Saliva production increased
Oral/Nasal Mucosa	Mucus production reduced	Mucus production increased
Heart	Heart rate and force increased	Heart rate and force decreased
Lung	Bronchial muscle relaxed	Bronchial muscle contracted
Stomach	Peristalsis reduced	Gastric juice secreted; motility increased
Small Intestine	Motility reduced	Digestion increased
Large Intestine	Motility reduced	Secretions and motility increased
Liver	Increased conversion of glycogen to glucose	
Kidney	Decreased urine secretion	Increased urine secretion
Adrenal medulla	Norepinephrine and epinephrine secreted	
Bladder Wall relaxed	Sphincter closed Wall contracted	Sphincter relaxed

Sympathetic stimulation can cause the release of noradrenaline which in turn:-

- stimulates heart beat
- raises blood pressure
- dilates the pupils
- dilates the trachea and bronchi

- stimulates the conversion of liver glycogen into glucose
- shunts blood away from the skin and viscera to the skeletal muscles, brain, and heart
- inhibits peristalsis in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract
- inhibits contraction of the bladder and rectum

In short, stimulation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system prepares the body for emergencies: for "**fight or flight**".

Parasympathetic stimulation causes

- slowing down of the heartbeat
- lowering of blood pressure
- constriction of the pupils
- increased blood flow to the skin and viscera
- peristalsis of the GI tract

In short, the parasympathetic system returns the body functions to normal after they have been altered by sympathetic stimulation. In times of danger, the sympathetic system prepares the body for violent activity. The parasympathetic system reverses these changes when the danger is over.

The optimal level of stress is called eustress or healthy stress necessary for health and performance. Too much stress is referred to as distress and results in ill health poor performance and dysfunctional behaviour. Insufficient stress results in boredom and lack of stimulation Swartz et al 2004.

All of these adaptive responses are described by the term "allostasis" which means "maintaining stability, or homeostasis, through change." The body actively copes with a challenge by expending energy and attempting to put things right. Most of the time it succeeds but the real problems arise when the systems involved in allostasis don't shut off when not needed or don't become active when they are needed.
While acute stress actually improves our brain's attention and increases our capacity to store important and life-protecting information, for example, a source of danger, chronic stress dampens our ability to keep track of information and places. Chronic stress does this by impairing excitability of nerve cells and by promoting atrophy of nerve cells in the hippocampus, a region of the brain that is important for spatial and verbal memory.

For the immune system, which is controlled by the nervous system and by circulating hormones, chronic stress suppresses the ability of the immune system to do its job. This once again is in contrast to acute stress. Acute stress actually helps the immune system handle a pathogen by causing immune cells to move out of the bloodstream and into tissues where they are needed. Chronic stress however, impairs not only the ability of the immune system to relocate immune cells but also the ability of those cells to do their job of recognizing and responding to the pathogenic agent.

What Actually Causes Stress?
Stress as explained is caused by a variety of causes including life itself. Some level of stress is good for effective performance, under-stress is dysfunctional so is overstress. Situations that may evoke stress include:

- People – expectations, conflicting desires and impersonal barriers
- Situations – lack of resources, lack of vision or goals, time and expectations
- Environment – crowding, insufficient space, noise, dirty conditions, pollution and disorganised environment
- Chemical and Nutrition – caffeine, sugar, too much salt, dietary deficiency or excess and alcohol
- Lifestyle –work demands, time pressure, keeping up with new developments, having to deal with unnecessary obstacles, career development, personal and family stress

Individuals have different mechanisms of coping with stress but generally seem to be in three stages. Stage one is when the individual becomes aware of stressors. Stage two individual attempts to fight off or adapt to the stressor. Stage three the cost of fighting and or adaptation may be so high the individual wears out with exhaustion. Exhaustion is a psychological consequence also referred to as burnout. It is a state in which the individual is emotionally drained, depersonalised and with reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Action Planning
Stop reading and do the following:
1. Write three situations going on in your life right now that support your ability to work with energy, focus and alignment.

2. Write three situations going on in your life right now that inhibit your ability to work with energy, focus and alignment.

To what extent can you influence these practices?
What do you do as an individual to help yourself stay energised, focused and aligned?
Please share the best practices.

Effective Management of Stress:
Individuals may differ in their health and well being because they differ in behavioural and neuroendocrine adaptive mechanisms, that is, the ways in which their hormone and nervous systems react. You might, compared to a friend, have higher or lower allostatic load, not only because you are subjected to different degrees of life stressors but because you are "wired" differently and have had different life experiences that make you react in different ways.
Whatever the cause may be, protecting your body against over-exposure to stress hormones is as important to the body as the ability to mount an adequate allostatic response in the first place. People with long-term histories of persistent and relatively small elevations or deficiencies in stress hormone levels may show accelerated progress toward dysfunctional physiology and disease. In dealing with stress it is important to adapt behaviours that help

maintain a state health and well-being. These behaviours may include the following:

- Keeping life in perspective
- Developing productive or effective work skills
- Exercises
- Take time to play and be around those you like
- Learn to relax - smell the roses, enjoy the sunset
- Avoiding frustrations by controlling situations around your life and do not complain. See obstacles as challenges not hinderances.
- Don’t bottle things but have a way to vent out
- Set realistic expectations
- Live in the present
- Laugh often and loud

In summary we need some stress to perform at peak levels but prolonged and excess stress can be detrimental to health and well-being.

Sample test for stress handling style

Consider the following questions and complete the chart by ticking the appropriate box.

QUESTIONS	Most times	Some times	Never
I share my worries and concerns with someone I trust			
I have friends with whom I can relax and really be myself			
I take time to alone every day just relaxing and winding down			
I express my feelings and do not just bottle them up			
I have at least one interest or hobby outside work			
I get involved in activities outside of work which help me to relax			
I can see the funny side of life and enjoy a good laugh every so often			
I take part in some kind of activity which is specifically designed to reduce stress			
I feel reasonably optimistic about the future			
I take some exercise at least once each week			
I am roughly the right weight for my height, age and build			
I relax and switch off from work by choosing TV or radio programmes, books or music which give me pleasure			
I do not exceed the recommended limits for alcohol consumption			

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