

Stress Management for High Performing IT Teams

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May 23, 2024

Why is Stress Management Important?

- ▶ Stress is inherent to IT operations work
- ▶ Mismanagement of Stress has Negative Consequences
- ▶ Results in IT outages and health problems
- ▶ Too much or too little stress can lead to personnel problems and poor job satisfaction

IT Operations are Inherently Stressful

- ▶ Work often has high stakes
- ▶ Also must respond to incidents late at night

In this presentation, we will

- ▶ Seek to understand stress
- ▶ Learn to recognize it in ourselves
- ▶ Learn how to spot it in teammates and colleagues
- ▶ Get directions on stress management

Defining Stress

- ▶ Internal drive to perform
- ▶ Independent from worry or anxiety
- ▶ Tied in part to social interactions
- ▶ Physiological in nature, not psychological

How Stress Affects Decision Making

- ▶ Narrowing of focus
- ▶ Filtered senses, particularly hearing
- ▶ On alert to threats
- ▶ Fixation
- ▶ Increase in confirmation, continuation, and expectation biases

Physiology of Stress Response I: The Brain

- ▶ Begins with recognition of need for stress, in the amygdala
- ▶ Suppresses hippocampus activity in favor of the amygdala
- ▶ Interferes with memory formation and accentuates threat assessments

Physiology of Stress Response II: Hormones

- ▶ Adrenal release of cortisol and epinephrine
- ▶ Cortisol affects the hippocampus and amygdala also
- ▶ Epinephrine affects the brain directly and raises blood pressure

Physiology of Stress Response III: Metabolism

- ▶ Cortisol increases insulin resistance
- ▶ Cortisol stimulates blood sugar release by the liver
- ▶ Together, Cortisol raises blood sugar 20-40 mg/dl

Compare to the Circadian Cycle

- ▶ Cortisol spikes just before we wake up and declines through the day
- ▶ Epinephrine spikes just before we wake up and then 12 hours later
- ▶ Both are low during sleeping times

Health Impacts of Stress and Cortisol

- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Heart attack and stroke
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Diabetes

Sources of Stress

- ▶ Work (urgent work is more stressful)
- ▶ Emergencies
- ▶ Threats and Uncertainties

Stress and On Call Work

- ▶ Emergencies
- ▶ Late night stress
- ▶ Rapid responses needed

Stress and Exercise

- ▶ Stress is involved in our performance while exercising
- ▶ Longer, heavier training involves more stress
- ▶ Cortisol levels take several hours to normalize after exercise.
- ▶ However, exercise is a critical method of stress management.

Basic daily Metrics

1 = rarely/never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = usually

- ▶ How frequently one wakes up at night (2 points for each wake-up)
- ▶ Digestive issues
- ▶ Changes in endurance while exercising
- ▶ Sudden weight gain or loss

Subjective Senses

1 = rarely/never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = usually

- ▶ Organizational difficulties
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Increases in alcohol or tobacco consumption

Serious Warning Signs

1 = rarely/never, 4 = occasionally, 6 = often, 8 = usually

- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ High blood sugar

Behavioral Warning Signs

1 = rarely/never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = usually

- ▶ Picking fights
- ▶ Fixation on past priorities
- ▶ Difficulty learning
- ▶ Inability to move beyond a firefighting frame of mind

Productivity Warning Signs

1 = rarely/never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = usually

- ▶ Falling productivity
- ▶ Complaints about workload

Sharing Numbers

Go around and just give the stress number

Importance of Stress Levels

I plan to put in a diagram I have seen in some other presentations similar to what is found at: <https://delphis.org.uk/peak-performance/stress-and-the-pressure-performance-curve/>

Short-term Stress Management

- ▶ Prioritize
- ▶ Shed Tasks
- ▶ Be deliberate on what you focus on

Physical Stress Management Strategies

- ▶ Structure Stressors to Morning/Early Afternoon and Away from Night-time
- ▶ Morning exercise
- ▶ Deep breathing and breath meditation

Meditative Stress Management Strategies

- ▶ Definition of Meditation
- ▶ Prerequisites
- ▶ Examples