

Chapter 21

Improving Your Own Effectiveness

Chapter Outline

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Managing Yourself

All of us are responsible for managing our own careers and maintaining our competence. A useful metaphor is to view ourselves as the chief executive officer of a one-person company responsible for our own strategy formulation, product development, manufacturing, marketing, and public relations. As the environment around us changes we must be prepared to adapt to assure the survival of our company.

Career Success

A career is best viewed as a process of work-related experiences that includes both paid and unpaid work in one or more organizations or as self-employed. In essence, everyone who works has a career. Some people join an organization early in their careers and remain until retirement. Others make significant changes by either changing companies or changing their entire vocation. Nevertheless, everyone experiences a unique sequence of work activities.

Everyone wants to be successful. Career success or failure is best evaluated by the person whose career is being considered rather than by the opinions of others.¹ Deciding whether we have achieved success is difficult because career effectiveness can be measured in many ways. The most popular methods of measuring career success are career performance, satisfaction, adaptability, and identity.

1. Career performance. Career performance is measured by the popular symbols of success: money, and position. Financial indicators include salary, pay increases, bonuses, and executive perks. Evidences of position and status include the number of people you supervise, the size of the budget you manage, the revenue generated by the organizational unit you supervise, and the level of your position on the organizational chart.

2. Satisfaction. Since you make your own career decisions, you should decide whether you like what you do. This criterion is entirely subjective. You decide for yourself whether you are satisfied.

3. Adaptability. Since jobs are continually changing, another measure of career success is how well you

adapt to the new demands. According to this criterion, career success is measured by maintaining the technical competence needed to adapt to new changes. Adaptability comes from acquiring new skills and knowledge through such activities as self-training, continuing education seminars, job rotation, and independent study.

4. Career Identity. Career identity refers to the integration of your work activity and your self-esteem. Each of us has a sense of identity that defines who we are. Therefore, an important measure of career success is whether your daily occupations is consistent with your identity. A woman who thinks of herself as an interior design decorator and is working in such a position would feel that she had a successful career. On the other hand, an individual would be considered to have an unsuccessful career if, when he was asked what he did, said, "I'm a clarinet player but I don't have time to join an orchestra because I have to work at the mill." The enormous influence of work on self-identity is reflected by the fact that most people, when asked who they are, describe themselves in terms of their occupation.

Individuals differ in terms of how well they plan their careers. Some individuals develop elaborate career plans with specific timetables and clearly defined goals, while others do essentially no planning at all. During the last three or four weeks of spring semester, college placement offices are typically flooded with students who have failed to plan what they want to do after graduation. Other students do an excellent job of managing their careers. They know which careers they want to pursue and they arrange their educational training to prepare them for their careers. Long before graduation they conduct an aggressive job search to find which organizations offer them the best opportunities to fulfill their career aspirations.

The responsibility for career planning is an individual responsibility. Finding a good job does not just happen; individuals have to make it happen. People should be responsible for managing their own careers regardless of economic factors influencing the supply and demand of labor. A major ingredient of successful career planning is looking ahead. Finding a good job involves a careful process of assessing one's abilities and interests, becoming aware of job opportunities, preparing an effective resume, locating job opportunities, interviewing prospective employers, and then assessing the job offers. Each of these activities takes time. An individual should begin to look for a job before graduation or before terminating other employment.

Effective career planning benefits both you and your company. For you, the most immediate benefits include a better job, more money, increased responsibility, greater mobility, better use of your skills, and higher productivity. It also provides less tangible benefits such as increased satisfaction and enhanced self-esteem. The development of a career orientation rather than a job orientation is another valuable by-product of career planning that leads to increased involvement in work, greater exposure and visibility to top management, a better understanding of what is expected, and a broader knowledge of additional areas of career interest.²

Career planning benefits organizations by identifying and developing future managers. Career planning activities are designed to nurture employees and increase their capacity to achieve organizational goals. When competent replacements are available, an organization can adopt a policy of promotion from within that motivates aspiring managers. Employees who remain in the same position for an extended period typically become obsolete. Career planning helps to avoid the problems of obsolescence by training employees and stimulating their desires to maintain their job skills.

Career Choices

As their careers unfold, people make numerous career choices. Some of these decisions are irreversible,

since earlier decisions can eliminate options later in life. For example, deciding to drop out of high school virtually eliminates many professional and technical jobs from consideration. However, most career decisions are not permanent and there is little need for anyone to feel locked into a dead-end job. People who are not satisfied with the work they are doing are free to pursue something more suitable.

It is not unusual for individuals to make a significant career change and pursue a totally different line of work. In fact, it has been estimated that the average person will pursue at least three different careers during his or her lifetime. Making a significant career change usually helps individuals acquire new skills, avoid obsolescence, and become more enthusiastic about life and work. A gardening metaphor is used to explain the rejuvenating effects of changing careers in mid-life. These individuals are called “repotters.” The most common motivation for changing careers is to find more meaningful work.³

Career decisions involve many choices. Three of the most important choices include (1) occupational choice – selecting a vocation or profession; (2) organizational choice – deciding which company to work for; and (3) job choice – selecting a desirable job.

Occupational Choice. The selection of an occupation is not a decision that is made once and for all at one dramatic point in life. Instead, occupational choices are made and revised repeatedly throughout a person’s life. The following variables have been found to influence the kinds of occupations individuals select.

1. *Socio-economic status.* The socio-economic status of parents influences the occupations their children select. Children from higher socio-economic families are more likely to choose careers in law, medicine, or business management than in non-salary professions.⁴ Children raised in higher socio-economic level families receive more information about the educational opportunities and professional training required for higher professional occupations. Furthermore, their parents communicate higher expectations about the amount of discipline and study necessary for success.
2. *Race.* Although considerable progress has been made in providing more equal employment opportunities, a larger proportion of minorities than whites enter lower-status occupations. This discrepancy occurs even though the vocational preferences (the ideal jobs they would like to have) of minorities and whites are similar. Apparently, minorities are forced to compromise their eventual career choices more than whites.⁵
3. *Gender.* For many years, certain jobs were classified as either male or female jobs. For example, mining and construction jobs were considered male occupations while nursing and grade school teaching jobs were considered female occupations. Although significant efforts have been made in recent years to eliminate these stereotypes, cultural norms, child-rearing practices, and other social expectations continue to perpetuate the feeling among many people that certain jobs are primarily intended for a particular gender.
4. *Communities.* Occupational choice is influenced by the occupational structure found in a community. Significant differences have been found between rural and urban locations.⁷ Individuals who are reared in rural communities generally aspire to occupations with lower prestige than those from urban communities. These differences have been attributed to the limited educational opportunities found in rural areas and the lack of career information available to individuals.

5. *Intelligence.* A relationship has been observed between average intelligence levels and occupational choice.⁸ For example, taken as a group, individuals in accounting, mechanical engineering, medicine, chemistry, and electrical engineering have intelligence levels that are slightly above average. However, teamsters, miners, farmworkers, and lumberjacks have below-average intelligence, when considered as a group. It should be noted, however, that a broad range of intelligence is found in every occupation.
6. *Aptitudes and interests.* Probably the greatest determinants of occupational choice are aptitudes and interests. Often, we allow our vocational interests to override considerations about our aptitudes and abilities. What we want to do becomes more important than what we are capable of doing best. Indeed, asking young adults what occupation they want to enter is generally the best predictor of their eventual occupation.⁹

People who possess special aptitudes and abilities typically try to find occupations where they can use these skills to achieve success in their work. Since occupational success often depends on having the necessary skills, individuals should carefully assess their aptitudes and use this information to make a wise occupational choice. The evidence shows, however, that many individuals do not make very accurate assessments of their abilities. One study found mainly low correlations between the self-evaluations of a group of adolescents and how these individuals were measured on a battery of tests.¹⁰

These factors have contributed to the occupational preferences of job applicants for a long time and their implications should not be overlooked. Long-term career choices can limit an organization's ability to attract and retain new employees and can influence the effectiveness of recruiting activities. Before a recruiter tries to sell a job opening, the applicants may have already decided that they are not willing to consider it. Consequently, these background variables may represent formidable obstacles to organizations attempting to achieve their affirmative action goals of hiring a larger percentage of minorities and females. For example, a decision by AT&T to employ women in outdoor crafts jobs was found to be more difficult to execute than anticipated. To achieve its goals, the company had to launch an aggressive educational program in the public schools to convince women that outdoor crafts jobs were a legitimate female occupation.

Organizational Choice. In addition to choosing an occupation, individuals also choose the organization in which their occupation will be performed. Three characteristics seem to influence organizational choice: the organization's mission, its image, and its culture or personality.

1. *Organizational mission.* Organizations serve a variety of social purposes, and individuals may be attracted to an organization because of its mission. People tend to select companies whose missions are consistent with their career interests. For example, individuals with social interests may prefer occupations in teaching and helping others, such as a mental hospital or a government welfare agency. Whereas individuals who have intellectual interests may prefer scientific occupations and choose to work for a university or a research institute.
2. *Organizational image.* Some individuals are attracted to an organization because of the status and prestige associated with the company or its industry. For example, chemical companies have had a reputation for polluting the environment, government agencies have had a reputation for bureaucratic inefficiencies, and railroads have had an image of financial decline. Although these reputations are not entirely accurate and some organizations are quite different from their

industry's image, individuals' perceptions of an organization influence their employment decisions. An organization's image also influences the status and social life of employees and their families off the job. Employees tend to transfer the status and prestige of the organization onto their own self-esteem. A study examining the reasons why employees decided to remain with or leave an organization found that the decision was greatly influenced by the prestige of the organization as viewed by an employee's spouse.¹¹

3. *Organizational personality.* Some evidence demonstrates that individuals are attracted to organizations that manifest personalities or styles similar to their own. In one study, the personalities of a group of subjects were measured on a number of dimensions and the subjects were then asked to describe the personalities of the organizations in which they would most prefer and least prefer to work. The results of this study indicated that the same dimensions of personality were used for describing both the personality of the individual and the personality of their preferred organization. The better the match of the personalities, the more highly the organization was preferred.¹² These results are consistent with other studies showing that people choose vocations consistent with their self-esteem and self-concept.

Job Choice. Several factors associated with the job itself influence an individual's job choice. The most important factors seem to be pay and benefits, geographical location, opportunities for service and responsibility, flexibility and autonomy, and the friendliness of supervisors and coworkers.

Studies of the relative importance of these job factors generally show that pay and benefits are the most important factors involved in choosing a job.¹³ However, the results are not entirely consistent, and the evidence seems to suggest that the results are influenced greatly by the method used to collect the information. When individuals are asked to rank the job factors in order of importance, they usually rank responsibility, opportunities for growth, and the opportunity to provide essential services as the most important factors. However, when they are shown job descriptions and asked to select between several pairs of jobs, their preferences seem to be most strongly influenced by pay and benefits.¹⁴

A hierarchical decision framework has been proposed to explain the relative importance of these job choice factors.¹⁵ This framework suggests that applicants first consider *objective factors* associated with alternative job offers such as salary, benefits, location, and the job requirements. These factors can be objectively evaluated and, in some cases, a dollar figure can be assigned to them. Objective job factors that can be easily measured, such as one job having a \$200 higher starting salary or being located 200 miles closer to home, appear to be the most important factors involved in choosing a job.

If the objective factors are roughly comparable, applicants are likely to turn to *subjective factors* and base their decisions on such things as the organization's image and the opportunity to serve society. Subjective factors are concerned with how well alternative jobs will satisfy personal needs and career goals; they may include such things as organizational prestige, responsibility, freedom from supervision, and the opportunity to benefit society. These subjective factors tend to be emotional and intuitive rather than objective.

If both the objective and subjective factors are roughly comparable, new recruits tend to base their decision on *critical contacts* with the organization. Recruits are influenced by how they feel about their interview and the interviewer, how speedily the organization handled the correspondence, and how hospitable the company representatives were during visits to the company offices. Critical contacts with the company are usually influential only if the objective and subjective factors are comparable or when the recruits do not know enough about the organization to rate one above the other.

Maintaining Your Competence

Obsolescence refers to a reduction in effectiveness because of a lack of knowledge or skill, and it is a serious problem that is getting worse. The deficiency is sometimes due to forgetfulness, but more often it results from the creation of new knowledge and technologies that replace old knowledge. Obsolescence among professionals has become so serious that several states require professionals to return to school. In some states, lawyers must return to school periodically or they are limited to representing only a full-time employer or members of their family. Similar requirements for medical doctors also have been enacted. A number of medical boards require periodic recertification every six years. Several states require physicians to take fifty to sixty hours of continuing education annually to maintain their licenses. Other professions, including accounting and human resource management, also require their members to obtain continuing education units (CEUs) to maintain their professional certification.

The quantity of knowledge is expanding in virtually every occupation. Furthermore, new knowledge is being created at an accelerated pace, especially in occupations that disseminate or use new information, such as engineering and teaching. The creation of new knowledge, however, does not necessarily mean that people will become obsolete. Even though a study of engineering firms showed that the average performance of older engineers declined, the researchers were quick to note that some older engineers were extremely competent and productive. Through study, work assignments, and training, these older engineers were able to maintain high rates of performance.¹⁶

Managerial obsolescence is not necessarily a function of age. The inevitable physiological changes that come with aging have little effect on executive performance. Mental abilities, as measured by intelligence tests, can actually improve over time and particular improvement is often observed in verbal and conceptual skills that involve the assembly of objects and designs. Creativity, which involves a synthesis of concepts and experience, is also little affected by aging. The effects of aging on vitality and energy levels, however, are more variable. While some older people are physically incapacitated, others have remarkable strength and endurance. Nevertheless, reduced stamina is seldom the major cause of obsolescence. There is no reason to assume that age is an automatic indicator of obsolescence; managerial incompetence is not a function of aging.¹⁷

There are many ways to maintain one's competence and avoid obsolescence. Companies provide their employees with a variety of programs to help them learn. Most of these programs are rather expensive, but because the costs of obsolescence are also high, they usually are cost effective.

1. Continuing education appeals to many employees, with the most popular form being evening classes at a local college or university. Tuition and other expenses are normally paid by the company if the course is relevant to an employee's job and if the employee receives a passing grade.
2. Training and development programs can be held at the company on company time or at some other site on weekends or evenings. These programs can be taught by competent members of the organization, by outside consultants, or by someone such as the service representative who sold the new equipment.
3. Training materials can be purchased by the company and made available to employees. The materials might include reference books, manuals, professional periodicals, films, videotapes, and

textbooks.

4. Periodic seminars and conferences can be held at which experts present information to professional groups or to groups of employees.
5. Education sabbaticals can be arranged for managers and engineers, similar to those for college professors. Many executives think going to school full time for a semester is more profitable than going to evening school forever. Sabbaticals help employees acquire better job skills while organizations benefit from greater creativity and loyalty.¹⁸
6. Job rotation and new project assignments can help employees gain new skills and knowledge. Although some lost time and frustration usually are associated with beginning a new assignment, the benefits of new learning frequently outweigh the lost time and effort.
7. Supervisors can encourage employees to maintain their competence by providing performance feedback, career counseling, opportunities for updating their skills, rewards for updating, and goal setting.

Company-sponsored training opportunities do not really focus on the root of the obsolescence problem, which is personal motivation. The motivation to learn and retain information must come from within an individual. If people are motivated to learn, they will do so, regardless of whether opportunities are provided by a company. If employees attend a training program only because someone else wants them to be there and not because they want to be there, the training will not be of much value. Organizations need to create healthy attitudes toward learning. They should emphasize that the successful workers of tomorrow need to develop positive outlooks toward learning, overcome resistance to change, understand their own shortcomings as learners, and be more open to experiences and ready to learn from them. In essence, successful workers have to learn how to learn.

Another important strategy for helping to combat the problem of obsolescence is to foster in employees more favorable attitudes toward the importance of work.¹⁹ To combat obsolescence and to help employees in their current career development, a company should strive to strengthen the meaning of work for employees and to provide opportunities for them to be of service. Obsolescence is avoided more by promoting strong work values than by sponsoring company training programs.

Work and Family

Most people feel a constant tension between the demands of work and family responsibilities. Maintaining a comfortable balance between these two forces has become increasingly difficult because of changes in the traditional family structure, the increase in female employment, and the shortage of skilled workers in some industries. Dual career families, where both husband and wife pursue full-time employment, present special challenges to both organizations and individuals, especially when employees are responsible for the care of young children or aging parents.

Dual-career families. Following World War II, the dominant employment trend was to release women from the work force, where they had supported the war effort, and allow them to remain at home raising the baby-boom generation. This trend was reversed in the 1960s, however, as increasing numbers of women joined the labor force. From 1960 to 2000 the percent of women in the 25 to 34 age category who joined the labor force increased from 36 percent to 79 percent.²⁰ This increase in female employment

represents a profound social trend that requires families and organizations to develop new patterns of accommodation.

The most difficult problems accompanying this change concern the care of young children and balancing other family responsibilities when both parents work. While some couples have joint career aspirations and both want to pursue careers outside the home, many couples prefer having one partner stay at home or only work part-time when there are young children in the home.

The percentage of children living in dual-career families and single-parent families continues to increase. From 1975 to 2000 the number of dual-career families increased from 30 to 64 percent and single-parent families increased from 16 to 27 percent. Forecasts indicate that the percent of dual-career and single-parent families will continue to increase because of two primary reasons: career fulfillment and money.

Money is usually an important reason why both partners decide to work; having two incomes is an economic necessity for some couples. The average income of a dual-career family is about 25 percent higher than a traditional family.²¹ But while the incomes of dual-career families are higher, so are the costs: spending patterns indicate that dual-career families spend more on services and nondurable goods.²² Consequently, the average disposable incomes of a dual-career family may not be much different than for traditional families if they have to pay more for taxes, child care, elder care expenses, household services, clothing, and prepared foods.

Studies on the effects of dual-career families indicate that the lives of both parents and children are impacted by the decision to have both parents work full-time. Having a second source of income creates greater financial security for both partners, and the feelings of freedom and professional self-determination are especially pronounced in men.²³ However, other results are not so positive.

The growth in dual-career families has been accompanied by an increase in physical and social problems for women that were once dominated by men, such as heart disease, heart attacks, ulcers, hypertension, and white-collar crime. Dual-career partners typically experience greater stress as they try to balance housework and childcare, and this burden falls unevenly on women in most families. Significant feelings of guilt are reported by both dual-career partners, with women usually reporting slightly higher levels.²⁴ In dual-career families, wives spend more hours doing housework than husbands, although dual-career husbands do more than traditional husbands. Daughters in dual-career families do 25 percent more housework than the daughters in traditional homes. The sons of dual-career families, however, only do about one third as much housework as sons in traditional families and they often develop very chauvinistic attitudes.²⁵ Men in dual-career families report lower job satisfaction than men in traditional families.²⁶

Quality child-care facilities help to relieve some of the tension for dual-career parents; but child-care can never replace the constancy and love of a parent in the home.²⁷ There is little doubt that some dual-career families experience intense stress that reduces the quality of life for all family members, both at home and at work. There is also evidence, however, that these problems are not universal in all dual-career families and the stress can be reduced by satisfactory child-care facilities and flexibility in work schedules. Employers are being asked to provide greater flexibility to accommodate family demands of workers.²⁸

Balancing work and family. Adapting work demands to family responsibilities has been referred to as *accommodation*.²⁹ Individuals who give the highest priority to family responsibilities, while work and other outside interests remain secondary, are said to be the most accommodative. Those who are the most nonaccommodative are those whose work and career interests are always a higher priority than family

responsibilities. In the past, the most accommodative individuals were the wives and mothers in traditional families who assumed responsibility for the family needs; the most nonaccommodative were career-oriented male executives who focused their interests and attention almost exclusively on work.

In recent years, new patterns of accommodation have emerged, largely because husbands are becoming more accommodative. Most women who are employed outside the home think their husbands should share household responsibilities. To achieve a successful marriage, dual career couples need to decide who is responsible for such things as childcare, meal preparation, housecleaning, shopping, yard work, and other family responsibilities. Unplanned events and emergencies often present special problems of accommodation, such as deciding which spouse remains home with a sick child or who should arrange for the repair of a household appliance.

The trend toward greater accommodation in our society on the part of husbands is indicated by the number of successful managers who, at mid-career, reject advancement opportunities because their new responsibilities would interfere with family commitments.

Organizations have been encouraged to develop alternative career tracks for mothers and fathers that allow them to sacrifice career advancement for the opportunity of spending more time with their families. A separate “mommy” or “daddy” track allows parents to hold flexible jobs with less travel and time demands while they have responsibilities for young children at home.³⁰ When their parenting demands ease, they once again pursue a fast-track path. A separate mommy track has been severely criticized, however, by those who fear it will be used as a pretext for discrimination against women or as proof that it means women can’t have it all – motherhood and a career.³¹

A major problem for a dual career couple is a job transfer involving relocation. This situation poses a problem not only for the couple but also for the organization. Some organizations offer to assist an employee’s spouse find a job when it wants to relocate an employee. Some dual career couples find that it is necessary to live in a metropolitan area to increase the career opportunities of both partners.

Many couples have decided that the benefits of dual careers are not worth the costs and a growing number of women have decided that the joys of mothering justify interrupting their careers. The process of leaving the workforce to raise a family and then returning is called *sequencing*, and an informal survey indicates that a growing number of career women are choosing sequencing as a means of balancing career and family interests.³² Women who elect to sequence their career first complete their education and work a short time, usually two to eight years in their chosen careers, then leave full-time work during the years they bear and mother their young children, and then – as their children grow – gradually incorporate professional activities back into their lives so that mothering and profession do not conflict.

Employment gaps by women, especially for purposes of child rearing, are generally perceived as acceptable career decisions that do not seriously damage their career advancement. An investigation of employment gaps among masters of business administration graduates revealed that discontinuous employment histories were negatively associated with future income and satisfaction for men but not as much for women. While an employment gap for women who return to work reduces their income 9 percent below what it would have been with continuous employment, a corresponding gap for men reduces their income by 21 percent.³³

Some of the innovative ways women become reincorporated in the work force include job sharing, permanent part-time employment, flexible work hours, work-at-home programs, relocation assistance for the spouse of a transferred employee, child care and day care assistance, time management and stress

management workshops, and employee assistance programs.

Organizations can help employees cope with the stress of dual-career families by legitimizing boundaries between work and home. For example, when professional employees are home in the evenings, are they still on call, or can they dedicate themselves to home and family? Some organizations help create boundaries by stating that evenings and weekends are viewed as family time and employees and their supervisors should not allow work to encroach on family time. A consequence of this policy is that people who stay late are not seen as super-achievers, but as poor time managers.

Stress Management

A major component of adapting to work is learning to manage stress. Everyone experiences stress and its effects can be either positive or negative. Individuals who achieve an optimal level of stress tend to work at peak efficiency, report high levels of job satisfaction, and experience a sense of accomplishment and well-being. Unfortunately, many people experience levels of stress that are either too high or too low. When stress is too low we tend to feel lethargic, lazy, and bored. However, excessive levels of stress can produce a loss of efficiency, excessive accidents, ill health, drug abuse, alcoholism, and other undesirable physical consequences.

Many of the physical and emotional problems college students experience are partially created by unhealthy levels of stress that they don't understand and don't know how to control. Too many individuals make the mistake of associating stress with mental illness and are unwilling to recognize the causes or consequences of stress in their lives.

Mental Health

The mental health of employees is just as important as their physical health. Mental illness is caused by many factors both on and off the job, including child abuse and other traumatic childhood experiences, marital conflicts and an unhappy family life, peer pressure and social ridicule, and a stressful work environment. Everyone occasionally feels frustrated, depressed, and a bit insecure, but most people can cope with temporary setbacks.

Maintaining good mental health requires a healthy environment just as the maintenance of good physical health requires good hygiene. Mental illness sometimes involves serious emotional problems that require professional psychiatric help. However, the emotional problems of most people are not that severe. Most employees can adjust to everyday problems and live reasonably healthy, normal lives. A stressful, unpleasant work environment can cause severe trouble for some employees by destroying their self-esteem and making them feel inadequate. Creating a healthier work environment can make a big difference in improving their mental health.

Anxiety and depression. Two of the most common mental disorders are anxiety and depression. Anxiety refers to a state of tension associated with worry, apprehension, guilt, and a constant need for reassurance. Anxiety is more than the ordinary fear and apprehension that is consistent with reality. If a person is scheduled to speak to an executive board, some fear and apprehension are normal and even desirable. Moderate tension improves performance. Without some degree of concerned anticipation, an individual might be indifferent and apathetic. Anxiety, however, refers to a general state of fear and apprehension that is abnormally high and is not associated with a specific cause.

Depression is a mood characterized by dejection and gloom and usually contains feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and futility. Depression is more than just being unhappy or sad. Unhappiness is usually associated with a specific unpleasant event. Depression is an intense sadness that has lost its relationship to a specific series of events. Depression may be mild or severe. When it is severe, an individual may be unable to make even simple decisions or to respond to customary, everyday situations. In its extreme form, depression occasionally leads to suicide.

Both anxiety and depression are accompanied by a host of physiological effects. Anxiety usually leads to profuse perspiration, difficulty in breathing, gastric disturbances, rapid heartbeat, frequent urination, muscle tension, diarrhea, or high blood pressure. Depression is usually associated with a series of biochemical disturbances that may be linked to a genetic predisposition. Both anxiety and depression have been treated chemically. However, drug treatments are not an ideal long-term solution since they often have undesirable side effects and usually do not solve emotional problems in the long run. Various forms of psychiatric counseling are recommended for severe cases. For mild forms, a good book, a vacation, or talks with close friends are highly recommended.

Burnout and Boredom. An inability to handle continued stress on the job that results in demoralization, frustration, and reduced efficiency, has been called burnout. Some occupations are particularly prone to burnout, primarily occupations that require a large investment of personal commitment and involvement. Burnout was first observed as a general problem among people who work in the helping professions, especially psychiatrists, social workers, and counselors, and since then it has also been used to explain the frustration and apathy of other professionals. The concept of burnout is popular because it helps to explain why people who are constantly asked to give of themselves can come to feel emotionally drained.

Boredom refers to the psychological responses of workers to repetitive jobs. All repetitive activities, however, are not boring. For example, playing a slot machine is a very repetitive activity that some people find very interesting. But jobs which have short work cycles and require the workers to do the same thing again and again are usually described as boring. Assembly line jobs are frequently described as the most boring jobs.

Although boredom and burnout are different problems, they are both caused in part by a lack of meaning in work. Burnout occurs on jobs that usually provide a considerable amount of variety, significance, skill, and responsibility. At first, employees feel excited about their work and their opportunities to make a significant contribution. They invest themselves in their jobs and often work extra hours. After a while, however, the excitement wears off yet the job still demands much in the way of effort and commitment. However, the jobs are no longer meaningful to the employees and they feel unwilling to exert the effort that is needed. Periodic vacations are usually recommended for professionals to take time to reassess the meaning and importance of their work. But like blue-collar workers who are bored with their work, some professionals feel they have to find a different job.

Stress. Stress refers to the nonspecific response of the body to stressors within the environment. Stressors can appear in a variety of forms and almost any physical or psychological demand can serve as a stressor. Some examples of stressors include a barking dog about to attack you, a speeding auto about to hit you, an executive committee you are planning to address, or a disciplinary hearing to suspend an employee. The variety of potential stressors is shown in Exhibit 21.1.

Exhibit 21.1 Typical Stressors

Physical environment stressors

- Hazardous jobs and toxic substances
- Busy highways and bad driving conditions
- Stormy weather and violent storms

Individual stressors

- Type A personality
- Low tolerance for ambiguity

Job stressors

- Time pressures and deadlines
- Pressure to perform and exposure to public
- Limited control over important matters
- Responsibility for the well-being of others
- Too much or too little work to do

Organizational stressors

- Inefficient work procedures
- Unfair policies and inequitable practices
- Office politics
- Role conflict

Life stressors

- Death of a spouse or serious illness
 - Divorce or family conflicts
 - Financial problems
 - Pregnancies and child birth
 - Marriage and falling in love
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All these stressors have one thing in common: they represent a potential demand that may exceed the person's ability or capacity to respond. Thus, stress involves an interaction between the person and the environment. It should be remembered, however, that all individuals do not perceive the environment similarly, and an extremely stressful situation for one person may not be stressful for another. Stressful events are not necessarily negative; a passionate kiss and receiving an award are positive experiences even though they create the same physiological responses as negative stressors.

Physiology of Stress

To properly understand stress requires an understanding of the physiological changes that occur during stress. The same series of changes occur during periods of extreme stress, regardless of whether the stressors are positive or negative.

General adaptation syndrome. Our understanding of stress comes largely from the pioneering research of Dr. Hans Selye, a famous endocrinologist who described the general adaptation syndrome in 1936.³⁴ Selye defined stress as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand that is placed on it and he made a clear distinction between stress and a stressor. When a stressor is present, a sequence of biological events occurs. Because the same syndrome of physiological responses is elicited by many different situations, Selye called it the general adaptation syndrome, which consists of three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion.

1. The alarm reaction occurs when a stressor is recognized. A biochemical message is sent from the brain to the pituitary gland which is a small gland just below the brain. The pituitary gland, the master control of the endocrine system, secretes adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) which

causes the adrenal gland to secrete corticosteroids such as adrenaline. Immediately, the entire endocrine system is engaged in the secretion of complex hormones and a general alarm is sent to all systems of the body.

2. During the resistance stage the body tries to return to a state of equilibrium once the immediate threat has passed. The physiological changes in this stage are mostly the exact opposite of those that characterize the alarm reaction. The body tries to regain a state of balance even if the stressor is present.
3. The exhaustion stage occurs if the stressor continues and the body exhausts its ability to adapt. The symptoms of the exhaustion stage are similar to the alarm reaction. If the stress persists unduly, severe wear and tear will occur, resulting in damage to a local area or death to the organism as a whole.

The alarm reaction also has been called the “fight or flight” response. In this stage, the autonomic nervous system makes dozens of immediate responses to prepare the body for physical action. When pedestrians are crossing the street and suddenly see a car speeding toward them, the alarm reaction prepares their bodies to quickly get out of the way. Some of the major responses that the body makes during the alarm reaction are listed in Exhibit 21.2.

The alarm reactions are very useful when a physical threat demands an immediate physical response. If you attempted to flee from a dog that was about to bite you or a car about to hit you and your body failed to make the appropriate alarm reactions, you would very quickly become unconscious because of a lack of oxygen or blood glucose. However, the stressors most people face do not call for an immediate physical response. The most typical kind of alarm reactions are such things as taking exams, being called on in class, speaking before an executive committee, or seeing another motorist cut in front of you. A strenuous physical response is not appropriate in such situations even though the alarm reaction prepares your body to make such a response.

Exhibit 21.2 Physiological Responses to an Alarm Reaction

1. The breath rate increases to provide more oxygen.
 2. Red blood cells flood the bloodstream to carry more oxygen to the muscles.
 3. The heart beats faster and blood pressure soars to provide blood to needed areas.
 4. Stored sugar and fats are converted to blood glucose to provide fuel for quick energy.
 5. Blood-clotting mechanisms are activated to protect against possible bleeding.
 6. Digestion ceases so that blood may be diverted to muscles and brain.
 7. Perspiration and saliva increase.
 8. Bowel and bladder muscles loosen.
 9. Muscles tense in preparation for strenuous activity.
 10. The pupils dilate, allowing more light to enter the eye.
 11. The endocrine system increases the production of hormones.
-

The alarm reaction is a major source of distress when it is constantly turned on without being used for its intended purpose. When the alarm reaction is fired too often or too long, the body may remain in a constant state of mobilization. The alarm reaction can become classically conditioned to inappropriate conditioned stimuli. The body may remain in a state of chronic tension with high blood pressure, rapid heart beat, and disrupted digestion. The consequences are usually very serious. Damage can occur to the

nervous system itself or to many vital organs. The results may range from simple hypertension to fatal heart disease.

The consequences of excessive stress may lead to a wide variety of health problems. A useful analogy is to think of a chain that is subjected to increasing levels of tension until it breaks. The increasing tension will cause the chain to break at its weakest link. Likewise, excessive levels of stress will result in injury to the weakest system of the body. Some individuals will respond to excessive stress by experiencing coronary heart disease, others by digestive problems such as ulcers, while others experience nervous disorders and hypertension. During periods of intense pressure, such as the week of midterms and final exams, students may experience a variety of physiological problems, especially sore throats, indigestion, and headaches.

Stress vs. Distress. Not all stress is unpleasant. Selye described stress as the spice of life and said that the absence of stress is death. He differentiated between positive stress, which he called *eustress*, and negative, harmful stress which he called *distress*.³⁵ Some examples of eustress are falling in love, winning a contest, and receiving an award. Since stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand, the physiological responses of distress and eustress are virtually the same. However, eustress causes much less damage to the body because the person is more inclined to successfully adapt to the change. How the individual chooses to respond to a stressor has a large influence on how much damage is likely to occur. If the stressor is viewed as an opportunity, the situation is much more likely to produce a growth enhancing reaction.

A common assumption is that top executives experience the most stressors. However, a study of 270,000 male employees in major corporations showed that the rate of coronary disease was lower at successively higher levels of the organization probably because upper-level executives have greater control and predictability over their own situations than those in lower levels.³⁶ Rather than feeling stress themselves, they are more inclined to create stress for others. Those who have more perceived control over their environments experience less stress and fewer somatic disorders.³⁷

Individual differences. Large individual differences have been observed in the way people respond to stressors. Speaking before a large audience is a frightening and stressful experience for most people. But some individuals enjoy speaking to large audiences and would gladly accept the opportunity even though they might feel a little nervous. Individual differences such as these are caused by many factors including biochemistry, physical strength, psychological and emotional makeup, past experience, and personal values.

Research suggests that the negative effects of stress have been more evident in the lives of men than women. Women have a longer life expectancy than men, and at certain ages men are four times more likely to die of coronary heart disease and five times more likely to die of alcohol-related disease than women. While these differences may be partially attributed to biological sex differences, they are also caused by role differences. Men have historically held occupations involving higher levels of stress and limited opportunities for physical exercise to manage the stress. Today, however, the differences between male and female occupational roles are being reduced as more women move into the mainstream of organizational life. Consequently, an increasing number of women are now beginning to experience stress-related health problems. As the occupational differences between male and female roles have narrowed, so also have the differences in stress-related health problems. For example, peptic ulcers and coronary disease among females below age 45 is increasing.³⁸

Self-esteem appears to moderate the effects of stress. Individuals with high self-esteem have greater confidence and can deal successfully with stressors. These people are more inclined to perceive a stressful situation as a challenge or opportunity than a threat. Individuals with high self-esteem have been found to experience fewer coronary heart disease risk factors. Even when the situation is beyond their control, individuals with high self-esteem are influenced less by stressful events. Research on the survivors of wartime prison camps found that high levels of self-esteem helped the prisoners endure the stress of captivity.

The personality characteristic most closely associated with stress is the Type A versus Type B behavior pattern. This behavior pattern was discovered by two medical practitioners who found that the traditional coronary heart risk factors such as diet, cholesterol, blood pressure, and heredity could not totally explain or predict coronary heart disease.³⁹ Through their interviews and observations they found that a certain personality characteristic that they called Type A predisposes some people to coronary heart disease. In fact, Type A individuals have approximately twice the risk of developing coronary heart disease as Type B individuals. The person with a Type A behavior pattern has these characteristics:

- Chronically struggles to get as many things done as possible in the shortest time period.
- Speaks explosively.
- Rushes others to finish what they're saying.
- Is always in a struggle with people, things, and events.
- Is preoccupied with deadlines, and highly work-oriented.
- Is impatient, hates to wait. Considers waiting a waste of precious time.
- Is aggressive, ambitious, competitive, and forceful.

On the other hand, the Type B behavior pattern is characterized by an individual who is contemplative and feels no need to hurry or race against the clock. Although Type B people may have considerable drive and want to accomplish things, they tend to work at a steady pace and do not feel the intense pressures of time and deadlines. Type B people are not as easily angered or disappointed by their own work or the work of others. They tend to be more relaxed and noncompetitive. Because of their contemplative approach to problem solving, Type B people tend to be more creative than Type A.⁴⁰

Events that force us to change our daily routine and face new challenges contribute to feelings of stress. The greatest stress comes from major changes such as divorce, marriage, or the death of a family member. But even positive events such as vacations and Christmas can contribute to stress levels because of the excitement, time pressures, and self-imposed deadlines associated with them. A scale for measuring the amount of change in a person's life, called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, was developed from a study of over 5,000 patients suffering from stress-related illnesses. People who score high on this scale due to many life-change events are encouraged to reduce the number of changes in their lives and to adopt some form of stress management exercise to manage their stress.⁴¹

Stress Management Methods

Since stress cannot be eliminated from daily life, nor should it be, the solution is to manage it effectively. If it is managed effectively, stress can enhance rather than diminish individual productivity, interpersonal relationships, and a general zest for living. The basic principle involved in managing stress is to reverse the stress response when it occurs inappropriately. The alarm reaction needs to be extinguished when it occurs at the wrong time. For pedestrians who see a car speeding toward them, the alarm reaction is appropriate, but it is not appropriate for motorists caught in heavy traffic. Several techniques have been proposed for controlling stress: eliminating the stressor, relaxation, social support, and physical exercise.

Eliminating the stressor. In some cases, the easiest way to manage stress is to avoid it. All stress cannot and should not be avoided, but much unnecessary stress can be avoided by changing the environment or by altering the person's interpretation of the stressor. Some executives avoid the stress of traffic jams by being driven in a chauffeured car. Supervisors can avoid the stress of criticizing an employee face to face by writing the criticism in a memo. Students avoid the stress of difficult exams by taking easy classes and not applying to graduate school. Some parents avoid the stress of having children around during the summer by sending them to summer camp.

Sometimes the stressor can be eliminated psychologically by changing the meaning of the situation. The goal here is to reassess the seriousness of the situation by thinking about the worst consequences that could possibly occur and then deciding how serious they really would be. "If I don't get this project finished by the deadline, will I die? No. Will my family leave me? No. Will I lose my job? Well, maybe. So how bad is that? It would be a real blow and I don't want that to happen, but I could get another job."

Much of the stress students experience in preparing for final exams can be handled quite effectively by this form of reassessment. "If I'm not prepared, will I fail the exam? No, but I'll probably get a low score. So, how bad is that?" Generally, the worst possible consequence does not happen, yet seriously thinking about it helps individuals to remove the stress psychologically. This method is particularly useful for those who suffer from vague premonitions of disaster. When two or three problems occur simultaneously, we often feel overwhelmed and think everything is crumbling around us. These vague premonitions of disaster can often be relieved by making a written list of our specific responsibilities or problems and prioritizing them.

Relaxation techniques. Since muscle tension is a classically conditioned response to stress, relaxation techniques attempt to extinguish these responses.

- 1 Abdominal breathing involves taking long, deep breaths which cause the body to relax and counteract the stress responses associated with an alarm reaction. This is an especially effective technique for most stress situations because it can be done without breaking a person's routine. A few deep breaths can effectively calm a person and yet go unnoticed in a committee meeting or during a phone call.
- 2 Muscle massage also relieves tension. The recommended procedure is to start at the top of the head, massaging slowly, and moving down the neck to the arms, back, legs, and feet. However, some other sequence or even part of a sequence that allows the body enough time to relax and regain a state of equilibrium should be helpful. Several organizations hire on-site massage therapists to help employees manage job stress more effectively.
- 3 Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a relaxation technique derived from the ancient traditions of India that uses a meaningless sound called a "mantra." The mantra is individually assigned to the meditator by a trained instructor and proper use of the mantra is said to automatically reduce the level of excitation and disorderly activity of the nervous system and to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness. Evidence evaluating TM indicates that metabolic changes occur during meditation that move the body toward a deep state of rest. Employees who practice TM have high levels of satisfaction and productivity and good relationships with supervisors and coworkers. The mantra is classically conditioned to evoke a state of calm and quiet within the nervous system which serves to replace the conditioned responses evoking stress.⁴²

- 4 Biofeedback uses sophisticated equipment to monitor internal body processes, such as muscular tension, skin temperature, blood pressure, and brain waves. When people are able to observe their brain waves or blood pressure, they can begin to control them by observing the internal and external conditions that caused them to change. Once they are aware that their internal body responses are in a state of stress, they can begin to make adjustments by altering their environment or their frame of mind to reduce the levels of stress.⁴³

Social support. Another method of managing stress is to develop a network of people with whom you can interact. A wide variety of people may be part of a social support system, including a spouse, family members, other relatives, friends, neighbors, a work supervisor, coworkers, members of self-help groups, and health and welfare professionals. Since individuals spend such a large part of their lives at work, the amount of social support they obtain from work associates represents a major part of their total social support.⁴⁴ An effective social support system may provide four major types of supportive behaviors.

1. *Emotional support:* Providing empathy, love, caring, and trust.
2. *Instrumental Support:* Providing direct help to people who are in need, such as doing their work, taking care of them, or helping them pay their bills.
3. *Informational Support:* Providing knowledge or information to help people cope with their personal or environmental problems.
4. *Appraisal Support:* Providing specific evaluative information to help individuals with their self-evaluations.

Each form of social support serves a useful function, but the most important form is emotional support. When individuals think of people being supportive toward them, they usually think of emotional support – providing empathy, love, caring, and trust. Most of the research showing that social support reduces occupational stress and improves health has focused specifically on emotional support.⁴⁵

The evidence indicates that the most important source of social support comes from the family unit, especially from one's spouse. The death of a spouse is usually a traumatic experience that influences both the physical and mental health of the surviving partner. The trauma is much less severe, however, if individuals have other social supports that can help them, such as an understanding supervisor, coworkers who are willing to listen and empathize, and a counselor who can provide supportive nondirective counseling.

Physical Exercise. Exercise enthusiasts argue that the best technique for managing stress is a regular program of physical exercise. They claim that exercise prevents many physical and mental health problems and significantly reduces the seriousness of others. Although these claims may be a bit overstated, an enormous flood of studies has shown that a well-designed physical exercise program can significantly improve both physical and emotional health.⁴⁶ Some of the major benefits are listed in Exhibit 21.3

Many different kinds of exercise programs exist. Some isometric routines are very brief and can be done sitting in a chair or standing in an office. An isometric routine involves tightening the different muscle groups and holding them tight for a short time, such as ten seconds. These exercises are designed to maintain good muscle tone and to strengthen the ligaments and tendons.

Almost any form of physical activity can provide good exercise if it is done properly. Basketball, football, and tennis are good activities for staying in shape, but they are not recommended for getting into shape because of the potential harm from jarring and abrupt movements. A common mistake in exercising is overdoing it and tearing the body down rather than building it up. Exercise should be systematic and regular and never too much at one time. People who have been inactive for several years need to start slowly when they begin exercising again.

Aerobic exercises are extremely valuable because they contribute to cardiovascular conditioning. *Aerobic exercises* refer to regular rhythmic activities that raise the heart and breath rate to a training range and keep them within that range for a period of time. Some of the best aerobic exercises are jogging, cycling, swimming, brisk walking, and aerobic dancing because they involve a constant level of activity. It is recommended that aerobic exercise be done a minimum of three times each week for at least twelve to fifteen minutes each time. More exercise is better, but the gains are not very large for exercise beyond forty-five minutes daily.

Exhibit 21.3 Benefits of Regular Exercise

General Benefits to Overall Health

1. Person gains increased strength and endurance.
2. Energy used more efficiently, even in mental tasks.
3. Proper circulation is maintained.
4. Grace, poise, and appearance improve.
5. Posture and muscle tone improve.
6. Chronic tiredness and tension are reduced.
7. Ideal weight is more effectively maintained.
8. Aches, pains, and stiffness are reduced.
9. Degenerative risk factors decline.

Specific Benefits to the Heart

1. Resting heart rate is lowered, meaning that the heart does not have to work as hard to circulate blood to the body.
 2. Cardiac output is increased, meaning that under stress the heart is better able to distribute blood.
 3. Number of red blood cells is increased, meaning that more oxygen can be carried per pint of blood.
 4. Elasticity of the arteries is increased.
 5. Blood cholesterol level and triglyceride levels are lowered.
 6. Adrenal secretions in response to emotional stress are lowered.
 7. Lactic acid causing fatigue is more effectively eliminated.
 8. Heart muscle is strengthened, and additional blood vessels within it are formed.
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Many large corporations have some form of in-house physical fitness facilities. A growing number of organizations encourage everyone to participate, and some organizations even offer financial incentives to participating employees. For example, the Hospital Corporation of America gives its employees four cents a mile for cycling, sixteen cents per mile for walking or jogging, and sixty-four cents per mile for swimming. Some organizations spend a considerable amount of money providing physical fitness centers

for their employees but claim that these centers more than pay for themselves by reduced health insurance costs and benefits claims.⁴⁷ Students who are reluctant to begin a physical exercise program, especially those who claim to be too busy with the pressures of exams and research papers, should memorize the following lament of a graduating doctoral student: “For we labored all our days to stuff a million-dollar mind into a ten-cent body.”

Discussion Questions

1. What is meant by the term career success? What criteria do you use to measure your own personal career success?
2. What are the major challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities? How were these challenges handled in your family as a child and how do you plan to balance them in your family as a parent?
3. What are the typical situations in a student’s life that can create alarm reactions? Which of these do you experience and how can you manage them appropriately?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of different stress management techniques? Which stress management techniques do you prefer personally?

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