Interphase Stress Mindset Workshop

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Stress is considered America’s number one health problem (World Health Organization).

Stress has been linked to the six leading causes of death (heart disease, accidents, cancer, liver disease, lung ailments, suicide) (American Psychological Association).

Stress’s effects on reproduction, growth and immunity identifies it as a threat to the survival of humanity” (Gold & Chrousos, 2002).
Two Fundamentally Flawed Assumptions:

• The effects of stress are only negative

• The goal should be to avoid, manage and counteract the effects of stress
Stress Training: Road Map

• Part 1: The Paradox of Stress & The Power of Mindset

• Part 2: Three Steps to a Stress is Enhancing Mindset

• Part 3: Applications & Integration
Part 1: The Paradox of Stress
A condition in which an individual is confronted with constraints or opportunities related to what she or he desires, but for which the outcomes are perceived as important and uncertain (Robbins, 2001).

Stress Response: The body’s non-specific reaction to demands made on it. (Selye, 1978).
Stressors:

- **Conflict**: When what you have and what you want differ
- **Uncertainty**: When you don’t know what is going to happen
- **Pressure**: When you need to be better, quicker & faster
The Stress Response

- **Stressor**
- **Sympathetic-AdrenoMedullary (SAM):** adrenaline / dopamine
- **Hypothalamic-Pituitary Adrenocortical (HPA):** cortisol

Salpolsky, R. Holt: New York, 1998;
The Stress Response

Sympathetic-AdrenoMedullary (SAM):
adrenaline / dopamine

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cortisol

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The Enhancing Nature of Stress
Stress can enhance: Performance & Productivity

- Increases brain processing
  - E.g. Flashing numbers for Bungee jumpers (30+ frames per second)

- Improves memory
  - E.g. Memory increased with hand in an ice bucket

- Focuses attention
  - E.g. zero-in on stressor

Stress can positively affect our performance!
Stress can improve:
Health & Vitality

• **Quicker recovery**
  - E.g. moderate stress facilitates knee surgery recovery (catabolic/anabolic)

• **Enhanced immunity**
  - E.g. vaccinations

• **Physiological toughening**
  - E.g. stress muscles to rebuild

Stress can make us healthy!
Stress can facilitate: Learning & Growth

- Mental toughness
- Deeper relationships
- Greater appreciation for life

Stress facilitates our learning and growth
What’s the distinguishing factor?

- Motivation & Peak Performance
- Stress-Related Growth
- Physiological Thriving
- Stress-related Illness
- Depression & Loss of Interest
- Panic & Performance Anxiety

What’s the distinguishing factor? Conflict, Uncertainty, Pressure.
The Power of Mindset

**Mindset**: A state or frame of mind that influences your response
Stress Mindset Study: Wall Street Bank

- Participants were employees at a wall street bank

- Prior to the study they assessed their:
  - Stress mindset
  - Mood and anxiety levels
  - Self-perceived abilities in soft and hard skills

- During the study, they watched either the Stress is Enhancing video or the Stress is Debilitating video

- Three weeks later they rated themselves again on mood and anxiety levels and self-perceived abilities in soft and hard skills

How does stress mindset influence mood, anxiety, and performance?
Wall Street Bank Study

Negative Health Symptoms

Mood & Anxiety Questions

- Enhancing
- Deteriorating
- Control

Pre      Post
Wall Street Bank Study

Negative Health Symptoms

Mood & Anxiety Questions

- Enhancing
- Deteriorating
- Control

Pre | Post
--- | ---
7.8 | 7.7
7.7 | 7.6
7.6 | 7.5
7.5 | 7.4
7.4 | 7.3
7.3 | 7.2
7.2 | 7.1
7.1 | 7.0
UBS Wall Street Banker Study

Work Performance

Enhancing
Deteriorating
Control
UBS Wall Street Banker Study

Work Performance

- Pre
- Post

Enhancing
Deteriorating
Control

Work Performance Questions
Transforming the Stress Curve: The Power of Mindset

- Avoid
- Counteract
- Utilize

Performance/Health/Well-being vs. Amount of Stress
Part 2:
Three Steps to a Stress is Enhancing Mindset
Three Steps to Managing Stress

1. Acknowledge Stress.
   *It is what it is.*

2. Welcome Stress.
   *You are stressed because you care.*

3. Utilize Stress.
   *Stress is designed to facilitate.*
1. **Acknowledge** Stress.

*It is what it is.*
1. **Acknowledge** Stress.  
*It is what it is.*

- **Written Exercise (p. 4):**
  - I’m stressed about _______
    - Pick something that:
      - Is very real
      - Is current and/or recurring
      - Requires an improved response
  - **Acknowledge** your typical reactions to that stress
  - What are your **typical responses** to that stress?
    - Emotional
    - Behavioral
    - Physiological
      - No judgment or critique
Benefits of Acknowledging Stress

*Imagine being put in an fMRI brain scanner*

- View images of emotionally distressing stimuli
  - The stimuli are processed in the amygdala (related to flight or flight)
  - **REACTIVE**

- View images AND state the emotions you are feeling
  - The stimuli are processed in the pre-frontal cortex (related to conscious thinking)
  - **PROACTIVE**

(Lieberman, et al., 2007)

*Think Clearly  
Act Deliberately*
Three Steps to Managing Stress

1. Acknowledge Stress.  
   *It is what it is.*

2. Welcome Stress.  
   *You are stressed because you care.*
Why Welcome Stress?

- **Definition of stress**
  - the *experience or anticipation* of encountering adversity or challenge in one’s *goal related* efforts

- **Experience or anticipation**
  - E.g., Final exam

- **Goal related efforts**
  - E.g., John isn’t doing well

*When we deny stress we’re denying things we really care about*
2. **Welcome** Stress.
*You are stressed because you care.*

- **Experiential Exercise:**
  - Get into pairs
    - One person is the stressor
    - One person is the person being stressed (stressee)
  - **Stressor (physical stressor)**
    - At some point you will grab the stressee at the shoulders
      - Not about impact, not gentle
      - Physiologically stressing

What did you feel?
*Loss of balance, attention on stressor, alarming*
2. **Welcome** Stress. You are stressed because you care.

- Trial #1 – Eyes Open
- Trial #2 – Eyes Closed
- Trial #3 – Welcome the Stress (Eyes Open)
- Trial #4 – Welcome the Stress (Eyes Closed)

**Switch Roles**

*find another partner*
2. **Welcome Stress.**  
*You are stressed because you care.*

- **Experiential Exercise:**
  - Explore the sensation of actively welcoming stress

- **Written Exercise (p. 5):**
  - Reconnect with the positive motivation and personal value behind your stress

“It is just a cold night on the side of Everest” (Bret Logan, 2005)
Benefits of Welcoming Stress

*Welcoming by writing about stress can help...*

- Reduced anxiety
- Improved health overtime
- Increased Control
- Increased Positive Energy

*connect you to the underlying reason why you care*

(Pennebaker, 1997)
Three Steps to Managing Stress

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3. **Utilize Stress.**
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- **Experiential Exercise:**
  - *Get into pairs*
    - One person will hold their arm out with their thumb up
      - Your job is to not bend your arm
    - One person will try to bend the other person’s arm
  - *Arm bender*
    - Put one hand on your partner’s wrist
    - Put one hand in the middle of your partner’s arm (opposite side of elbow; inside bend)
    - Try to bend your partner’s arm
      - Do this gradually; Don’t distract your partner first then try to bend

*What did that feel like?*

*Tension, Strain, Struggle*
3. **Utilize Stress.**  
*It is designed to facilitate.*

- **Experiential Exercise:**
  - Experience greater strength by creating a confluence of energy
  - View your stress as a collaborator, not a competitor

- **Written Exercise (p. 6):**
  - Return to your typical reactions
    - Expand: explore the opportunities
    - Channel your reactions so they are in alignment with your purpose
    - Narrow in on the important change you can make
Benefits of Utilizing Stress

• Greater strength, resilience and performance

• Increased enjoyment

• Realization of unforeseen opportunities & possibilities

(Wood Brooks, 2013; Jamieson et al., 2010; Park et al., 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)
Part 3:
Applications and Integration
Review of 3 Steps

1. **Acknowledge** Stress.
   *It is what it is.*

2. **Welcome** Stress
   *You are stressed because you care.*

3. **Utilize** Stress.
   *It is designed to facilitate.*
Practical Application: 

Mindset Elicitation Triggers

• Anchors (p. 7)
  – Doorknobs, red lights, seatbelts, jacket zippers, pictures and images

• Stress Signals (p. 7)
  – Physiological, behavioral, or psychological signals of potential tipping points
What’s next?

1. **We will check in next week**
   - How are you using the tools to prepare for your finals?
   - How are you feeling?
   - Tips on how to ace your final exam

2. **We will check in this fall**
   - How are you using the tools during your first semester at MIT?
   - Deepen the learning

3. **Opportunities for long-term connections**
   - How are you using the tools throughout your time at MIT?
   - Opportunities to earn money
Key Takeaways:

ReThinking Stress

• Stress can be enhancing: you can reach higher levels of performance and well-being under constant or even increasing stress

• Your mindset is an important factor in determining your response

• Continually elicit an enhancing stress-mindset by acknowledging, welcoming, and utilizing your stress
Thank you!

Interphase Stress Training Workshop