

MICRO AND MACRO ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES IN STRESS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Stress can be defined as any challenge to 'homeostasis' or to the body's internal sense of balance. It gets manifested itself either as eustress or distress. Eustress or 'good stress' is a positive form of stress that motivates an individual to proceed working. It is when the stress is no longer tolerable or manageable that distress manifests. Distress or 'bad stress' is the peak at which the good stress becomes too much to bear or cope with. It is when we remain in the stressful situation that our bodies experience adverse physical, mental, and emotional effects. The sources of Work stress can be attributed to Extra-organisational stressors, Organisational, Group as well as Individual stressors. The dysfunctional aspects of high level of distress are a major concern for the contemporary society in general and for effective human resource management in particular. Distress experienced by individual has negative consequences not only for oneself and ones families but also for the organisations in which they serve. Stress management is the act of coping with the stressful events and situations which we encounter in our day to day life. We make use of coping mechanisms which are basically cognitive, behavioural and psychological efforts to deal with stress. The present paper discusses both the micro and the macro organisational approaches towards stress management. A conducive combination of stress management approaches both by the individual as well organisation should be applied to make the work environment stress free and productive enabling positive well being both at the individual and organisational level.

Key words: stress, stress management techniques, micro organisational approach and macro organisational approach.

INTRODUCTION

The wellbeing of an organization and the wellbeing of its workers are closely linked with each other. There is substantial evidence which shows that as the 21st century progresses, the workplace wellbeing will climb up the business agenda and the organization and the employer will turn their attention to determining and improving the state of well being of its human resources. Studies have revealed that stress levels are rising among employed Indians due to growing uncertainty in jobs in a highly varying, competitive and unsettling environment and also due to increasing anxiety in their personal lives. The rising stress has, led to an upsurge in the number of people who are suffering from depression and are at high risk of attempting suicide. Employers, therefore, face an increasing challenge of dealing with workers who are not only personally depressed but may also adversely impinge on the productivity of their organizations. World Health Organization's report (2017) states that India is home to an estimated 57 million people affected by depression and 18 % of people worldwide suffer from the condition. Hence assumed that a significant portion belong to the Indian workforce.

A survey conducted on 200,000 professionals employed across 30 Indian firms in 2016 found that 46 % professionals are facing stress as a consequence of their work. A recent study conducted by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India found that professionals reported workplace fatigue, sleeping disorders and a general feeling of 'poor health'.

An Indian employee from the private sector works for a minimum of 48-50 hours a week when compared to 33 hours a week in UK and 40 hours a week in US. Also the pay scale in India, a 'developing country', is meagre when compared to these 'developed countries' which pay almost six times more even after considering and deducting the indexing prices and cost of living. This results in extremely demanding schedules, high stress level and performance pressure.

NATURE OF STRESS

Stress is highly individualistic in nature with some people having a high tolerance level and some others having low tolerance. There may be a few who need certain level of stress to perform which motivates and energizes them to put in their best. Thus for every individual there is an optimum level of stress under which he or she will perform to the full ability. If the stress experienced by the individual is below this level, he may feel bored; the motivation becomes low and a sense of apathy sets in. If this phenomenon continues and if one operates in a very low stress environment and constantly experiences boredom, the person is likely to psychologically or physically withdraw from work.

If on the other hand, the stressors are too many or too intense, then there are chances for the individual to experience anger, anxiety and aggression which may have an adverse effect on one's performance. A person with high self esteem on the other hand may handle stressful situations with ease, confidence and clarity in thinking. Organizational performance is at its peak only during optimum levels of stress. Though the optimum stress level is different for different individuals, each individual can sense and determine how much stress is practical for oneself to operate in a productive manner.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is the common term applied to the pressures people feel in day today life. The presence of stress at work is almost anticipated in many jobs. The nature of stress has been a topic of interest across a wide range disciplines. Academicians, Doctors, psychiatrists, and researchers in the field of management have studied its causes and its symptoms, and have defined the term in a

variety of different ways. Stress is defined as the reactions of individuals to new or threatening factors in their work environment or as any challenge to 'homeostasis' or to the body's internal sense of balance.

Stress can be either positive or negative. Some innovative and creative work situations can bring positive challenge and excitement. Just as promotions present employees feel positively anxious about their new work assignments and also make them look forward to the new responsibilities eagerly with positive outlook towards additional challenges, rewards, and excitement thus developing positive stress or Eustress. But there are certain other types of work, very threatening and anxiety-arousing such as depression in the economy creating negative stress or distress for sales personnel, as they will be much more anxious about making sales commissions and sales quotas.

SOURCES OF STRESS

Stress, whether positive or negative is a reality of our everyday life and comes from our work and non-work lives. As pointed out by Near, Rice, and Hunt (1980) and Sekaran (1986) the work and non-work domains of one's life are closely interrelated. The stress and strain experienced in one area is carried over to the other. Thus, if one feels stressed at work, it may get carried over to the home. Likewise, stress experienced at home or from other non-work situations can be carried over to the work place as well. In general the sources of stress can be classified as

- Extra-organizational stressors
- Organizational stressors
- Group stressors
- Individual stressors

A. Extra organizational stressors

Job stress is not limited to things that happen inside the organization during the working hours. Extra organizational factors also contribute to job stress for example the **Political factors** such as a stable political system supporting changes implemented in an orderly manner favours a stress free environment within the organization. The **Economic factors** with swings in the economy can be a detrimental stressor. The recession and the downward plunge in the economy can lead to temporary layoff or reduction in pay in many organizations leading to stressful situations. The **technological factors** can also be threatening to employees' skill becoming obsolete. The technological innovations and automation can be a threat to many organizations and can cause stressful situations.

B. Organizational Stressors

Job related factors like the Task and the Role demand expected out of the job if dull or boring or too demanding in terms of frequent transfers or constant travelling with the employee finding little time to be spent with family can be strenuous. The **Hazardous or morally conflicting jobs** can affect one's job satisfaction and can bring anguish to the employees. Some duties and responsibilities associated with certain jobs have in built stress such as police department, fire fighters etc. The **Working environmental conditions** such as noise, poor lighting, radiation, temperature and smoke are stress inducing agents. **Job security** can also cause stress which increases dramatically when job security is threatened. **Interdependence of one's own tasks and tasks of others** can act as a potential stressor with Autonomy leading to relatively less stress. The **Workload** with an overload either quantitative or qualitative in terms of too many tasks, too little time or lack of skill or ability can lead to stress.

The role related factors include **Role ambiguity, Role conflict, Role overload and Ethical dilemmas**. A major source of job stress is ambiguity regarding a person's role in the organization. The recent increase in mergers and acquisitions among major organizations, have resulted in more and more employees experiencing job stress due to role ambiguity. In **Role Overload** employees feel that they are being asked to do more work than what time or ability permits. Working under time pressure is especially stressful. For example, if an employee is expected to perform the duties of a supervisor, receptionist, public relations officer and an accountant, she is likely to experience stress from the multiple roles she has to play during the day. She may be able to manage the various roles for a short period of time, but if expected to continue on a long term basis, she is likely to be succumbed to stress, fall ill or quit.

In Role Under load the employees have too little work to do or too little variety in their work. A salesperson in a store with no customer, standing around all day with nothing to do, could be said to experience role under load. Role under load may lead to low self-esteem, increased frequency of nervous symptoms and health issues.

Ethical Dilemma refers to situations such as whether or not one should report the observed unethical behaviors of another person which can cause extreme levels of stress in individuals. This will be specifically true for those who have strong moral values and a deep sense of personal and corporate social responsibility.

Interpersonal and group related factors are a major source of **organizational** stressor. Three aspects of interpersonal relationships at work, How much contact an individual has with coworkers and managers, how much time he or she deals with clients or consumers, and how pleasant those interactions are, all influence how much stress an individual experiences at work.

The poor interpersonal relationships with supervisors, subordinates, coworkers or clients at work can lead to employees developing a generalized anxiety. Moreover, lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationships can cause considerable stress, especially among employees with a high social need. Sometimes, the individuals try to avoid these stressful situations by remaining absent as frequently as possible and even start looking for new jobs.

Organizational structural factors Organizational structure defines the level of differentiation, the degree of rules and regulations where decisions are made. Insufficient resources such as time, budget, raw materials, space or manpower also induce stress in the work environment. When one has to produce and perform with inadequate resources on a long-term basis stress will be imposed naturally on the individual who is responsible for getting the job done. **Organizational leadership factors** associated with the managerial style of the organization's senior managers can also be stressful. Some managers create a culture characterized by tension, fear and anxiety. They establish unrealistic pressures to perform imposing excessively autocratic control over the employees and punish employees who fail to turn up. **Organization's life cycle with** Organizations going through a cycle as they get established, grow, become mature and eventually decline can create different problems and pressures for the employees. The initial and the final stages are considered stressful. The initial stages of establishment involve a lot of excitement and uncertainty,

while the decline typically requires layoffs and a different set of uncertainties. When the organization is in the maturity stage, stress tends to be the least because uncertainties are lowest at this point of time.

C. Group Stressors:

Group stressors include **Group Cohesiveness** as the famous Hawthorne studies had proved group cohesiveness is very important to the employees, particularly at the lower levels of the organisation. Lack of cohesiveness can be stressful, especially for those persons who cannot thrive in isolation. The other side of the picture is that too much cohesiveness can also lead to stress. Sayings like "Too much familiarity breeds contempt" are very valid because prolonged contact with other people can also cause stress. This stress becomes more intensified when the people we are close to or with whom we come in contact with are in distress themselves.

Lack of Social Support Satisfaction, a state of mind is primarily influenced by positive external factors like friendliness, respect from other members and self respect, support, opportunity to interact, achievement, protection against threats and a feeling of security.

Conflict has both functional and dysfunctional aspects. People who are working in the organizations are prone to interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Whenever conflict has dysfunctional consequences, it will lead to stress among the concerned parties.

Organisational Climate may have a relaxed style of working or may be tensed and crisis oriented. All the employees of such organisation will be continuously tensed, if the climate in general is unfriendly, hostile or totally task oriented.

D. Individual Stressors:

The typical individual works for about 8 to 10 hours a day. The problems and experiences which he has to face in the remaining 14 to 16 non-working hours can spill over to his work place. Employees' personal lives have a marked effect on their lives at work. If things are going well personally, they are more likely to be upbeat and optimistic and have more energy and patience for dealing with problems at work, but if employees are having some personal problems, they might be more tensed or distracted when they go to work.

Job Concerns regarding lack of job security can lead to anxiety or frustration to the individual. The prospect of losing a job especially when you have a family and social obligations is always very stressful. Career progress and status incongruity, i.e., having jobs with less status, power and prestige than they think they deserve can lead to stress.

Career Changes with an employee having to relocate geographically because of a transfer or promotion, the routine daily life gets disrupted, causing concern and stress. Geographical moves create stress because they disrupt the daily routine. Thus, when a person is geographically relocated, his stress will depend upon how many changes occur in his social relationships and family life, more the changes, more will be the stress.

Economic Problems: Some people are poor money managers or they have wants and desires that seem to exceed their earning capacity. When individuals overspend their financial resources, it will cause stress and distract the employees from their work.

Changes in Life Structure is seen with an individual growing older, with his responsibilities to himself as well as others changing. The higher the responsibility, the greater the stress.

The Pace of Life also induces stress with the responsibilities of a person increasing, his capacity to execute them should also increase. A hectic pace of life when the person is always busy in business can create more stress than a relaxed pace of life.

Life Change and Life Traumas with sudden changes are highly stressful. Life trauma is any disturbance in an individual's life that alters his or her attitudes, emotions or behaviours which can be highly stressful. **Personality of a Person** is the most dominating factor which influences the way one responds to a stressful situation which include values, attitudes and behavior patterns that make up the unique personality of an individual. Our concept of self also influence the way we perceive stress, a person with low self esteem may exhibit inability to adapt to stressful situations and may harbour negative emotions such as fear. Psychologists have identified two broad personalities, one more vulnerable to stress than the other. TYPE A is the Stress prone Personality who are constantly impatient, ambitious, competitive, aggressive and hard working. They set high goals for themselves and others and are particularly prone to stress. TYPE B Personality on the other hand is calm, relaxed and not overly ambitious and less at risk from being stressed.

Ability to Cope with stress and the sources a person seeks to deal with stress are very important. People who have strong faith in God will find it easier to deal with stressful situations. Similarly, family, relations and friends are a source of great comfort at such times of crisis.

METHODS OF MANAGING STRESS

Stress is a factor that everybody has to face on a daily basis both in the work and non-work spheres of life. Since the body has only a limited capacity to respond to stress, it is important for individuals to optimally manage their stress level to operate as fully functioning human beings.

Various approaches of Managing stress are discussed under **Micro organizational or the Individual approaches and the Macro organizational Approaches.**

Micro or Individual-Focused Stress Management Strategies:

Individual-focused interventions concentrate on improving conditions for the individual. The counseling programs emphasize that the individual is in charge of reducing "stress" Every individual belonging to an organization should take personal responsibility for reducing his/her work load. There are a number of ways by which a person can learn to cope with a stressful situations at the work front. Some of the micro organizational approaches towards stress management include the following

Employee Assistance Programs.

When stress become sufficiently problematic in a worker's life, employees may utilize the short-term counseling services, referral services or Employee Assistance Programs. People who utilize the counseling services, may engage in cognitive behavioral therapy aimed at changing the way people think about the stressors (e.g., as challenge opportunity over threat) A few topics that may be covered in these therapy sessions include time management and goal setting (prioritization), career planning , cognitive restructuring, relaxation, anger management etc.

Cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) helps an individual to identify misconceptions about the nature and causes of stress and develop new conceptions about stress. In addition, the behavioral element of CBT helps the person develop new behavioral responses to stressful events. Stress inoculation training consists of three phases: education about stress and its causes; acquisition and rehearsal of skills in cognitive restructuring (e.g., identifying irrational thoughts and replacing them with rational thoughts); and developing and practicing new cognitive, emotional and behavioral 'scripts' for responding to stressful events.

Recreational Program

Providing recreational facilities, arranging group meditation programs, help to reduce stress and achieve personal goals. It also makes the employees aware of what additional educational qualifications or specialized technical training they need to acquire. By becoming aware of the possible avenues for advancement, the employees can reduce their stress levels by becoming more realistic about their options and can prepare themselves for it.

Mindfulness

A popular therapy today is to train people to be more mindful, which involves helping people live in the present, reduce negative judgment of current and past experiences, and practicing patience assertiveness Knowledge about stress, Physiological fitness, Time management etc. (Birnie, Speca, & Carlson, 2010). People can learn to get better organized as well as manage time so that they can do their work more efficiently.

Biofeedback/Imagery/Meditation/Deep Breathing

Biofeedback therapy is a way to get feedback from the body to measure how relaxed you are. When you are relaxed, breathing rate slows, heart rate decreases, hands and feet become warmer, blood pressure and muscle tension decrease, and brain waves change. By measuring these types of physical responses, it is possible to determine how relaxed or how stressed the body is. With guidance from a therapist, individuals learn to change their physiological responses so that their pulse normalizes and muscles relax (Norris, Fahrion, & Oikawa, 2007). The therapist's guidance might include reminders for imagery, meditation, and deep breathing. The idea behind the use of imagery in stress reduction is that you use your imagination to recreate and enjoy a situation that is very relaxing. The more intensely you imagine the situation, the more relaxing the experience will be. **Abdominal breathing** for 20 to 30 minutes each day will **reduce** anxiety and **reduce stress**. **Deep breathing** increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes a state of calmness.

Sleep/Rest/Respite

Workers today sleep less per night than adults did nearly 30 years ago (Luckhaupt, Tak, & Calvert, 2010). In order to combat problems, such as increased anxiety and cardiovascular artery disease, associated with sleep deprivation and insufficient rest, it is imperative that people disconnect from their work at least one day per week so that they are able to restore psychological health (Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998; Ragsdale, Beehr, Grebner, & Han, 2011). One of the ways that companies are trying to help with the challenges of high workload or increased need to be available to colleagues, clients around the globe is by offering flexible work arrangements. Companies that require global interactions 24-hours per day often employ this strategy

Role Analysis Technique (RAT)

The Role Analysis Technique helps both the manager and the employee to analyze the requirements and expectations from the job. Breaking-down the job into various components clarifies the role of the job for the entire system. This helps to eliminate reduction of work thus lowering down the stress level. Role analysis or role clarification aims to redefine, identify, and align employees' roles and responsibilities with their work goals.

Macro or Organization-Focused Stress Management Strategies

At the organizational level, companies that face major declines in productivity and profitability or increased costs need to be motivated to reassess organizational factors that might be impinging on the employees' stress levels and wellbeing. Companies may choose to implement practices and policies that are expected to help not only the employees, but also the organization with reduced costs associated with employee ill-health, such as medical insurance, and unused office space.

Some of the macro organizational approaches towards stress management are as follows

Organizational-Level Occupational Health Interventions

Organizational-level occupational health intervention is implemented in response to some ailing organizational issues that need to be reversed or stopped, and because it brings in the entire organization's workforce to address the problems, it has been placed in this category.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Dewe and Kompier (2008), noted that concern over losing one's job is a reason for why 40% of survey respondents indicated they work more hours than formally required. As companies become increasingly global, many people with desk jobs are finding themselves communicating with colleagues who are halfway around the globe and at all hours of the day or night (Glazer et al., 2012). To help minimize the strains associated with these stressors, companies might devise flexible work arrangements (FWA), though the type of FWA needs to be tailored to the cultural environment (Masuda et al., 2012). FWAs give employees some control to decide what would be the optimal work arrangement for them (e.g., part-time, flexible work hours, compressed work week, telecommuting). In other words, FWA provides employees with the choice of when to work, where to work (on-site or off-site), and how many hours to work in a day, week, or pay period (Kossek, Thompson, & Lautsch, 2015).

Diversity Programs

Employees in the workplace might experience strain due to feelings of discrimination or prejudice. Organizational climate that do not promote diversity (in terms of age, religion, physical abilities, ethnicity, nationality, sex, and other characteristics) are breeding grounds for undesirable attitudes toward the workplace, lower performance, and greater turnover intention (Bergman, Palmieri, Drasgow, & Ormerod, 2012). Many companies invest large sum of money in gym and sport facilities for maintaining the health of the employees. Thus, diversity programs can directly reduce stressors associated with conflict linked to diversity in the workplace.

Healthcare Management Policies

Over the past few years, organizations have adopted insurance plans that implement wellness programs for the sake of managing the increasing cost of healthcare that is believed to be a result of individuals' not managing their own health, with regular check-ups and treatment. The wellness programs require all insured employees to visit a primary care provider, complete health risk assessment, and engage in disease management activities as specified by a physician.

A healthy workplace requires healthy workers. An organizations' missions should focus on a healthy workforce, for which the company must routinely examine its own contributions in terms of how it structures itself; reinforces communications among employees, vendors, and clients; how it rewards and cares for its people and the extent to which people at the upper levels are truly connected with the people at the lower levels. As a matter of practice, management must recognize when employees are overworked, unwell, and poorly engaged. Management must also take stock of when it is doing well and maintain and reinforce the good practices, norms, and procedures.

Job Relocation

Job relocation assistance is offered to employees who are transferred, by finding alternative employment for the spouses of the transferred employees and getting admissions for their children in the new place. These arrangements help to reduce the anxiety and stress for the moving family.

Delegation, Feedback and Supervisor Training

Another way of coping with job stress is to delegate some responsibilities to others. Delegation can directly decrease workload upon the manager and helps to reduce the stress. Another type of stress management Program that organizations are experimenting with is feedback and supervisor training. Managers are trained to give constructive feedback, performance appraisals, listen to employees' problems more effectively, and to communicate job assignments and instructions more clearly.

An Eclectic model as a Recommendation to combat stress

Keeping in mind the strategies to combat stress, an innovative model is presented with focus on acquiring social and emotional skills. In the Education front; it's known that preparing students with technical or academic skills alone will not be enough to achieve success. Social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, empathy, mindfulness, courage or leadership are the significant factors leading to success.

The Eclectic Model draws on a well-known framework in the field of social and emotional skills – the Big Five model – to provide a general outline of how these skills should be organized. These skills are arranged hierarchically, with five general skill categories split into narrower, lower-order skills.

The Big Five categories are

- openness to experience (open-mindedness)
- conscientiousness (task performance)
- emotional stability (emotional regulation)
- extraversion (engaging with others)
- agreeableness (collaboration).

The Big Five model has been extensively researched and has accumulated substantial evidence to combat stress. Many research teams have independently found a similar five-factor structure of personality characteristics, and this consistency in results has contributed to the widespread acceptance of the model. The Big Five model is also comprehensive enough to include the majority of social and emotional skills studied till date. There is also extensive evidence that the Big Five domains and sub-domains can be generalized across cultures and nations.

The model comprises of social and emotional skills spread across the 5 broad domains – the “Big Five” dimensions and the compound skills. These skills when imparted can help the individual face stressful situations with ease.



Fig. 1.Eclectic Model to combat stress

1. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS – getting things done, as required and in time. Conscientiousness includes a range of skills that determine the tendency to be self-controlled, responsible towards others, hardworking, persistent, orderly, and virtuous and rule abiding

This domain comprises of **ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION** Setting high standards for oneself and working hard to meet them, **SELF-CONTROL** Ability to control impulses, delay gratification and maintain concentration, **RESPONSIBILITY** Following through a responsibility and **PERSISTENCE** Persevere in tasks and hard to distract

2.OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE- exploring the world of things and ideas which is regarded as one of the key domains for intrinsic motivation to learn and develop one's potential. Openness to experience concerns an individual's preference for variety and novelty. In particular, intellectual curiosity, creativity and intellectual efficiency are considered to be one of the most important drivers of intellectual development and lifelong learning.

This include **CURIOSITY** Interest in ideas and love of learning, and intellectual exploration, **CREATIVITY** Generating novel ideas or products and **CULTURAL FLEXIBILITY/ TOLERANCE** being open to different points of view and values .

3. EXTRAVERSION-is enjoying the company of others. It is the tendency to engage and enjoy friendly social interactions, attract attention, dominate in relationships and sustain vigour throughout the day.

This include **ENERGY/ACTIVITY** Sustaining vigorous activity throughout a day, **ASSERTIVENESS** Enjoying leadership, dominance and assertive behaviors and **SOCIABILITY** Preference for social interactions

4. AGREEABLENESS– concern for the well-being of others. Agreeable individuals place greater value on their interpersonal relationships, co-operative and helpful, and are (as a consequence) better liked by their peers. This comprises of **EMPATHY** Perspective taking and empathic concern for others well-being, **CO-OPERATION** Living in harmony with others and **TRUST** Assuming that others generally have good intentions

5. EMOTIONAL STABILITY – having a calm and positive emotionality or its negative form, neuroticism/ negative emotionality. At the level of individual social and emotional skills, models of negative emotionality typically differentiate between three types of negative affect: fear/anxiety, sadness/depression and irritation/anger. Of these, the tendency to experience anxiety and fear tends to be most central. This involves **STRESS RESISTANCE** Effectiveness in modulating anxiety and response to stress, **EMOTIONAL CONTROL** keeps their emotions and temper under control and **OPTIMISM** Positive expectations for self and life.

6. COMPOUND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS In addition to the Big Five dimensions and their sub-dimensions, there has been considerable research into a number of other social and emotional skills outside the Big Five framework. These are sometimes called “compound” personality characteristics, since they are found to be combinations of aspects of a number of individual skills and characteristics. Examples include self-efficacy, metacognition, critical thinking, self-esteem and core self-evaluations. **SELF-EFFICACY** Belief in one's capabilities to execute tasks and achieve goals, **CRITICAL THINKING** which is

thinking for yourself; grounding beliefs on critical analysis through independent thought and METACOGNITION Awareness and regulation of inner processes and subjective experiences.

Implications

Over the last decade, social and emotional skills have been rising on the educational policy agenda and in the public debate. Keeping this in mind an innovative model to combat stress and help individuals to be successful in life is presented. The model will help practitioners to support individuals in the development of these critical skills. It will provide insight and guidance for jurisdictions to understand the policies and practices that foster the development of social and emotional skills among individuals. This would also enable academicians and also management gurus to look within organizations and understand where and how success and wellbeing is achieved, equipping individuals of different ages and backgrounds to approach stressful situations with ease.

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