

# **INVESTIGATING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS**

**by**

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## DECLARATION


I, Jacobus Fourie, declare that Investigating Employee Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Stress Management Interventions is my own unaided work both in content and execution. All the resources I used in this study are cited and referred to in the reference list by means of a comprehensive referencing system. Apart from the normal guidance from my study leaders, I have received no assistance, except as stated in the acknowledgements.

I declare that the content of this thesis has never been used before for any qualification at any tertiary institution.

I, Jacobus Fourie, declare that the language in this thesis was edited by Michelle van Jaarsveld (SAFREA).

Jacobus Fourie

Date: 20 March 2015



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Signature

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to explore the perceptions of employees of the effectiveness of stress management interventions within a specific company.

**Motivation for the study:** Stress has become part of everyday life of most employees. Studies have shown the negative effect that stress has on employee wellbeing. Stress Management Intervention (SMI) is a programme implemented by organisations focusing on the reduction of work-related stressors, as well as assisting employees to cope with and minimise the negative impact of stress. Most stress intervention programmes are reactive and are aimed at alleviating the situation. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived measure of effectiveness of the SMI in the organization.

**Research design, approach, and method:** A qualitative cross-sectional approach was used on a purposive sample of 12 employees from one organisation in South Africa. The sample consisted of permanent employees, aged between 25 and 64, employed by an organisation utilising a SMI programme.

**Main Findings:** SMI in this company was evaluated as effective by the majority of participants. The participants indicated the effectiveness of the SMI in terms of personal stress management ability improvement, more effective authority management, more effective time management, improved assertiveness behaviour, meaningful personal counselling sessions, and improved personal health. It can thus be concluded that SMI in the company seems to be effective, as perceived by the participants.

**Practical implications:** The findings of this study can inform other organisations of the importance of effective SMIs in order to alleviate stress and to equip employees with efficient skills to manage stress. This will promote a healthy workforce and increase productivity. The opposite can occur if SMIs are not implemented effectively, namely loss in productivity, increased absenteeism, and an unhealthy workforce.

**Contribution/value-add:** This study makes a theoretical knowledge contribution to the field of SMI in the workplace, and contributes to a better understanding of the nature and importance of effective SMI programmes for organizations.

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## Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT .....	2
1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	2
1.4 ACADEMIC VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY.....	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
2.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION (SMI) CONSTRUCT AS PART OF EMPLOYEE WELLNESS.....	4
2.2 DIMENSIONS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION .....	5
2.3 STRESS.....	7
2.3.1. How stress is defined and measured.....	7
2.3.2 Causes of Stress in the Organisation .....	10
2.3.3. Effect on employees and the organisation.....	12
2.4 STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS IN ORGANISATIONS .....	13
2.4.1 SMI in Organisations Defined .....	13
2.4.2 Prevention: The Primary-level Strategy .....	14
2.4.3 Treatment: The Secondary- level strategy (eustress and distress).....	15
2.4.4 Rehabilitation: The Tertiary-level Strategy.....	17
2.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS .....	18
2.5.1 Less Successful SMI Programmes.....	19
2.5.2 More Successful SMI Programmes .....	20
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN .....	21
3.1 PARADIGM/PHILOSOPHY .....	21
3.2 THE RESEARCH APPROACH .....	23
3.3 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE.....	23
3.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY .....	25
3.6 TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES .....	28
3.6.1 The Target Sampling Population .....	28
3.6.2 Data Collection Procedures .....	28
3.6.3 Data Analysis.....	31
3.6.4 Quality and Rigour .....	31
3.6.5 Ethics.....	32
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.....	34
4.1 SAMPLE.....	34
4.2 QUESTIONS .....	36
4.3 DATA ANALYSIS .....	39
4.4 RESULTS.....	44

4.4.1 Causes of Work Stress: Company.....	44
<i>Company Ethics and Culture</i> .....	45
<i>Interpersonal Conflict and Management Style</i> .....	46
<i>Deadlines, Workload and Type of Job</i> .....	47
<i>Incomplete Job Profiles, Job Insecurity and Incompetency</i> .....	49
<i>Lack of Resources</i> .....	50
<i>Remuneration and Budget Related Issues</i> .....	51
4.4.2 Causes of Work Stress: Personal.....	52
<i>Family relationships</i> .....	52
<i>Country of Origin</i> .....	53
<i>Personal Finances</i> .....	53
<i>Studying</i> .....	54
4.4.3 Employees' Definition of Stress.....	55
4.4.4 Ways of Handling Stress.....	56
4.4.4.1 <i>Inside the Company</i> .....	56
4.4.4.2 <i>Outside the Company</i> .....	58
4.4.5 Effects of Stress on Employees.....	60
4.4.6 Responsibility of SMI in Company X.....	62
4.4.7 Effectiveness of SMI in Company X:.....	63
4.4.7.1 <i>Successful</i> .....	63
4.4.7.2 <i>Unsuccessful</i> .....	68
4.4.8 Employee Suggestions for Future SMI.....	69
4.5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS.....	72
4.5.1 Selective Code: Causes of Work Stress – Company-Initiated.....	72
<i>Company Ethics and Culture</i> .....	73
<i>Interpersonal Conflict and Management Style</i> .....	74
<i>Deadlines, Workload and Type of Job</i> .....	75
<i>Incomplete Job Profiles, Job Insecurity and Incompetence</i> .....	75
<i>Lack of Resources</i> .....	76
<i>Remuneration and Budget Related Issues</i> .....	76
4.5.2 Selective Code: Causes of Work Stress: Personal.....	76
<i>Family and Other Relationships</i> .....	76
<i>Country of Origin</i> .....	77
<i>Personal Finances</i> .....	77
<i>Studying</i> .....	77
<i>Physical Health, Mental Health and Death</i> .....	77
4.5.3 Selective Code: Stress Defined by Employees.....	78
<i>Physical Appearance, Mental State, Absenteeism, Eating Habits, and Negative Attitude</i> .....	78
4.5.4 Selective Code: Ways to manage stress inside the Company.....	79
<i>Authority Handling (Involving Management)</i> .....	79
<i>Involving Human Resources Management (HRM)</i> .....	79
<i>Solving the problem</i> .....	79
<i>Talking to Others</i> .....	80
<i>Getting Job Profiles in Place</i> .....	80
<i>Working Overtime</i> .....	80
<i>Enjoying Work</i> .....	81
<i>Work-life Balance</i> .....	81
4.5.5 Selective Code: Ways to Handle Stress Outside of the Company.....	81

<i>Eating Related Habits</i> .....	81
<i>Sense of Humour</i> .....	81
<i>Isolating Themselves</i> .....	82
<i>Recreational Activities and Physical Habits</i> .....	82
<i>Family Time</i> .....	82
<i>Altered Sleeping Patterns</i> .....	82
4.5.6 Selective Code: Results of Stress on Employees.....	83
<i>Physical Deterioration</i> .....	83
<i>Eating Disorders</i> .....	83
<i>Mental Health and Emotional Problems</i> .....	84
<i>Productivity</i> .....	84
<i>Sleeping Disorders</i> .....	85
<i>Absenteeism</i> .....	85
4.5.7 Selective Code: Responsibility for SMI.....	85
4.5.8 Selective Code: Effectiveness of SMI – Successful.....	86
<i>Effective Applications and Improvement of Stress Management</i> .....	87
<i>Authority Handling Improved</i> .....	87
<i>Productivity Increased</i> .....	87
<i>Learned to Prioritise and Mastered Time Management</i> .....	87
<i>Assertiveness Improved</i> .....	88
<i>Positive Feedback on Course</i> .....	88
<i>Very Effective Personal Sessions</i> .....	88
<i>Could help others</i> .....	88
<i>Improved Health</i> .....	89
4.5.9 Selective Code: Effectiveness of SMI - Unsuccessful.....	89
4.5.10 Selective Code: Suggestions for Future Stress Management Interventions...	90
<i>Role-play</i> .....	90
<i>Company Related Examples</i> .....	90
<i>Teaching Workers How to Identify and Measure Stress</i> .....	90
<i>Teaching Employees How to Cope with Stress</i> .....	90
<i>One-on-one Counselling Sessions</i> .....	91
<i>Refresher Courses Once a Year</i> .....	91
<i>Allowing Operators to Attend SMI Training</i> .....	91
<i>Assessments and Assessment Centre</i> .....	92
<i>Adding Spirituality</i> .....	92

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS.....	93
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	93
5.2 CONCLUSIONS.....	93
5.2.1 Causes of Work Stress (Personal and Company-initiated).....	93
5.2.1.1 <i>Company-initiated</i> .....	94
5.2.1.2 <i>Personally-initiated</i> .....	95
5.2.2 Employees' Definition of Stress.....	96
5.2.3 How Stress is Managed (Inside and Outside of the Company).....	96
5.2.4 Effects of Stress.....	97
5.2.5 Responsibility for SMIs.....	97
5.2.6 Effectiveness of SMI.....	97
5.2.7 Employee Suggestions for Future SMIs.....	98

5.3	RECOMMENDATIONS .....	98
5.4	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	100
5.5	LIMITATIONS .....	100
	APPENDICES.....	101
	APPENDIX A: REFERENCES.....	101

**Table of Figures**



Figure 1: Model of Work Stress (Palmer, Cooper, & Thomas, 2004).....	10
Figure 2: Research "onion" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).....	21
Figure 3: Basic Types of Design for Case Studies (Yin, 2012) .....	26
Figure 4: Causes of Company Originated Stress.....	45
Figure 5: Effectiveness of SMI in Company X.....	64
Figure 6: Causes of Work Stress originated from the Company Environment.....	73
Figure 7: Comparison of the Effectiveness of SMI in Company X .....	86

### **Table of Tables**

Table 1: Dimensions of SMI.....	5
Table 2: Data Search Summary.....	6
Table 3: Characteristics of Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2013) .....	24
Table 4: Participant Biographical Information .....	35
Table 5: Interview Questions and Relating Themes .....	36
Table 6: Explanation of Coding Process.....	39

# INVESTIGATING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Stress has become a part of everyday life for most employees. Although it is not exclusive to fast paced societies, stress seems to be increasing as the pace of life requires constant adaptation. Technology, social habits, values, social structures, and people are constantly changing. Individuals, organisations and governments have to cope with this (Treven & Potocan, 2005). Many studies (Akussah, Dzandu, & Osei-Aduo, 2012; Blaug, Kenyon, & Lekhi, 2007; Treven & Potocan, 2005; Weinberg, Sutherland, & Cooper, 2010) have shown the negative effect that stress has on employee well-being. Employees exposed to stressful working environments can testify that stress negatively affects their physical and psychological well-being. Not only is stress a pervasive feature within organisations, it is also omnipresent in everyday life, and therefore it is important that people learn to manage it effectively. Organisations may ultimately experience extreme cases of absenteeism and low productivity when stress is not managed effectively. Stress management is therefore imperative for employee wellness (K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

Stress Management Intervention (SMI) programmes can be implemented by organisations. These focus on the reduction of work-related stressors and assist employees in coping with and minimising the negative impact of stress (Fevre, Kolt, & Matheny, 2006; K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Most stress intervention programmes are reactive and are aimed at alleviating stressful situations (Kohler & Munz, 2006).

While much research has been conducted on the value of individual stress interventions (Antoni et al., 2000; Bragard et al., 2006; Cheng & Cheung, 2005; Maas & Spinath, 2012; Orpen-Lyall, 2008; Searle, 2008; Willert, Thulstrup, Hertz, & Bonde, 2010; Wolever et al., 2012) and organisational stress interventions (Blaug et al., 2007; Nielsen, Taris & Cox, 2010; Ongori & Agolla, 2008; R. Randall, Nielsen & Tvedt, 2009) the reasons behind the

failures of these programmes have not been adequately investigated. In addition to this, the subjective realities and experiences of the participants have not been afforded much attention (Biron, Gatrell & Cooper, 2010; Nielsen, Fredslund, Christensen & Albertsen, 2006; R. Randall, Cox & Griffiths, 2007).

The American Institute of Stress indicated that up to 80% of all work-related injuries are caused by stress (K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). It is clear that stress affects the physical and psychological well-being of the employee (Kohler & Munz, 2006). Although stress cannot be completely eliminated, it is important that employees learn to manage it (K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived effectiveness of the SMI in the organization (Biron, Gatrell & Cooper, 2010).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Organisations seem to assume that an SMI will be successful. Despite a lot of research in the field of stress interventions, it is still not clear whether this is true either for the organisation or for the participants. Employees should have the opportunity to indicate how they rate the success of these programmes. It appears that some interventions deliver better results than others, but the value of these programmes have not yet been proven. Previous studies refer to different outcomes for the alternative programmes (Kohler & Munz, 2006; Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Bohle & Quinlan, 2000; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). The effectiveness of these programmes remains in question. There appears to be a scarcity of studies that evaluate the process of SMI. This could be due to negligence of organisations, researchers and publishers to publish unsuccessful research projects (Biron et al., 2010).

## **1.3 Purpose Statement and Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the subjective experiences and realities that employees encounter with SMIs and to investigate the perceptions of these employees regarding the use of such programmes in stress reduction within organisations. It seems that there is a scarcity of studies that evaluate the process of SMI. This could be due to

negligence by organisations, researchers and publishers. The publication of unsuccessful research projects can leave one lacking a feeling of accomplishment, although this could make a significant contribution to knowledge on the subject (Biron et al., 2010). By making use of Qualitative research, this study will attempt to determine how the concept (SMI) could be better clarified. The study will also investigate whether employees who went through SMI previously, benefitted from such a programme. In addition, part of the study will be dedicated to a better understanding of effective SMI programmes.

#### **1.4 Academic Value and Contribution of the Study**

The academic value and intended contribution of this study will be:

- To indicate if SMI is successful, as believed by organisations in general
- To highlight employees' qualitative experiences of such programmes
- To conduct interviews or a focus group (or both) in a specific company to determine employees' experience of SMI
- To assist practitioners with information in developing a more successful SMI programme

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is necessary to place a research project into context. A literature review indicates how the research fits into a particular field. It helps to identify knowledge gaps and to develop a research problem (Terre Blance, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

### 2.1 An overview of the Stress Management Intervention (SMI) construct as part of Employee Wellness

The SMI construct belongs within the broader concept of Employee Wellness within an organisation. The wellness model has increased in popularity as a positive, strengths-based, more holistic approach to understanding human functioning. It stands in contrast with the medical model that emphasises disease (Myers, Luecht & Sweeney, 2004). Positive psychology is about helping people to not only exist, but to flourish (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010).

The emphasis has shifted from a preventative approach of intervening in psychological problems, to a proactive, developmental approach. The idea is not to focus on what makes the client ill, but on the factors that enhance the wellness and mental health of people - factors resulting in health, even when people are under severe psychological, social and economic strain (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010; Karasek, 2004). One of the primary influences on a healthy mental state is the job condition. Five measuring instruments that are used to identify stress and job satisfaction are important here (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010):

- The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) used in the assessment of job satisfaction;
- The McMaster Health Index Questionnaire (MHIQ), which includes physical, emotional, and social aspects of quality of life;
- The Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC) - With this scale, Antonovsky (as cited by Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010) involves adaptive coping in stressful situations. He proposes that 'sense of coherence' refers to a global orientation that expresses the extent to which a person has a pervasive, enduring feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable;

- The Affestometer-2 Scale (AFM2), which measures general happiness or well-being;
- The Satisfactions with Life Scale (SWLS) – This scale focuses only on the cognitive and not the affective component of subjective well-being (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010).

These five measurements are normally used to identify stress and job satisfaction. Schaufeli and Bakker (as cited by Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2005) concluded in their studies that some individuals found pleasure in working hard and dealing with job demands. These people are engaged in their work and this aspect could be seen as the opposite of burnout. Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling state of mind that is work related and filled with dedication and absorption (Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2005). Job stress however, forces the employee to deviate from normal functioning. Both the psychological and physiological health of an employee are negatively affected by job stress (K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). It is however the task of both the individual and the organisation to initiate change, because they are both the targets and agents of change (Akussah et al., 2012).

## 2.2 Dimensions of Stress Management Intervention

In order to determine how many instances of the different constructs of stress management are referred to in literature and which literature is available on the subject, a data source search was done. The data source search delivered 65 articles and 6 books with information that is possibly relevant to this research topic. Eleven dimensions were identified under the topic of SMI, but this could be reduced to five. The following two tables (Table 1 and Table 2) indicate a summary of the information found in the data source search:

**Table 1: Dimensions of SMI**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Description of Dimensions</b>	<b>Literature Sources</b>
Stress, Eustress, Distress		Olivier, 2005; Olivier & Venter 2003; De Bruin 2005; Van Zyl 2004; Loebenstein 2005; Leung 2011; Chang, 2007; Bhagat, 2010; McCormick, 2011; Fevre, 2006; Mohr, 2010
Workplace Stress & Work		Rothman, 2005; Naude, 2006; Gaede,

Wellness		2005; Idris, 2010; Dewe, 2004; Blaug, 2007; Chandola, 2010; Ongori, 2008; Kinman, 2005; Wolever, 2012; Myers, 2004; Orpen-Lyall, 2008
Stress Management		Lotz, 2006; Carr, 2011; Bragard, 2006; Antoni, 2000; Brinkborg, 2011; Van der Klink, 2001
SMI		Dewe, 2001; Matteson, 2007; Wickramasinghe, 2012; De Frank, 2007; Mellor, 2013; Murphy, 1995; Fevre, 2006; Mueller, 2012; Richardson, 2008; Coffey 2010; Panari, 2010; McVicar, 2013; Eisen, 2007; Akussah, 2012; Clarkson, 2007; Panari, 2010; Hsu, 2011; Nytro, 2000; Kohler, 2006; Nielsen, 2010; Searle, 2008; Hasson, 2010; Limm, 2010; Shimazu, 2006; Gardner, 2005
Burnout		Yavas, 2013; Leung 2011; McCormick, 2011; Rothmann, 2005
Effectiveness		Yavas, 2013; Clarkson, 2007; Biron, 2010; Nielsen, 2006; Randall, 2009; Randall, 2007a; Morten, 2010; Richardson, 2008; Horan, 2001; Nielsen, 2007; Randall, 2007b
Workplace		Hsu, 2011
Coping		Carr, 2011; Cheng, 2005; Dewe, 2004; Maas, 2012; Shimazu, 2006; Gardner, 2005

**Table 2: Data Search Summary**

Date	Database	Keywords	No. of hits	No. of relevant hits
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress & Workplace	3	1
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress & Causes	8	2
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress	219	Scope too big - too many irrelevant hits.
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress & Employee	3	1
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress & Work	23	3
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress Management & Work	5	0
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress Management Interventions	18	1
28-01-2013	SABINET	Stress Management Programmes	13	1
04-02-2013	EMERALD	Stress Management Interventions & Workplace	20	14

04-02-2013	EMERALD	Personal Experience & SMI	1	1
13-03-2013	EMERALD	Stress & Cope & Work	4569	Scope too big - but still a great deal of valuable articles.
13-03-2013	EMERALD	Work Stress & Cope	348	6
13-03-2013	EMERALD	Stress Management Interventions & Organisation	24	Duplicate results as with Stress Management Interventions Workplace.
13-03-2013	UP Libr Catalogue Books	Stress Management	5	3
13-03-2013	UP Libr Catalogue Books	Stress & Workplace	8	3
27-03-2013	EbscoHost: E-Journals	Stress Management Interventions & Workplace	24	7
27-03-2013	EbscoHost	Stress Management Interventions & Effectiveness	0	0
27-03-2013	EbscoHost	Stress Management Interventions Effect	93	6
01-04-2013	Google Scholar	(Stress Interventions Management)(Employee)(Effective)(Work)	67,300	

## 2.3 Stress

### 2.3.1. How stress is defined and measured

Stress is inevitable in our everyday lives (Cheng & Cheung, 2005). It can be referred to as pressure exerted on workers by capitalism (Blaug et al., 2007). However, to get a uniform definition of stress is like finding a needle in a haystack as the historical meaning of the word has changed over time (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). The word “stress” was first used in the fourteenth century to refer to hardship, affliction or adversity. For over 200 years, stress was mainly referred to by the metaphor of what happens when you put a load on a bridge.

In 1920, Hans Selye (a physician) redefined stress as the body’s non-specific response to any demand made on it (Treven & Potocan, 2005; Weinberg et al., 2010). He referred to “eustress” as good stress and “distress” as bad stress (Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). Selye developed a response-based model of stress (Weinberg et al., 2010) and according to this model, a stability or balance is necessary in every person (homeostasis). From here, Hans Selye introduced the concept of General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). According to this



theory, some of the visible results were that every patient looked and felt sick and was characterised by loss of motivation, weight, strength and appetite (Weinberg et al., 2010).

There are two ways in which stress influences a person: Firstly, when it works constructively, it helps you to stay focused, alert and energetic. This is called eustress or the good type of stress (Fevre et al., 2006). However, beyond a certain point, stress starts causing damage to health, productivity and relationships (Akussah et al., 2012). This is called distress or bad stress (Fevre et al., 2006).

The two main types of stress are acute (short lived) and chronic stress (ongoing). Unresolved (ongoing) issues or situations have a negative effect on the health of the employee (Akussah et al., 2012). Some of the different ways that stress can manifest itself, include physical (mechanical), physiological (the body's response to stress) and psychological responses (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005). Schlebusch (cited by De Bruin & Taylor, 2005) indicates that an interaction of several variables takes place during this stress process. Person and environment stand in a relationship and the interaction of physical, physiological and psychological responses are experienced as transcending coping resources, leading to stress.

If asked to write down what stress means to them, what would employees say? Most of the words or phrases will be expressed in negative terms referring to something bad. Some people will describe symptoms of exposure to a stressful situation. Others will refer to the source of the stress or stressor. Stress is an interactive, dynamic process referring to a condition that might disturb normal physiological and psychological functioning (Weinberg et al., 2010). People try to cope with stress by attempting to solve the problem or by avoiding a direct confrontation with it by changing their thoughts and emotions (Cheng & Cheung, 2005). People react differently to stress, as far as the following aspects of personality are concerned: Type A/B behavioural pattern, Individual self-perception and power, locus of control, ability, and flexibility and rigidity (Treven & Potocan, 2005):

- *Type A/B behavioural pattern:* Type A people are result oriented and desire to complete work fast. They are very competitive and impatient. Type B people are

more relaxed, less competitive, and less aggressive and seldom show emotion, even during a crisis.

- *Individual self-perception and power*: Self-perception, whether positive or negative, influences the way people handle stressful life events. People with a positive opinion of the self; tend to have more confidence in themselves. A person's reaction to stressors seems to be moderated by self-esteem.
- *Locus of control*: A person's perception of the source of his/her fate is called locus of control. "Rotter's internal-external scale measures an individual's perception of how much control he is exerting over the events in his life. An internal person is convinced that the outcomes of his behaviour are the results of his own efforts. In contrast, the external person believes that the events in his life are beyond his control and should be attributed to fate, luck, or destiny. Depending on these perceptions, it is assumed that there will be a considerable difference in behaviour"(Miller, Kets De Vries, & Toulouse, 1982, p.238).
- *Flexibility and rigidity*: The flexible person does not work according to rigid rules on how to handle a situation, whilst rigid people tend to be more closed-minded, inconsiderate of others and critical in judging others (Treven & Potocan, 2005).

Severe long-term stress can lead to burnout. Burnout, caused by stress, can be defined as a constantly negative, work-related state of mind. This can be identified by exhaustion, distress, loss of motivation, reduction of effectiveness and the development of attitudes that are personally and socially dysfunctional. It can be measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the Job Stress Inventory, or the Orientation to Life Questionnaire (Rothmann et al., 2005).

Two measures are of importance when considering burnout: The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Experience of Work and Life Circumstances Questionnaire (WLQ). The MBI assesses stress and burnout in adults, especially in situations related to job-stress. The most important symptoms of stress are: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment. The WLQ measures stress levels as well as the causes of stress in individuals who have reading and writing skills equivalent to a Grade 10 level. It measures levels of stress, from normal to very high, where a high score indicates a high level of stress, and vice versa (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010). It was indicated through research

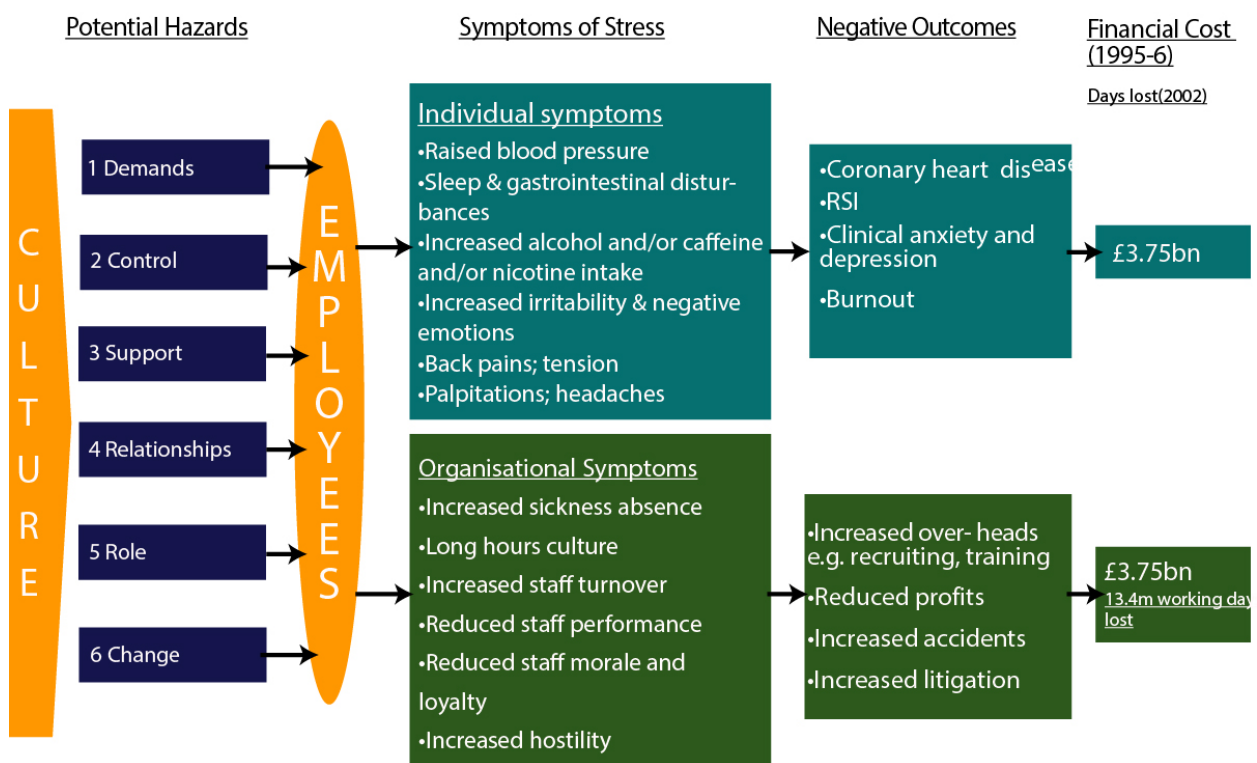
that the WLQ is fit to be used for diagnostic and developmental purposes as well as for counselling to enhance the psychological wellbeing of fire-fighters and their families (Oosthuizen & Koortzen, 2009).

### 2.3.2 Causes of Stress in the Organisation

There is no single factor that can be highlighted as the sole cause of work stress (Blaug et al., 2007). In order to explain the relationship between the main stress related hazards, individual and organisational symptoms, and the outcomes as far as health and safety are concerned, Palmer produced the following model (Figure1):

**Figure 1: Model of Work Stress (Palmer, Cooper, & Thomas, 2004)**

## Model of Work Stress



According to this model, there are six main hazards that cause stress in the workplace, namely Demands, Control, Support, Relationship, Role, and Change. “Demands” refer to workload, work patterns and work environment. “Control” is about how much say an

employee has over the way they do their work. Karasek's Job Strain model states that stress at work is the result of the combined influence of the demands of the working environment and also the amount of decision making power the employee has (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005). If the job demands are high and the job decision power is low, the employee will experience job strain (Chandola, 2010; Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2004). "Support" refers to the way that an employee receives encouragement, and provision of resources needed for the job by colleagues and management. "Relationship" indicates the way that conflict is avoided and how unacceptable behaviour is controlled. "Role" refers to individuals knowing their roles, and also the reduction of role clashes by the company. "Change" indicates how organisational change is communicated and managed by the company (Palmer et al., 2004).

Other elements with an influence on stress levels are the environmental constraints - those aspects that prevent an employee to cope with demands. Some of these are: lack of career development opportunity, poor relationships at work, shortage of equipment, role ambiguity, physical working conditions and non-work factors like work-family conflict, work-life balance, and flexible working arrangements (Chandola, 2010; De Bruin & Taylor, 2005; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a).

Other causes of stress include an unsympathetic organisational culture, lack of involvement in decision-making, poor communication between managers and employees, continual or sudden change, conflicting priorities and lack of challenges. Furthermore, Bland (as cited by Ongori & Agolla, 2008) refers to a stressful environment, too much work, relationship problems with partners and financial insecurities as causes of work stress. Inadequate support and guidance from superiors, lack of encouragement from superiors, shortage of consultation and communication, the feeling of isolation, favouritism and discrimination, as well as poor training and development can also contribute to stress (Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). All of these aspects are significant and should be taken into consideration in any company trying to combat stress.

Work situation factors that are indicated as causing stress, are: Organisational functioning, the characteristics of the task to be performed, physical working conditions and equipment, career matters, social matters, remuneration, fringe benefits and personnel policy. Indicated

aspects outside of the work situation are: family problems, financial circumstances, phase of life, general economic situation in the country, changing technology, facilities at home, social situations, status, health, background, effect of work on home life, transport facilities, religious life, political views, availability of accommodation and recreational facilities (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005; Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010).

The SWSI (Sources of Work Stress Inventory) is aimed at measuring occupational stress and also helps to identify the sources thereof. This measure was developed and standardised in South Africa for a South African population. With the wide range of stress that is measured, it is possible to more clearly pinpoint the origin of the stress related factors. Eight sources of work stress are measured: Role ambiguity, relationships, tools and equipment, job security, career advancement, lack of autonomy, work-home interface, and workload. In this way the employee can be helped to focus on specific areas causing stress (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005; Foxcroft & Roodt, 2010).

### 2.3.3. Effect on employees and the organisation

It is clear that job stress causes the employee to deviate from normal effective functioning, which causes the psychological and physiological health of an employee to be negatively affected (K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). A fleeting moment of stress (such as when you just escaped an accident) is called an acute stressor. Chronic stressors, lasting for a longer period, is the main type of stress that influences an employee. It is also indicated that stress influences a person's decision making capability and faulty choices could result from this (Thompson, 2010; Treven & Potocan, 2005). Stress has a negative impact on employees, ranging from burnout and job dissatisfaction to cardiovascular disease, and withdrawal or reduction in employees' job performance (Folkman, 2011; Searle, 2008).

Anxiety, depression and psychological disorders can also be some of the consequences of high stress levels (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005; Searle, 2008). Employee stress is a key factor in absenteeism, accidents, lost productivity and medical insurance claims (Wolever et al., 2012). It causes 75 to 85 per cent of all industrial accidents (Thompson, 2010). Employees become ineffective, non-productive and absent from their job (Akussah et al., 2012; Weinberg et al., 2010). Cohan and Single (as cited by Ongori & Agolla, 2008) compiled

stress symptoms under the following five categories: emotional, physical, behavioural, mental and health.

Stress also has a negative impact on the organisation. It contributes to low morale, a decrease in performance, sick leave, high staff turnover, low motivation, accidents, low quality products and services, low job satisfaction, unsatisfactory conflicts and poor communication (Ongori & Agolla, 2008a).

## **2.4 Stress Management Interventions in Organisations**

### **2.4.1 SMI in Organisations Defined**

Before stress can be managed or any intervention can take place, it has to be identified or audited in the particular organisation (Leung et al., 2011; Weinberg et al., 2010). This stress risk assessment should help the organisation in the process of optimising the performance and health of its employees. Sources of stress have to be eliminated or minimised to obtain the absence of physical and psychological disease and to produce feelings of happiness, satisfaction and well-being. The problem is that organisations focus on reactive (curing) rather than proactive (preventing) programmes. In most cases the organisation refuses to change the way they are running their business and that communicates to the employees the message that they themselves have to adopt successful coping mechanisms. Interventions focusing only on how the individual should manage stress have weaknesses: The results only last for a short period of time and little identification is done to determine which of the employees really require it. Organisations fail to investigate whether these programmes have a positive return on investment and it is a high risk to wait for a victim of stress to take the first action (Weinberg et al., 2010).

According to Weinberg et al. (2010), stress control functions operate on three separate levels:

- a. Identifying and minimising or eliminating stressful situations
- b. Teaching the employee to cope with stress, and
- c. Helping the victims

There are three main strategies to follow with SMI, namely prevention, treatment and rehabilitation (McVicar, Munn-Giddings, & Seebohm, 2013; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a; Weinberg et al., 2010):

#### 2.4.2 Prevention: The Primary-level Strategy

The Primary-level strategy refers to the prevention of stress by altering the source of stress and the risk to employees (Blaug et al., 2007; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a; Weinberg et al., 2010). It is a very important part of SMI and the starting point for a company in the process of work stress management. The implication is taking action to reduce stress hazards and limiting the employees' exposure to it. A stress audit should be done via a questionnaire and a face-to-face interview. When the audit results are available, appropriate interventions can be implemented. Some of the interventions could be: redesigning jobs, providing co-worker support groups and increasing employee decision-making authority (Karasek, 2004; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a; Weinberg et al., 2010). It is however crucial for a company to carefully weigh the loss of income and the health loss of employees due to stress in the workplace (Karasek, 2004; Treven & Potocan, 2005). However, it is also important to keep in mind that individuals do not react the same to potential stressors, and these reactions may be rooted in both individual differences as well as the circumstances in which it takes place (Fevre et al., 2006).

Personal stress management training interventions have been identified by Treven and Potocan (2005) and Murphy (as cited by Chandola, 2010) and these are focused on increasing the capacity to handle stress (Karasek, 2004).

These interventions include:

- Interventions focusing on relaxation e.g. muscle calming and breathing activities to release tension. This is one of the simplest techniques to lower physiological arousal and can result in relaxation even in the presence of stress. Another form of stress management is to make use of cognitive reinterpretation of stressful events in order to make them appear less threatening (Karasek, 2004).

- Meditation techniques focusing on the relaxation of the mind while staying completely attentive (Chandola, 2010).
- Biofeedback training helping to recognise skin and muscle reactivity and thus reducing work stress (Chandola, 2010).
- Exercise that leads to improvements in mood and vitality and increased resilience to stress. Physical activities, such as walking, jogging, swimming, and aerobic dancing are an effective protection against stress (Chandola, 2010).
- Learning self-confidence for personal change (Karasek, 2004).

Other methods of personal stress management are communication pattern interventions. These refer to both person and social environment interaction, such as task structure interventions and work organisation and production process interventions. Task structure interventions take place when workers' skills and decision making authority are increased (Fevre et al., 2006; Karasek, 2004). Work organisations are trying to embed task changing activities within a supportive labour context at company level and even on national level, e.g. management style, sharing authority and open communication. These activities require new structures, including new ways of communication between all active parties (participatory interaction methods) (Karasek, 2004). Programmes such as these had up to 90% success in reducing stress symptoms and instituted positive work reorganisation (Chandola, 2010; Karasek, 2004). These programmes normally run over a period of one year (Fevre et al., 2006).

#### 2.4.3 Treatment: The Secondary- level strategy (eustress and distress)

Stress Management Training is designed to help individuals cope with stress in the work environment (Gardner, Rose, Mason, Tyler & Cushway, 2005). The aim of the training is to treat or mediate the effects of a problem as experienced by the employee (Blaug et al., 2007). The individual is taking responsibility to solve his/her stress issues, and if the company is involved, the focus is on the individual and not on management style and company culture issues as such. Compared to primary-level strategies, the interventions here are relatively brief (Fevre et al., 2006). This type of intervention treats the stress severity before it leads to serious health problems (Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). However, if the focus is only here, employee's ability to cope will decline, as the root of the problem has not



been exposed, namely a combination of the work environment (management style, etc.) and the individual's capacity to cope in the specific circumstances (Fevre et al., 2006; Weinberg et al., 2010).

The secondary level of intervention can be divided into three main types: Somatic, Cognitive and Multimodal. "Somatic" refers to relaxation methods and breathing techniques. The "Cognitive" type includes mindfulness, affirmations and thought stopping. The "Multimodal" type combines techniques of both the somatic and cognitive types with techniques such as transcendental meditation and relaxation response (Fevre et al., 2006).

Examples of somatic types of interventions are bodily relaxation methods (which can include music therapy), breathing techniques, progressive relaxation and visualisation (Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2008; Fevre et al., 2006; Jain et al., 2007). Poor breathing reduces the inflow of oxygen and the outflow of carbon dioxide. This in turn makes it harder to cope with stressful situations. After learning to be aware of your breathing and practicing to normalise and slow your breaths, you will be able to quiet your mind and your body will relax in turn. Certain breathing techniques can be learned to breathe in a more relaxed and normal way. Progressive relaxation refers to deep progressive relaxation of your muscles which in turn reduces blood pressure, pulse rate, perspiration, and respiration rates. After deep muscle relaxation has been mastered, it can be used as an anti-anxiety cure (Davis et al., 2008).

Cognitive-behavioural skills training is an example where the focus is on the specifics of the stress-generating situation, attempting to alter its interpretation (the way a person conceptualises a situation will determine their emotional reaction to it), and offering support in dealing with it. It originates from cognitive psychology, and may include efforts to eliminate the source of stress such as providing training in conflict resolution, assertiveness, time management, anger management or problem solving (Chandola, 2010; Gardner et al., 2005; Shimazu, Umanodan, & Schaufeli, 2006). This is however not a simple solution in the workplace situation, as the employee is not necessarily a psychiatric patient, but rather needs a specific cognitive-behavioural approach, such as used by d'Zurilla and Nezu (Shimazu et al., 2006). During this programme, the person is equipped with skills to deal with potential problems they might encounter in the future (Shimazu et al., 2006).

The Multimodal type includes techniques such as self-hypnosis, meditation, visualisation, refuting irrational ideas, somatic relaxation or a combination of these techniques (Davis et al., 2008; Fevre et al., 2006). Meditation is when a person focuses their attention uncritically on one thing at a time. It then becomes clear that it is impossible to fear or worry when your mind is thinking about something different from the object of your emotions. It will also become evident that habitual patterns of perception and thought will lose their influence over your life once you become aware of them. Even a person's strongest emotion will become manageable when concentrating on the sensations in their body and not on the thought that brought about the emotion. Using your imagination - which is a very powerful force - you can significantly reduce stress. Coué (as cited by Davis et al., 2008) held the motto that "you are what you think you are". Refuting irrational ideas happens when we become more sensitive to our self-talk. When self-talk is irrational and untrue, we experience emotional disturbance and stress. Albert Ellis developed a system to attack irrational ideas and replace them with realistic ones. He called it "rational emotive behaviour therapy". According to this theory, it is your own thoughts that create anxiety, anger, and depression. Your thoughts should then be controlled to avoid these negative emotions (Davis et al., 2008).

Eustress and distress are very important topics to be discussed in any form of stress intervention. Eustress refers to "good stress" as defined by Hans Selye (Fevre et al., 2006; Olivier & Venter, 2003) and does not refer to the amount of stress but how the stress is interpreted by the individual experiencing it. Harris (Fevre et al., 2006) refers to it as pleasurable reactions to stressors. Distress, in contrast, refers to negative reactions to stressors. Both eustress and distress are determined by the other characteristics of stressors, such as source, timing, and the degree to which they are experienced as desirable, as well as the degree of control over it (Fevre et al., 2006).

#### 2.4.4 Rehabilitation: The Tertiary-level Strategy

This approach takes place after the worker has been diagnosed as suffering from the effects of stress. Here, the focus is on rehabilitating employees and helping them to return to work (Blaug et al., 2007; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a; Weinberg et al., 2010). The most common form of tertiary intervention is case management, where different service providers

coordinate on a rehabilitation programme to get the employee back to work. This is done with cost effectiveness in mind (Blaug et al., 2007).

The five functions of case management, according to Blaug et al. (2007), are:

- Assessing the workers' needs
- Planning and setting goals
- Coordinating the treatment and service to reach these goals
- Implementing the plan and linking the employee to the service
- Monitoring and evaluating the outcome of the plan and the success levels

For the purpose of rehabilitation of an employee, counselling and employee assistance programmes are included in the treatment process. It is crucial to also incorporate a consultation with a stress manager or mental health professional (McVicar, 2013; Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). Unfortunately employers tend to focus more on secondary and tertiary interventions, instead of the most important aspect, namely primary interventions (Blaug et al., 2007).

## **2.5 Effectiveness of Stress Management Interventions**

Stressors do exist in organisations and managers should come up with interventions to manage it (Ongori & Agolla, 2008a). It is however the task of both the organisation and the individual to initiate change. Both the organisation and the individual are targets and agents of change (Akussah et al., 2012).

Management in the organisation has the responsibility to adapt to any change in the organisation, to empower the employees and effectively manage their occupational stress capabilities. To achieve consensus and solve problems effectively, labour-management relations should be in place. Employee skills and abilities should be enhanced by continuous training. This empowers them to make the necessary changes demanded by management. The inclusion of teamwork in this process is important (Ongori & Agolla, 2008). The process of the SMI can be as important as its contents. Comparative studies in the psychotherapeutic interventions indicated that the positive outcomes have less to do

with the content of the SMI than with the fact that it has been done. Trust and motivation are particularly essential to ensure a positive outcome in any type of change (Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2000).

Individual focused approaches continue to have the upper hand in the UK concerning strategies to manage stress, despite the growing evidence that systems approaches are more successful. This involves collaborative action that will lead to changing the workplace environment (McVicar et al., 2013). Employees should be involved in planning and sharing of performance. Another important issue is the delegation of authority, as it acts as training ground and will prevent stress (Ongori & Agolla, 2008). When jobs are designed, it should be in a way that provides stimulation, meaning and opportunity for the employee to develop skill and talent. Workload should also be reasonable and according to the capability of the employee. When top management is involved as a major role player in the whole SMI process, it carries more authority (Ongori & Agolla, 2008).

### 2.5.1 Less Successful SMI Programmes

The first SMI approach, Stress Management Training, focuses on strengthening a person's ability to deal with stress. The second approach focuses on changing stress-generating working conditions (Chandola, 2010). When focusing only on either the individual or the working conditions in order to perform SMI in an organisation, the program has a high risk of failure. Kompier and Cooper (Arthur, 2000) suggest that this happens often because targeting the individual involves no explicit acknowledgement of managerial/organisational responsibility. This approach focuses the "blame" of work stress on employee personality and lifestyle rather than employment factors (Chandola, 2010, p. 70). Reasons for failure should be analysed and documented to learn from past errors. Failing to do so, will result in the repetition of past mistakes without understanding why (Nytrø et al., 2000). Transferring interventions from one workplace to another and expecting the same results appears to be one of the causes of unsuccessful SMI programs (Biron et al., 2010).

## 2.5.2 More Successful SMI Programmes

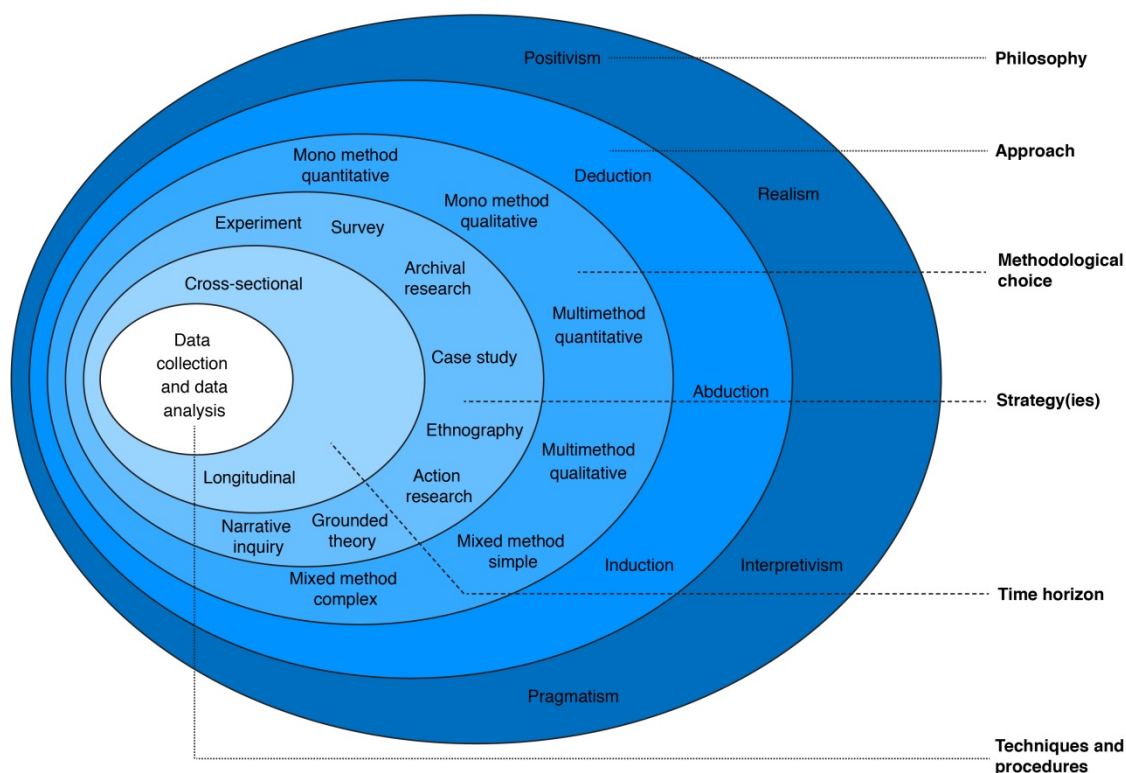
When a combination of an organisational and individual approach is used, a more successful program is implemented. This includes individual stress training and organisational stressor reduction (Kohler & Munz, 2006; McVicar, 2013; Weinberg et al., 2010). Cognitive-behavioural programs consistently produced more positive effects than other types of interventions. The researcher has already stressed the importance of a systems approach. This involves collaborative action that will lead to changing the workplace environment. Staff should be empowered to participate in this process. Stress management is most likely to be successful if the interventions address all of the combined sources of stress in the employees' environment (McVicar, 2013). Individual employees should be made aware of the fact that they are experiencing stress, in order for them to be helped in time (Karasek, 2004).

PAR (Participating Action Research) designs have an overall positive outcome as SMI. Smaller organisations of up to a 100 employees seem to be more suited for this approach. Important but very specific problems that form part of the specific organisation should be targeted. Fully participative collaboration should be non-negotiable for the researcher and the organisation (McVicar, 2013). Is the content of the SMI of utmost importance? The evidence of comparative studies of SMI interventions conclude that positive outcomes simply come from the fact that some form of interventions has been initiated (Nytrø et al., 2000).

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The figure below summarises the whole concept of research design in the form of an onion. Starting from the outer layer towards the inner, it represents: Philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, data collection, and data analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The researcher will explain his design step-by-step according to the following representation (Figure 2):

**Figure 2: Research "onion" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012)**



### 3.1 Paradigm/Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the development of knowledge and also the nature of that knowledge. When making assumptions at every stage in research, this shapes how the researcher understands the research questions, the methods to be used and how the findings will be interpreted. The researcher's philosophy also reflects his/her assumptions of how they view the world. These will always be present, even if only in the background, to

underpin their research strategy and methods. In a certain sense, the researcher is making a philosophical commitment through the choices of research strategy (Saunders et al., 2012).

Paradigms are systems of interrelated practice and thinking. They define the nature of the enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Terre Blance, Durrheim, & Painter, 2007). The approach of this study is going to be Interpretive. This type of research focuses on the way we as humans attempt to make sense of the world around us. The idea would be to understand and explain what is going on, rather than to change things (Saunders et al., 2012). As far as Ontology is concerned, the researcher is more inclined towards the internal reality of subjective experience. For the purposes of this study, an interview and focus group will be conducted to gain insight regarding the participants' subjective experience of SMI (Babbie, E. & Mouton, 2012; Creswell, 2009) and the researcher's understanding of people's cultural and historical background (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher's epistemology is linked to being empathetic and having observer subjectivism. Subjectivism entails that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions that social actors have and display. This could also refer to the reality that is occurring behind what is happening (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher's worldview is inclined towards the Social Constructivist view. From a constructivist standpoint, individuals want to understand the world they live in. They give their own subjective meanings to experiences, objects and people. The idea is to rely more on the participant's view of the situation that you want to study. For the purpose of this study, it was crucial that participants could react freely and therefore a combination of semi-structured and open-ended questions were used. The process of interaction among individuals form part of a constructivist researcher's efforts, referring also to the context that people live and work in (Babbie & Mouton, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012).

The limitation to the research epistemology in this study is the fact that a certain part of objectivism may be lacking. Objectivism refers to the "property of the procedures and methods used in science to obtain evidence" (Babbie & Mouton, 2012. p.12). An objective process is one that reduces error in the process of research. A certain sense of not being unbiased might therefore be present in this research. Not a purposeful bias, but

unconsciously in a certain sense, although this might have been counteracted by the establishment of rapport in qualitative research as a type of objective measure. The research was then also based on the best supporting evidence obtained through the application of rigorous methods and techniques (Babbie & Mouton, 2012).

### **3.2 The Research Approach**

The approach of this study was inductive, the purpose being to get a feel of what is going on in the research situation (stress management in an organisation), so as to understand the nature of the problem better. The researcher's task was to make sense of the interview data that was collected. The results of the analysis lead to the formulation of a theory, also called a conceptual framework. One of the main ideas here was to try and understand the way in which people interpret their social world. Followers of induction sometimes accuse the followers of deduction that they do not allow for alternative explanations of what caused a situation. Deductions may suggest alternative theories (Saunders et al., 2012).

### **3.3 Methodological Choice**

The methodology is multi-method and qualitative in nature. Qualitative research looks at the relationship among variables. This research type is a means of exploring and also understanding the meaning that people give to a social or human problem. Qualitative research is characterised by natural settings, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meanings, emergent design and a theoretical lens (Creswell, 2009; Terre Blance et al., 2006). Qualitative research involves closer attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and situating the study within the political, cultural, and social context of the researchers, and the reflexivity or "presence" of the researchers in the accounts they present (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods can be suitable to indicate how interventions can be linked to interventions' outcomes in a specific research setting. This method provides detailed data at a more rapid pace and needs smaller samples (R. Randall et al., 2007). The characteristics of qualitative research is summarised in table 3 (Creswell, 2013).

**Table 3: Characteristics of Qualitative Research** (Creswell, 2013)



<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>LeCompte &amp; Schensul (1999)</b>	<b>Hatch (2002)</b>	<b>Marshall &amp; Rossman (2010)</b>
Is conducted in a natural setting (the field), a source of data for close interaction	Yes	Yes	Yes
Relies on the researcher as key instrument in data collection		Yes	
Involves using multiple methods	Yes		Yes
Involved complex reasoning between inductive and deductive	Yes	Yes	Yes
Focuses on participants' perspectives, their meanings, their multiple subjective views	Yes	Yes	
Is situated within the context or setting of participants/sites (social/political/historical)	Yes		Yes
Involves an emergent and evolving design rather than tightly prefigured design		Yes	Yes
Is reflective and interpretive (sensitive to researchers' biographies/social identities)			Yes
Presents a holistic, complex picture		Yes	Yes

The study uses a multi-method approach because a case study (with semi-structured interviews) as well as a focus group will be used. The researcher is the key instrument in the qualitative study and endeavours to provide an interpretive and holistic account of the phenomenon being studied.

The researcher's approach made use of natural settings where the entire context was taken into account. Thick descriptions and interpretive understanding are part of the aims of the research (Babbie, E. & Mouton, 2012). Where the researcher is not exactly sure which variables are at play, he needs open-ended, inductive exploration as this lies at the core of qualitative research (Terre Blance et al., 2006).

The reason the researcher used this type of methodology, is that qualitative research provides a platform where employees could be interviewed to obtain the data necessary for this study. Seeing that the type of research is more interpretive, inductive and subjectivist, the qualitative method would complement this philosophical point of view. The idea was to get the feelings, thoughts and situational information from the participants on the subject of SMI in the industry. Interview guides might have limited the input that the participants gave,

because the pre-set questions might not have touched on a specific topic that the participant chose to introduce. A combination of open ended and semi-structured questions were used to ensure a balance guiding the participant in providing the information needed for the research, but also to provide room for the candidate's own interpretation of the SMI situation in the company.

The limitation of this methodology is that the researcher's subjectivity and the complex data analysis procedures might have had a biased influence. Special care was taken by the researcher to follow the standardised data analysis methods. The background and position of the researcher also has to be taken into account. He studied social sciences and his passion is the well-being and development of people, which could influence his approach as researcher.

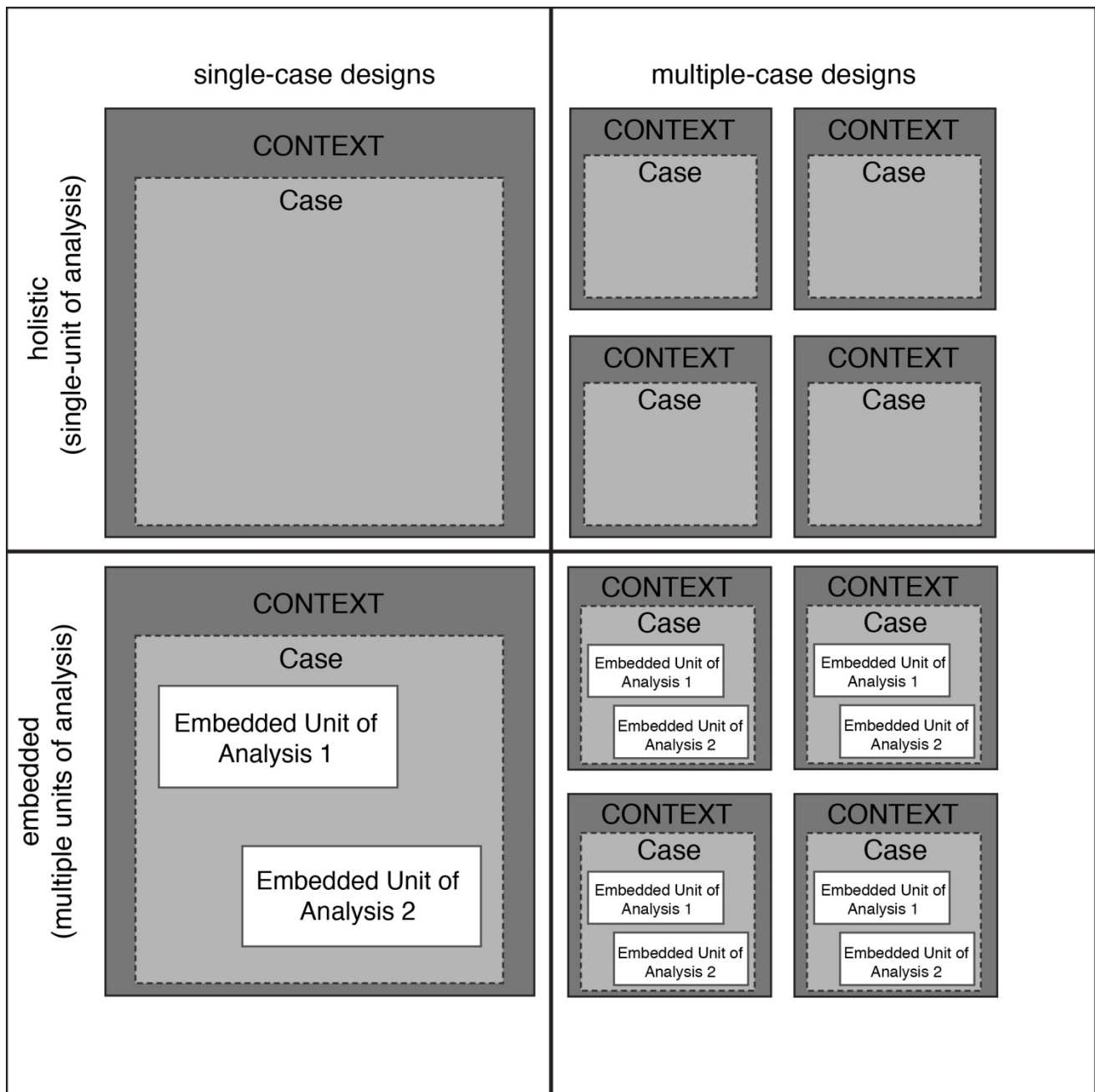
### **3.4 Research Strategy**

Some of the research strategies followed by qualitative researchers are: Ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, narrative research, action research, and archival research (Creswell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, the researcher's strategy mainly focused on a case study and grounded theory. He also looked at previous research on the topic and conducted research in a specific company (Company X) about the effectiveness of their SMIs.

A case study is a strategy of inquiry where the researcher conducts an in-depth exploration of an event, a program activity, a process or one or more individuals within a number of real life contexts. The research was influenced by the type of activity and time restraints and the researcher collected his detailed information by using different data collection procedures over a set period of time (Creswell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012). The case study strategy is totally opposite to the experimental strategy where contextual variables are highly controlled, because the researcher sees them as a threat to the validity of the results. The afore mentioned strategy has a significant ability to generate answers to the questions of why, what and how (Saunders et al., 2012).

Figure 3 demonstrates the basic types of design for case studies.

Figure 3: Basic Types of Design for Case Studies (Yin, 2012)



The first step is to define the “case” the researcher is studying. He/she should attempt to stick to the original definition, because the literature study was done with that in mind. The case therefore serves as the main unit of analysis. One should select one of four types of case study designs (as indicated in the figure above): Holistic single-case design; holistic multiple-case design; embedded single-case design or embedded multiple-case design (Yin, 2012). For research purposes, the holistic single case study within a single unit of

analysis was used. The reason being that the research objective selected needed only one topic to be researched, namely the effectiveness of SMIs in an organisation. Only one organisation was studied.

The concept of triangulation was also being pursued in this study. Triangulation refers to using different data collection techniques to confirm reliability (Saunders et al., 2012). This was achieved through a case study, with semi-structured interviews and a focus group.

One of the limitations of this research strategy is the possibility of not having sufficient participants to get a more saturated case sample. The case samples consisted of twelve interviews and one focus group. Multiple case studies contribute to data saturation sufficiency, increasing confidence in the study's findings. As counteract, this research involved collaborating with the participants interactively, so that they had a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that emerged from the process (Yin, 2012).

Grounded theory is used where the researcher infers a general, abstract theory of an action, a process or interaction grounded in the views of the participants in a relatively unknown social phenomenon. It runs over multiple stages of data collection and then refines and inducts interrelatedness of categories of information. Data is constantly compared with emerging categories as well as with theoretical sampling of different groups. This will maximise the similarities and differences of the information (Creswell, 2009). For the current study, this approach was sufficient because data was collected and analysed at the same time.

Limitations: The data that was collected from literature could also have influenced the researcher in his views of the topic under research.

### **3.5 Time Horizon**

This study was not longitudinal, but rather cross-sectional in nature. A longitudinal study would focus on a particular situation/person over a longer period, to see possible progress or regression, or to test for test-retest reliability. The reason the researcher chose a cross-sectional study, was that it was a study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time

(Saunders et al., 2012). In this case, the study was done over a period of five months from June to October 2014 in Company X.

### **3.6 Techniques and Procedures**

The following techniques were applied and the accompanying procedures were followed:

#### **3.6.1 The Target Sampling Population**

The target population for the proposed study was employees at a specific company (Company X) that went through an SMI. Company X is a vehicle production company based in South Africa, in the Gauteng area.

#### **3.6.2 Data Collection Procedures**

As sampling method, non-probability sampling was used. This means that not all people in the population had the same opportunity to be selected. The selection was made purely on a convenient sampling base where employees who went through an SMI were selected. This is called a convenience homogeneous sampling method (Struwig & Stead, 2011). The participants' informed consent to participate in the study was obtained. Social research takes place in situations where the researcher cannot select probability samples such as those used in large-scale social surveys (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). The strength of this method lies in the fact that sample saturation can be reached with more ease as only participants that did SMI were selected. The limitations with this type of sample, however, is that sample saturation may not be reached easily, if a homogeneous group cannot be found. Furthermore, the researcher's personal bias may also play a role in the convenience sampling. The sample will also not be representative of the workforce population in South Africa.

The data for this study was collected by means of a focus group and semi-structured interviews. This is a sampling purely based on availability of participants and combining people with a similar background. In this research, the sample group consisted of managers and other employees from Company X that already went through an SMI programme. The

focus group consisted of the same employees from the same company that already went through an SMI programme and who were willing to share their experiences. The interview protocol was followed. Both groups focused on their experiences of previous SMI programmes. Open-ended and semi-structured questions and their oral responses formed the basis of the data collection.

After some introductory and rapport-building questions were asked, the following *open ended questions* were used:

- Were there any areas in the work situation that caused you stress before the SMI? Please give some examples.
- Were there any areas in your life outside the work situation that caused you stress before the SMI? Would you mind giving an example?
- Was the SMI theory only or could you also practically apply it? In what way?
- Was there any improvement in your handling of stress after the SMI? Please elaborate.
- In which other areas of your work/life could you apply the skills/knowledge?
- And how effectively could you apply the skills/knowledge?
- Can you use it to help others? Please elaborate.
- What would you suggest should be part of a course about stress management?

The following *semi-structured questions* were used:

If you had problems with any of the following, did it improve after the SMI? (Indicate whether or not each question is applicable):

- Did you have sleeping problems before the SMI? If so, are you sleeping better now?
- Did you have problems handling conflict before the SMI? If so, are you handling it better now?
- Did you have problems being assertive before the SMI? If so, are you being more assertive now?
- Did you have problems with productivity before the SMI? If so, are you more productive now?

- Did you have problems with your physical health before the SMI? If so, has your health improved now?
- Did you have problems with your mental health before the SMI? If so, has it improved now?
- Did you have problems with authority in the workplace before the SMI? If so, are you handling it better now?
- Did you have problems with responsibility before the SMI? If so, are you handling it better now?
- Did you like your work before the SMI? If not, has the situation changed now?

During the *focus group*, the following set of questions was used:

- What causes stress at work for you and for other people in this company?
- What causes stress outside of work for you and for other people in this company?
- What would you define as stress?
- What are the signs that a person is experiencing stress, in your opinion?
- What would you suggest to the company to reduce stress?
- What can be done to treat stressed people in the company or to help them?
- What ways do you and other people in the plant, preferably not outside, effectively use to reduce stress - inside or outside the company?
- Who is responsible to reduce stress in the company?
- What content, experience and implementation would you like to see as part of stress management intervention?

With reference to participants' answers to the above questions: Participants' accounts provided information that was not captured by the dominant evaluation paradigm. Specifically, this data can i) help organisations to make better use of interventions, and ii) enhance research into the links between intervention processes, contexts and outcomes (Randall et al., 2007, p. 1181).

The strength of this data collection technique is situated in the fact that both focus group and semi-structured interviews were focused on participants sharing a homogeneous experience, namely SMI. This enhanced the collection of data to a point of saturation.

### 3.6.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to making sense out of text and image data. During this process, data were prepared for analysis and the researcher delved deeper into the understanding of the data. It was a continual process of reflection on the data. Questions were asked and notes were taken throughout the analysis. It was also recorded electronically. A process of identifying themes was then followed. The researcher first read through all of the data to get a general feeling for the information. General ideas and their tone were identified. Thereafter, a detailed coding process was followed (Creswell, 2009). This is a way of organising the data in meaningful chunks, called open coding (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). The researcher then generated a description of the settings and the people and categorised them in themes for analysis (Creswell, 2009).

The relationship between the concepts was explored, which is called axial coding. The strength of the relationship was first identified, before an indication was given whether the relationship was positive or negative. From here, the direction of the relationship was indicated, and the relationships were coded. Their meaning was indicated and the analysis was virtually mapped into networks using the ATLAS.ti programme, resulting in a final interpretation (Babbie & Mouton, 2012).

The strengths of this type of analysis is that it is structured and eventually leads towards the classification of data, which then makes it possible to create a network between the codes. The limitation of this type of analysis would be that it is complicated, time consuming, and possibly open to bias.

### 3.6.4 Quality and Rigour

Reliability occurs where data collection techniques and analytic procedures are producing consistent findings when repeated in a different setting. The factors inhibiting reliability are participant error, participant bias, researcher error and researcher bias (Saunders et al., 2012). Procedures to ensure reliability included:

- Checking the transcripts for obvious mistakes during transcription



- Control drift in definitions of codes or a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding

Construct validity happens when the research measures what it intends to assess. Internal validity is obtained when the research demonstrates a causal relationship between two variables. The threats to internal validity are past or recent events, testing instrumentation, mortality, maturation and ambiguity about causal direction (Saunders et al., 2012). The procedures to ensure validity were (Creswell, 2009):

- Triangulation – using different data sources of information. The use of both interviews and a focus group to collect data, assisted in triangulation of the data
- Rich and thick descriptions were used to convey findings
- The possible bias the researcher brought into the study was clarified
- Discrepant or negative information were presented
- Time in the field was prolonged to a period of five months

Trustworthiness is a very important quality that needs to be present in a qualitative study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there are four dimensions of trustworthiness: Conformability, dependability, credibility and transferability. Conformability refers to the degree in which the findings came forth from the research and not from the biases of the researcher. In this case, the researcher was aware of conformability throughout the duration of the study. “Transferability” indicates whether findings can be applied in other contexts or even with other respondents. The findings of this study are not transferable to other contexts due to the qualitative nature of the study. “Credibility” was indicated through the comparability between the realities experienced by the participants and their actual realities. “Dependability” corresponds with “reliability” which has already been discussed above (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.6.5 Ethics

There are strict ethical rules in academic research in South Africa aiding researchers to conduct research according to ethical principles. The following ethical principles were taken into account for the duration of this study: Autonomy - the research respected and protected

the rights and dignity of participants; non-maleficence - the research did not cause harm to the participants in particular or to people in general; beneficence - the research made a positive contribution to the welfare of people by suggesting guidelines for effective SMI; justice - the benefits and risks of the research were fairly distributed among people (Terre Blance et al., 2006, p.41).

The following guidelines ensured ethical conduct:

- Informed consent from participants
- Confidentiality and competence in reporting results
- Essentiality – giving adequate consideration to existing literature
- Maximisation of public interest and social justice
- Knowledge, ability and commitment to do research
- Respect and protection of the autonomy, rights and dignity of participants
- Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality
- Precaution and risk minimisation
- Non-exploitation – research did not unnecessarily consume time of participants
- Accountability and transparency – conduct of the researcher was fair, honest and transparent
- Totality of responsibility – the researcher observed all principles of ethics and guidelines regarding those directly or indirectly involved in the research (Bekwa, Coetzee, & De Beer, 2011).

The researcher firstly obtained consent from the HR General Manager from Company X where the research was done. The whole purpose of the research was explained and presented in written format to the company. Consent was then given by the company. Confidentiality was agreed upon as far as the identity of the company and the participants are concerned. The only other request from the company was to receive a written recommendation on the effective implementation of SMI in their company, which will be given when the research is finalised.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter indicates the data analysis done and the results obtained. In qualitative research there is not a clear point where data collection stops and analysis begins. It is a matter of mainly collecting data in the beginning and mainly analysing towards the end. A very important aspect of the analysis is to stay close to the data and interpret it from an empathic understanding, but still place it in perspective (Terre Blance et al., 2006).

The researcher started out with some semi-structured categories, e.g. indicators of the effectiveness of SMIs, causes of stress, the results of stress on both the individual and the company, the way people are handling stress, and suggestions for future SMIs. However, this did not limit the interviewees in touching on wider areas of SMI, because some open-ended questions were also used. These open-ended questions were used more specifically at the onset of the interviews, to give the interviewees the opportunity to bring forward their own ideas and experiences (Terre Blance et al., 2006).

The researcher used Atlas.ti to code the data transcriptions and to derive certain identified themes from it. Atlas is a computer-based qualitative analysis programme. First, the data were segmented into quotations. The text passages were labelled with different codes, according to shared information. Segments were then compared, which led to creative conceptualisation. Fourteen networks were established by categorising different themes. These networks indicate the relation between the different codes and made it possible to reason logically around the different themes (Terre Blance et al., 2006). These network illustrations are available in Addendum B.

### 4.1 Sample

The company used for the purposes of the research is part of the automotive industry in Gauteng. It is a very task driven company, resulting in strict deadlines and set production volumes. The company has different options for managing their SMI Programme: A medical practitioner, industrial psychologists, and a one-day course in SMI. The medical practitioner is normally the first line of help in the case of stress related issues. From there the employee is normally referred to an industrial psychologist, if necessary. The company

furthermore presents, from time to time, a one-day course on stress management, which is focused on preventing stress related issues. The company prefers to stay anonymous and will therefore be referred to as “Company X”. The data was collected using semi-structured, face-to-face, interactive interviews, as well as a focus group. Twelve interviewees were identified on a basis of convenient sampling. Participants were selected on a basis of sharing a common factor: they all went through an SMI in Company X. The focus group individuals were selected from the same sample. The interviews and the focus group session discussions were recorded and the collected data was transcribed. This improved the accuracy and the quality of the collected data.

Table 4 provides biographical information about the participants in the research:

**Table 4: Participant Biographical Information: N=12**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Job Level</b>	<b>Candidate no</b>
African	28	Female	Economic Officer	1
African	26	Female	Logistics Student	2
African	26	Female	Buyer	3
Indian	28	Male	Process Engineer	4
African	29	Male	Logistics Student	5
African	30	Male	Student	6
Indian	32	Male	Senior Buyer	7
African	25	Male	Student	8
African	64	Male	Foreman Inbound PDC	9
African	25	Male	Industrial Engineering Student	10
African	26	Male	Lab Assistant	11
Caucasian	30	Male	Manager: Aftersales	12

The average age of the participants was 31 years. There were three females and nine males. Two of the participants were managers. There were two Indian, one Caucasian and nine African participants.

## 4.2 Questions

The interview questions were designed to flow from the research questions and delivered broad descriptions of the effectiveness of SMI in Company X. Table 5 shows the research questions, interview questions, and the related themes.

**Table 5: Interview Questions and Related Themes**

Research Question	Interview Questions	Themes
<p>What are the factors that make SMI effective in a company?</p>	<p>Was the SMI theory only or could you practically apply it? In what way?</p> <p>Was there any improvement in your handling of stress after the SMI? Please elaborate.</p> <p>In which other areas in your work or your life could you apply these skills and knowledge?</p> <p>How effectively could you apply these skills?</p> <p>Can you use it to help others? Please elaborate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectiveness of SMI - Successful</li> </ul>
<p>What are the factors that make SMI ineffective in a company?</p>	<p>Was the SMI theory only or could you practically apply it? In what way?</p> <p>Was there any improvement in your handling of stress after the SMI? Please elaborate.</p> <p>In which other areas in your work or your life could you apply these skills and knowledge?</p> <p>How effectively could you apply these skills?</p> <p>Can you use it to help others? Please elaborate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectiveness of SMI - Unsuccessful</li> </ul>

<p>What are the causes of stress in a company?</p>	<p>What causes stress at work for you and for other people in this company? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>Were there any areas in the work situation that caused you stress before the SMI/Course? Please give some examples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company Ethics</li> <li>• Interpersonal Conflict and Management Style</li> <li>• Deadlines, Workload and Type of Job</li> <li>• Lack of Job Profiles and Placement Incompetency</li> <li>• Resources not in Place</li> <li>• Remuneration Issues</li> </ul>
<p>What are the causes of stress outside the company?</p>	<p>What causes stress outside of work for you and other people in this company? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>Were there any areas in your life outside the work situation that caused you stress before the SMI? Would you mind giving an example?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Causes of Work Stress - Personal</li> </ul>
<p>How do employees define stress?</p>	<p>What would you define as stress? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>What are the signs that a person is experiencing stress, in your opinion? (Focus Group Question)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees Define Stress</li> </ul>
<p>How is stress handled inside the company?</p>	<p>What would you suggest for the company to reduce stress? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>What can be done to treat stressed people in the company or to help them? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>What ways do you and other people in the plant, preferably not outside, effectively use to reduce stress inside or outside the company? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>What ways do you use to reduce stress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways to Handle Stress Inside the Company</li> </ul>

<p>How is stress handled outside the company?</p>	<p>What ways do you and other people in the plant, effectively use to reduce stress outside the company?</p> <p>What ways do you use to reduce stress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways to Handle Stress Outside the Company</li> </ul>
<p>Who is responsible for SMI in the company?</p>	<p>Who is responsible to reduce stress in the company? (Focus Group Question)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for SMI</li> </ul>
<p>What are suggestions for future SMI in a company?</p>	<p>What content, experience and implementation would you like to see as part of the stress management intervention? (Focus Group Question)</p> <p>What would suggest as part of a course on stress management?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future SMI Suggestions from Employees</li> </ul>
<p>What are the results of stress in a company?</p>	<p>Did you have sleeping problems before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems handling conflict before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems being assertive before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems being productive before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems with your physical health before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems with your mental health before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems with authority in the workplace before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you have problems with responsibility before the SMI?</p> <p>Did you like your work before the SMI?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Results of Stress</li> </ul>

### 4.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. This formed part of the raw data on which the analysis was done. First the data was coded by making use of key words and phrases with shared meaning. This was placed in the code manager and from there, it was highlighted and placed in different groups that shared communalities. This led to the identification of categories and concepts. It was placed in networks (code families). Each network (code family) received an identifying theme.

**Table 6: Explanation of Coding Process**

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Authority upwards BEE forces you into restricted job choice Budget of company does not allow new employees Cancellation of year-end function Change in job position Company not investing in employees Company being more worried about unions than employees doing their jobs properly Conflict handling Deadlines depending on others Doing a job without knowing why Handing responsibility over too soon HR recruiting cheaper personnel rather than quality workers Inability to reach targets Job insecurity Lack of decision-making power Lack of job profile Minds feeling depleted Minuses outweighing plusses - uncomfortable environment Moods of people No new car models Not knowing what one is doing Not liking the job Not receiving market related salary Over-assertiveness People who are difficult to communicate with People who do not do what they are supposed to Pin codes on phones and printers Presentations Receiving a small salary Resources not available Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company ethics and culture</li> <li>• Interpersonal conflict and management style</li> <li>• Deadlines, workload and type of job</li> <li>• Incomplete job profiles, job insecurity and incompetence</li> <li>• Lack of resources</li> <li>• Remuneration and budget related issues</li> </ul>	CAUSES OF WORK STRESS - COMPANY



Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<p>Salary differences on same level Skewed ethics Smoking, because of stress Too little responsibility Too little results Too many managers in a single section Type of job: production Type of job: projects with deadlines Type of job: purchasing Unaligned KPIs Under-assertiveness Wanting to do job in own way Working in production Not getting information needed to do job Personality clashes - challenging each other Working with expired contracts Workload too much Incompetent people Not being able to take action against incompetent people Qualities not being recognised by management BEE taking experienced black people Deadlines New graduates being only there to qualify Not being able to take action against incompetent people People deliberately slowing down information/processes Producing safe cars Purely task focussed Quality of resources/tools Resources to be self-discovered Security system on computer network Sharing your global experience to help others Taking incompetent people's workload Too many new trainees at once Working overtime Doing work outside job description Processes are too slow Report writing Senior management Team members loaned to other sections Under resourced on personnel</p>		
<p>Dwelling on problems Family changes Handling conflict - collaborative Loss of close family member Not being assertive Not from RSA Raising children Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family relationships</li> <li>• Country of origin</li> <li>• Personal finances</li> <li>• Studying</li> <li>• Physical health, mental health, and death</li> </ul>	<p>CAUSES OF WORK STRESS - PERSONAL</p>

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<p>See family seldom - live very far from work Studying &amp; working Depression Family Marriage Not being healthy Personal finances Personal issues</p>		
<p>Anger Going bald Going grey Indulging in food Refraining from eating Short temper Sickness Someone becoming quiet/withdrawn Someone acting out of character Absenteeism Tantrums</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical appearance</li> <li>• Mental state</li> <li>• Absenteeism</li> <li>• Eating habits</li> <li>• Negative attitude</li> </ul>	<p>EMPLOYEES DEFINE STRESS</p>
<p><b>Inside the Company:</b> Staying productive Handling authority positively Not to taking on a lot of things at the same time Management backing you up Encouraging yourself through situations Solving the problem Talking to others Having one manager that gives orders Having a job profile that is respected Learning to prioritise Working overtime Explaining problems to a manager Communicating with the person involved Not taking stress home from work Speaking about it Manager initiating a one-on-one session HR getting involved to help solve the problem Enjoying work Staying mentally healthy</p> <p><b>Outside the Company:</b> Chewing nails Clearing head Confiding in someone Dancing Sport/exercise/gym Doing loose activities Forgetting about work at home Isolating self Going out on a date Having sex Listening to music</p>	<p><b>Inside the Company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority handling (involve management)</li> <li>• Involve HR</li> <li>• Solve the problem</li> <li>• Talking to others</li> <li>• Job profile in place</li> <li>• Prioritise</li> <li>• Work overtime</li> <li>• Like your work</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> </ul> <p><b>Outside the Company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating related habits</li> <li>• Sense of humour</li> <li>• Isolating self</li> <li>• Recreational activities</li> <li>• Family time</li> <li>• Physical habits</li> <li>• Sleeping patterns changed</li> </ul>	<p>WAYS OF HANDLING STRESS</p>

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<p>Reading Shopping Singing Sleeping Smoking Solving the problem Speaking about it Talking to others Keeping the body healthy Going for a walk Joking Spending time with family Travelling Watching movies Doing the things I love</p>		
<p>Absenteeism Anger Body &amp; brain functioning abnormally Not being able to handle conflict Sleeplessness Loss of energy Eustress: pushing you to perform Having a flight instead of fight response Going bald Going grey Indulging in food Being less productive Mental health problems Physical health deterioration Refraining from eating Stopping eating Tantrums Tiredness Withdrawal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical deterioration</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> <li>• Emotional problems</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Sleeping disorders</li> <li>• Absenteeism</li> </ul>	<p>RESULTS OF STRESS ON EMPLOYEES</p>
<p>Company dealing with incompetent workers You, yourself Senior or management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company</li> <li>• Management</li> <li>• HR</li> <li>• Self</li> </ul>	<p>RESPONSIBILITY FOR SMI</p>
<p><b>Successful:</b> Better equipped to handle stress Improved health Can apply SMI skills successfully Can help others with stress Can identify forms of stress Doing more introspection Doing exercises Applying given tools Handling authority better Handling conflict better Handling responsibility better Improved relationships Increased productivity Learning to prioritise Time management decreasing stress Enjoying work more Changing and coping</p>	<p><b>Successful:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective applications</li> <li>• Stress management improved</li> <li>• Authority handling improved</li> <li>• Productivity increase</li> <li>• Learned to prioritise</li> <li>• Mastered time management</li> <li>• Is more assertive</li> <li>• Presentation of course well done</li> <li>• Personal sessions very effective</li> </ul>	<p>EFFECTIVENESS OF SMI</p>

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<p>Handling downward authority better More assertive Were taught stress relieving exercises Making deadlines Personal sessions with IO psych Presentation of SMI well done Reflecting and finding solutions</p> <p><b>Unsuccessful:</b> No application No improvement in stress handling Self-application complicated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could help others, and</li> <li>• Better health</li> </ul> <p><b>Unsuccessful:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application possibilities weak</li> <li>• No improvement in stress handling</li> </ul>	
<p>Adding spirituality Providing company specific examples Company specific role-play Updating and upgrading course on stress management Doing assessments first Providing examples of handling stress Feasible personnel concerns with solutions Feasible workplace concerns Teaching workers how to handle different kinds of stress Teaching workers how to identify a stressed person Teaching workers how to measure stress levels Providing information on coping mechanisms Providing feedback on any questionnaires completed One-on-one counselling sessions Quick recap every 6 months on stress management Role-play Sharing frustrations Sharing what others do to relieve stress Explaining where workers can go for help Changing certain things Allowing operators to also attend courses Assessment centre as part of SMI course</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role-play</li> <li>• Company related examples</li> <li>• How to cope with stress</li> <li>• How to identify and measure stress</li> <li>• One-on-one counselling sessions</li> <li>• Refresher course once a year</li> <li>• Let operators join</li> <li>• Assessments and assessment centre</li> <li>• Add spirituality</li> </ul>	<p>FUTURE SMI SUGGESTIONS</p>

## 4.4 Results

During the process of coding, eight major selective coding themes were identified. Throughout the study the results were derived from both the interviews and the focus group. These were:

- Causes of work stress (company)
- Causes of work stress (personal)
- Employees define stress
- Ways of handling stress
- Results of stress on employees
- Responsibility for SMI
- Effectiveness of SMI, and
- Future SMI

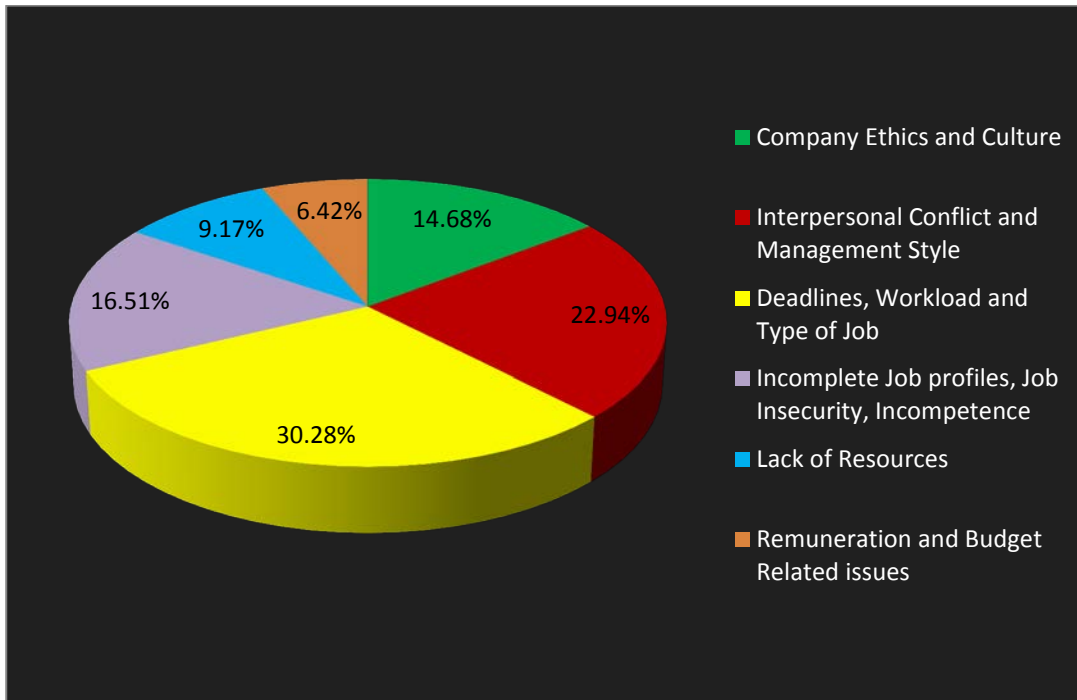
### 4.4.1 Causes of Work Stress: Company

The participants identified fifty possible company-related causes of work stress in Company X. This was grouped into six axial codes (sub-themes), namely:

- Company ethics and culture
- Interpersonal conflict and management style
- Deadlines, workload and type of job
- Incomplete job profiles, job insecurity, and incompetence
- Lack of resources, and
- Remuneration and budget related issues

Figure 4 indicates a summary of the causes of company originated work stress in Company X:

**Figure 4: Causes of Company Originated Stress**



### *Company Ethics and Culture*

From all the participant responses, the axial code “Company Ethics and Culture” was identified. It seems that ethics and company culture play a significant role (14.68%) in causing stress in the company.

The open codes that were identified are: BEE forces you into restricted job choices, HR recruits cheaper personnel rather than quality workers, company does not invest in employees, company seems more worried about unions than employees doing their job properly, skewed ethics, and the cancellation of the year-end function.

Examples of participant responses in this regard were:

“There are the plusses and minuses in the company. The minuses outweigh the plusses. And that makes it an uncomfortable environment with turnover very rapidly.”

“And those that remain in there... unfortunately it’s due to South African laws. Some people are forced to take the job.”

“Some people can move freely because that’s how it is in BEE and stuff like that...”

“I mean if you look at the people that’s coming in now compared to blokes that we had previously.”

“I don’t expect Mr C to fly economy. That is why I expect him to represent the company in other countries successfully. Going there it is fine, but the rest of the chaps, sorry, there is a medium, you stick to the medium.”

“It shows something of the company not recognising you. Last year they cancelled the whole thing. One department already booked a place. They paid the deposit. Struck off! They know you had to pay the bills from your own pocket. How do you think everybody feels?”

### *Interpersonal Conflict and Management Style*

This identified axial code relates to conflicts between employees and also the type of management style of certain managers that causes conflict and stress in Company X.

According to the above figure, it contributes to 22.94% of company-originated stress. When combining the open codes, the axial codes “Interpersonal Conflict” and “Management Style” were identified.

The open codes that were identified are: People who are difficult to communicate with, conflict handling, over-assertiveness, under-assertiveness, authority upwards, too many managers in a single section, personality clashes - challenging each other, co-workers’ mood swings, and senior management.

Examples of candidate responses in this regard were:

“There, you get these people who are so difficult. No matter what you do they will always be so difficult and then you find it so hard to, like, communicate with those people.”

“I still have problems with handling conflict.”

“I don’t know when to shut up. That is my problem. So, if I can bring that one under control I think I’ll handle conflict a little bit better because I always tell myself that I know more. That is the problem.”

“I always speak my mind. Even if enough I go to the Director, I always speak my mind regardless of the input that it is going to make but I’m always making my point heard. If then I stand to be corrected, I stand to be corrected. I didn’t... I don’t take any criticism; I take it as a learning curve for me. That is the way I mostly take stuff.”

“Especially life when you first come in you don’t really want to speak, okay, because you’re scared, you know whatever. They don’t like you, or whatever, they are not listening to what you have to say. Ja, so I would say yes I was a bit.”

“Ja, I did, ja, because the authorities, they will always see their way, they will never see your way. You will have always had some differences, how they see things, how do you see things.”

“Lot of people just came to get into management. But I for one think there are way too many managers.”

“Well, for me I want to say it causes stress. Just the normal day to day people just challenging each other, I would say it causes stress.”

“I mean, some guys, their mood depends on whether they kick the dog in the morning or not. The dog bites back or not.”

“Oh yes, absolutely, ja. It is different management styles.”

### *Deadlines, Workload and Type of Job*

These identified axial codes (sub-themes) explain more about the impact of deadlines, workload and the type of job on stress levels in Company X (30.28%).

The open codes identified were: Type of job, production, projects with deadlines, job responsibility, presentations, working in production, purchasing, deadlines depending on others, too little responsibility, inability to reach targets, workload too much, doing work outside job description, and unaligned KPIs.



Examples of the responses of participants were:

“Yes, a lot of stress when you become accountable to the production line to cost and your budget. I did have stress.”

“Yes, I was under a lot of stress all the time because we do a lot of projects. Projects that require us to think a lot, and sometimes it is very stressful. Especially when you’re doing something that you know it is needed, that I mean your time is running out, or you need more time and that can stress you.”

“Presentations: So I’m standing in front of a couple of guys who, they’re management. You know and you’re standing in front of management you really, really need to know your stuff because now all the questions that come after the presentation, they will really hang you there. So now, most of the time, I was stressed when I was about to do a presentation.”

“You know, working with production, it can be quite stressful and you feel like, you know what, I... it is better for me to just get out of the gate. It seems like that there is nothing that you are going to do here is going to stand out, even if you give it your all.”

“I work in purchasing. So basically, what we have to do is we deal with suppliers trying to get the parts, quality parts here, and trying just to source a different level of prices. So we’re just having to deal sometimes with having the stress to deal with.”

“So, it happens that sometimes when you’re waiting for information you need to, like, report that information back to your management, or anything else, and a certain supplier or an individual is not doing their proper job. You really get frustrated because you cannot do your part of your job”

“Yes. Obviously, you’ve been given more responsibility, and then, the more your workload increases, you get stressed as a person. You get stressed because it’s more work; it’s more what you need to do. So have to get more, so that actually does have a strain on you after a while. “

“The only thing that maybe caused me a lot of stress, it’s when we’ve got quite a lot of activities up and a lot of projects maybe they’re running and then you find that a lot of reports they have to be done.”

“...which wasn’t part of the job description, which is a major problem.”

### *Incomplete Job Profiles, Job Insecurity and Incompetency*

These axial codes (sub-themes) were identified during the analysis of the responses, and they provide more information about the impact of incomplete job profiles, job insecurity and incompetency on stress levels in Company X (16.51%).

The open codes identified, were: Type of job, change of job position, people who do not do what they are supposed to, handing over responsibility too soon, job insecurity, doing a job without knowing why, no job profile, not knowing what you are doing, taking incompetent people's workload, inability to take action against incompetent workers, and not getting information needed to do job.

Examples of the responses of participants were:

“So, that transition and the change in workload could have given me stress, yes.”

“It’s like, how am I going to get this person to do what I want them to do? It happens all the time.”

“See, the problem was, last year I was a student so my stress was actually more to do with, you know, getting a permanent position.”

“Yes, there was this time when there was one lady, she worked over me and she used to just send me data and then I’ll ask such things as what are we actually doing, why do you want this information? She shouldn’t give me and then I remember I was very stressed.”

“If you don’t know what you are doing. That is so true. If you don’t know the processes what you’re supposed to do, it can be stressful.”

“You’re forced to take their work on you. You’ve got the workload so eventually their workload comes on your shoulders, because they know you are capable of doing that.”

“... can’t take action against incompetent people.”

““You didn’t mention this came in a mirror image.’ And I say, ‘Oh, sorry, you’re missing a part in here because if you turn it around’ ... different level. You have to spend another R2 million updating that tool. I don’t know how do you miss that. Simple errors that cause a lot of tempers to go up.”

### *Lack of Resources*

At times, it happens in a company that all resources are not in place. This could cause stress to the employee who was expecting to finish his/her job on time. A total of 9.17% of company stress, according to the participants, is related to lack of resources. The following identified axial code, elaborates on the stress that this caused employees.

The analysis of the participants' responses led to the identification of the following open codes: Resources to be self-discovered, working with expired contracts, quality of resources/tools, security system on computer network, and no new car models.

Examples of the responses of the participants were:

“So, in terms of information and how do we go about doing certain things. That is the stress that I had, I would say. So I had to discover things by myself, so to speak.”

“You're always finding maybe other people who have contracts where the contracts are about to expire. You don't see any action from your managers or HR, and it can be very stressful. I worked for about three odd days without a contract that had expired.”

“Yes, not knowing if you are continuing or not. The HR processes are taking too long because they are waiting for signatures. Stuff like that.”

“Yes, decision making, as well as the tools you are given to work with.”

“How many times have I dialled the mobile? Four or five times. Not going through. Phone them and they go a: 'no, sorry the person you dialled is not available'.”

“Our laptops, our laptops are shit. Our laptops can open probably three or four Excel documents and a Word document. They don't open technical files carrying data. Open one of that and you're finished, everything is gone.”

“The problems we have with the printer. Print, go there, it's not done. Go back, print again, stop, it wants an access code again. Print again.”

“Yes, the security system on networks, it's rough.”

## *Remuneration and Budget Related Issues*

These axial codes, as identified from the analysis of participants responses, touch on how remuneration problems and budget related issues cause stress with employees (6.42%) in Company X.

The open codes identified from an analysis of participants responses, were: Budget of company not allowing new employees, receiving a small salary, not receiving a market related salary, and salary differences on same level.

Examples of the responses of participants were:

“Ja, you know, it is like a normal thing because you know, always management will talk about the overheads, expenses and all those things because when you try to reason and you say, ‘ok but... if we look the way we are operating, can we hire people and put them there, so that the other section mustn’t be affected’. But they will tell you about the overheads. They need money, they need budget and all those sort of things you know so it gives a person a little bit of stress, yes.”

“The issue was just that, I remember when I started here, when I came for an interview and all that. They sent me the contract, but when I looked at the contract, the salary, when I began it, it was not good at all and I remember I almost didn’t come to the site. I almost didn’t come to the site comparing my previous salary from the previous employer and the current one that they were offering. It wasn’t good; it was a very big difference. So when I started my first 6 months here, it was not an easy month. Especially looking at transport costs, accommodation costs, the cost of living in South Africa is not cheap.”

“If you look at the average person’s salary here, compared to somebody outside, we are below par. Actually, the fact that they did benchmarking: Who are they benchmarking against? And I can speak for myself personally.”

“How do you even benchmark somebody sitting at Company P doing a buyers job compared to me whereas I’m bearing a horrible stress. It’s much worse than that part of a vehicle who somebody is going to buy and a family of five and his whole life depends on what part I purchased.”

“I mean guys who started off with me, started with me. I mean not in the automotive field, but a different field. His work responsibility is a third of mine, but his salary is three times mine.”

#### 4.4.2 Causes of Work Stress: Personal

The participants indicated through their responses sixteen personal causes of work stress, as employees in Company X.

These responses led to the identification of the following five axial codes:

- Family relationships
- Country of origin
- Personal finances
- Studying, and
- Physical health, mental health, and death

##### *Family relationships*

This axial code, identified through the analysis of the participants’ responses, refers to marital status, relationships in the family, parenthood, and handling conflict in the family.

The following open codes were identified from the data: Family changes, raising children, relationships, and marital status.

The following were examples of the employees’ responses relating to the above indicated axial code:

“I was expecting my first child.”

“Conflict? Yes, I’ll say to a certain extent I did have a problem. Sometimes, I will shy away from handling conflict.”

“I think relationship-wise... I think I had my share of stress.”

“No, it is fine. Ja, ja, 2000 I lost a son, my first born in a car accident. It was 2000. He was almost a year from the school here. He also studied at the University of Cape Town and he finished his degree there and he started working at (Company M) and then it was almost a

year and then they got a car accident with his friends. There were three of them in the car and he was not driving. The friend that was driving... and they all died on the spot.”

“Taking care of that child’s, of those kids.”

“Is it my personal life, maybe just family it is mainly that.”

### *Country of Origin*

One of the participants indicated that country of origin played a very important role in causing personal stress. This response led to the identification of the axial code: Country of origin.

The following identified open codes relate to this axial code: Not from South Africa and seeing family seldom. Examples of the employees’ responses relating to the above mention code were:

“Maybe one aspect may be that I’m not from South Africa I’m from Z.”

“So my family is far. So I’m far from my family for extended periods of time. It can be a bit stressful.”

### *Personal Finances*

There was an indication that personal finances caused personal stress. This led to the identification of the axial code: Personal finances.

The open code identified, was: Personal finances.

The following are examples of the responses of participants in this area:

“I think money brings stress.”

“Money will always be an issue.”

### *Studying*

Some of the participants experienced that studying while being employed caused them stress. This led to the identification of the axial code “Studying”.

The identified open codes are: Studying and working.

The following were examples of the responses of participants, relating to this axial code:

“Those two major things I know to balance the fact that you are at work, and having, like being active, and doing well at your work. Then, at the same time, you have to go back and then actually go to school, and you have to perform there. So, I think that is a very hard thing to juggle... actually studying and working at the same time.”

“For me, it is working and studying. It is stress for me.”

### *Physical Health, Mental Health, and Death*

Participants identified that physical health caused them stress. Some experienced mental health problems. Others were affected by death in the family. This led to the identification of the above axial code.

The following open codes, relating to the above axial code, were identified: Personal issues, not being healthy, depression, not being assertive, and loss of a close family member.

Examples of participant responses, relating to this axial code were:

“No, it is fine. Ja, ja, in 2000 I lost a son, my first born, in a car accident. It was in 2000. He was almost a year from the school here. He also studied at the University of Cape Town and he finished his degree there and he started working at (Company M), and then it was almost a year and then they got a car accident with his friends. There were three of them in the car and he was not driving. The friend that was driving... and they all died on the spot.”

“It is quite a thing to work through.”

“Ja, it was. It is some years but it is still, it doesn't want to go away. Ja, when you remember, you think about it. It is very difficult to lose a child than to lose parents.”

“I guess that could also give stress if you’re not healthy, obviously coming here just thinking about your health problem, a chronic disease or something. That is stress.”

“Speaking more chronic diseases, yes.”

“Depression.”

#### 4.4.3 Employees’ Definition of Stress

From the analysis of the participants’ responses, the above selective code was identified and the following axial codes were identified:

- Physical appearance
- Mental state
- Absenteeism
- Eating habits
- Negative attitude

The following open codes were identified: Short temper, someone acting out of sorts, someone becoming quiet/withdrawn, anger, absenteeism, sickness, tantrums, going bald, going grey, refraining from eating, and indulging in food.

Examples of participants’ responses, relating to these codes were:

“Short temper.”

“I think when someone is not their self.”

“If they are usually happy and talkative maybe and then just quiet.”

“Withdrawal, sometimes.”

“...sickness...”, “...tantrums...”, “...baldness...”, “...absenteeism...”, “...going grey...”, “...refrain from eating...”, “...and others indulge...”.



#### 4.4.4 Ways of Handling Stress

##### 4.4.4.1 Inside the Company

The participants could indicate how stress is handled inside the company. From the participants' responses, the following axial codes were identified:

- Authority handling (involving management)
- Involving HR
- Solving the problem
- Talking to others
- Getting job profiles in place
- Prioritising
- Working overtime
- Enjoying your work
- Work-life balance

The following open codes were identified from the participants' responses: Staying productive, handling authority positively, not taking on a lot of things at the same time, management backing you up, encouraging yourself through situations, solving the problem, talking to others, having one manager that gives orders, having a job profile that's respected, learning to prioritise, working overtime, explaining problems to a manager, communicating with the person involved, not taking stress home from work, speaking about it, manager initiating one-on-one sessions, and HR getting involved to help solve the problem.

Examples of the participants' responses were:

*Authority Handling (Involving management):*

"Ja, at least now there is a proper way of working. Ja, they have to go through my manager."

"You can go on and on but it is because how you handle it and firstly you speak up, you got a problem, start with your manager, explain your problem."

“But most of the times are the highs, because of the excellent senior manager and GM that I have. They always make it. They always come through for us. They always are there to make sure that we are properly motivated every time.”

*Involving HR:*

“Are you going through any stress?’ That is where you pick it up and then you have to make a note of that and that goes through to HR, well that is the process.”

*Solving the Problem:*

“The ultimate way of decreasing stress is to solve a problem.”

*Talking to others:*

“The way how to manage it, speak about it and address the problem, because I cannot read anybody’s mind.”

“If you have a one-on-one discussion with your subordinates, it can all start from there when they tell you if there is anything wrong or is there any stress you know, other from work or home.”

*Getting job profiles in place:*

“Having a job profile in place, that is respected.”

*Prioritising:*

“Like for instance at work, by prioritising.”

“Right now I have learned not to take a lot of things at the same time because if you just accept projects for the sake of working, then it is not going to work out for you. You have to do something that you are going to be able to handle; not going to be able to do in such as it is so easy. No, you take something that you will be able to manage.”

*Working Overtime:*

“I do. I take my own overtime, which I won’t claim at the end of the day, to add one more hour and maybe continue to do my work.”

*Enjoying your work:*

“In the work situation, I just talk myself through it that I’m going to do it.”

*Work-life Balance:*

“No, I don’t even talk to my wife about work, nothing.”

“After working hours, on your way home, you shut down.”

“I love joking and stuff, so at work yes we work, but I love to joke at work with the guys near me, with the guys on the line. I’m always joking and stuff, especially when I’m stressed.”

*4.4.4.2 Outside the Company*

The participants indicated how they handle stress outside the company. The following axial codes were identified during the analyses of participants’ responses:

- Eating related habits
- Having a sense of humour
- Isolating self
- Recreational activities
- Family time
- Physical habits
- Changing sleeping patterns

Referring to the above axial codes, the following open codes were identified from employees’ responses: Keeping the body healthy, staying mentally healthy, praying, participating in sport/exercises/gym, travelling, having sex, forgetting about work at home, doing loose activities, reading, listening to music, shopping, joking, laughing, singing, sleeping, clearing your head, smoking, chewing nails, isolating self, watching movies and spending time with family.

Examples of responses of participants were:

*Eating Related Habits:*

“I know if I’m stressed I don’t eat. Yes, and I love to eat, you can see my weight. I love eating. I love food, but when I’m stressed, yes, I know that’s one way it will affect me, is my eating. Ja, I stop eating.”

*Indulging in Food:*

“...and others indulge.”

*Having a Sense of Humour:*

“Like, I think yesterday, I was in a bit of a bad mood, but you know, you go away, you distress by just laughing.”

“... joking making things exiting.”

*Isolating Self:*

“Well, if I’m under a bit of stress or pressure, I take time even if I don’t speak to people.”

*Recreational activities:*

“So mostly, I did exercises, I trained a lot, spent a lot of time in the gym, although my physique is still looking the same but I’m tough inside.”

“I’ll probably go and play basketball, just to detox the stress, yes.”

“Because when I’m stressed, I watch movies or say prayers.”

“Like myself, I enjoy watching movies and travelling.”

“So now, when you’re training and your stress levels is going down, that is when your body starts to get back into the normal routines.”

“... reading. I like to read a lot.”

“I like to listen to music.”

“Different... I like shopping.”

“I sing a lot at home.”

*Family Time:*

“I spend a lot of time with my kids. That helps me a lot”

“At home, it is a hundred percent focus on the family. Especially with the young kids.”

*Physical Habits:*

“Chewing nails, whatever...”

*Changing Sleeping Patterns:*

“I love to just sleep and just forget about everything that is happening.”

#### 4.4.5 Effects of Stress on Employees

It is clear that stress plays a role in Company X when we look at the fact that employees did go for SMI interventions. The following axial codes were identified during the analyses of participant responses:

- Physical deterioration
- Mental health
- Eating disorders
- Emotional problems
- Productivity
- Sleeping disorders
- Absenteeism

The following open codes were identified from the responses of participants: Inability to sleep, less productive, abnormal functioning of body and brain, eustress - pushing you to perform, having a flight instead of fight response, physical health deteriorating, mind becoming depleted, anger, someone become quiet/withdrawn, absenteeism, sickness, tantrums, going bald, going grey, withdrawal, refraining from eating, indulging in food, not having energy, inability to handle conflict, being less productive, and mental health problems.

A list of experiences that were identified follows:

*Physical Deterioration:*

“Maybe even my heartbeat doesn’t beat at the same rate, my brain doesn’t function the way that it is supposed to.”

“My body was constantly sore, my back was constantly tired, I was constantly tired, and that was because a whole lot of strain was under me and I think that was the cause of it.”

“...sickness...”

“...baldness...”

“It comes with the push of the games. It comes when they take up their posts within a year and a half. It’s just naturally, I mean, just look at (person O). He went into ageing. He’s got a grey patch. Just out of that.”

*Mental Health:*

“Because they say when you enquire confidence you get something like two responses which is flee or fight. So the stress was causing me, when I was supposed to fight, to just flee, because that was my reaction all the time. So, even when sometimes you needed to fight, but the stress just caused me to flee.”

“...me down at one stage because of the depression that I... I’m coping with it at the moment or the last couple of years, but this did cause a bit of a breakdown. That is before stress management, ja.”

*Eating Disorders:*

“I know if I’m stressed, I don’t eat. Yes, and I love to eat, you can see my weight. I love eating. I love food, but when I’m stressed, yes, I know that’s one way it will affect me is my eating. Ja, I stop eating.”

“...and others indulge.”

*Emotional Problems:*

“Anger.”

“Withdrawal, sometimes.”

“It is mainly you can’t control the emotions. In that situations you can’t. You don’t know how to handle conflict because of the emotions. It is all over the place, ja.”

*Productivity:*

“Yes, yes, because when I’m stressed I can’t think of anything other than what is bothering me. Last time, when I had personal stress I was like just... I was accompanying people to work, because I couldn’t focus on my work. Day to day I was falling behind. Until I got everything under control, I managed to bring my stress levels down. So, that is when I started to be productive again, but when I was stressed I was under-productive.”

*Sleeping Disorders:*

“Stress related? Yes, I did have sleeping problems, yes.”

*Absenteeism:*

“Absenteeism.”

#### 4.4.6 Responsibility of SMI in Company X

The question of responsibility for the SMI came forward during the research. From the analysis of participants’ responses, the following axial codes were identified:

- Company
- Management
- Human Resources
- Self

The following open codes, in line with the above axial codes, were identified: Company’s responsibility, senior or manager, Human Resources, and you, yourself.

Examples of responses from participants in this regard were:

*Company:*

“Company deal with incompetent people, to make sure that in your own part you can handle your own stress.”

*Management:*

“I guess, I report him if he is your senior. I will report him to his manager.”

“But most of the times are the highs because of the excellent senior manager and GM that I have. They always make it. They always come through for us. They always are there to make sure that we are properly motivated every time.”

*Human Resources:*

“It can maybe start there and you can write it down and that goes through to HR and then ... it could work.”

*Self:*

“You manage your own stress.”

#### 4.4.7 Effectiveness of SMI in Company X:

The main purpose of this study was to identify the effectiveness - or ineffectiveness - of SMI in Company X.

##### 4.4.7.1 *Successful*

The following axial codes were identified from an analysis of the participants' responses:

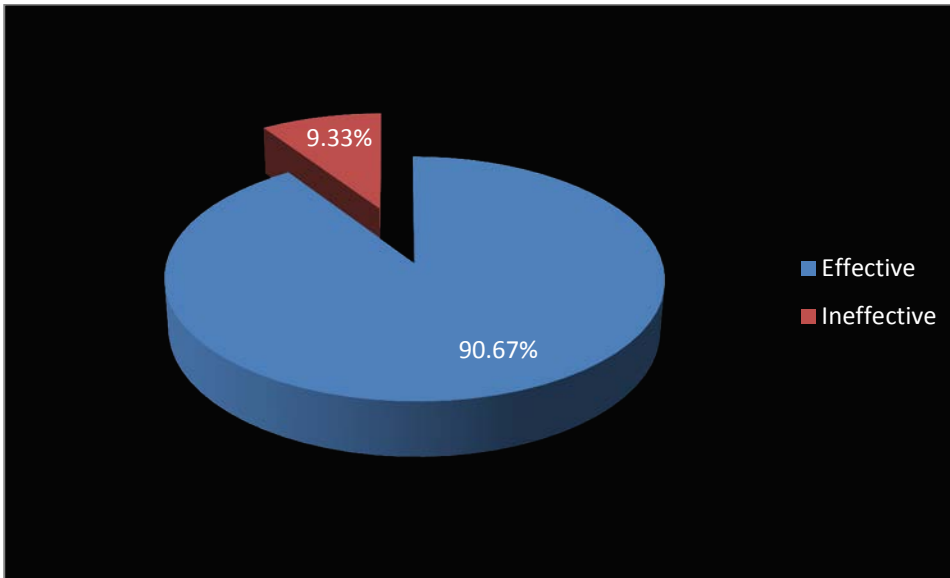
- Stress management improved
- Effective applications
- Authority handling improved
- Productivity increase
- Learned to prioritise
- Mastered time management
- Is more assertive
- Presentation of course well done
- Personal sessions very effective
- Could help others, and



- Better health

The following graph (figure 5) indicates, according to the participants, the percentage of effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness of SMIs in this company.

**Figure 5: Effectiveness of SMI in Company X**



According to the data compiled from participants' responses, 90.67% of the SMIs in the company are effective. The following open codes were identified: Given tools to apply, better equipped to handle stress, more assertive, handling responsibility better, can apply SMI skills successfully, can reflect and find solutions, can help others with stress, handling conflict better, the exercises done (during SMI), increased productivity, more assertive, improved health, time management decreased stress, handling authority better, enjoying work more, can identify forms of stress, doing more introspection, handling downward authority better, improved relationships, changed and coping, learned to prioritise, taught stress relieving exercises, making deadlines, and presentation of SMI well done.

A list of experiences that were identified follows:

*Effective Applications:*

“Yes, they did give us tools, a set of tools that you can use to apply it, of which, some of it, I'll say, you're already applying.”

“I’ll say, in my personal life the skills that I now possess, I can easily relate more, because I have got a more formal training background to it now.”

“This happens. This is something you can diagnose as this is stress. So, for me just like some of the things that there were scenarios, that they were putting through, that this is stress. So they opened that up.”

“Stress management in relation to private and friendship wise, family wise. This is... I mean it is just anything that has a relationship in it: People, may that be customers or may it be whatever. You can actually apply it.”

*Stress Management Improved:*

“Yes. I’ll say that the natural way that one has to handle stress and the formal way that they taught you... you are better able to handle stress.”

“For example, back then, the way I used to handle stress, was more of dwelling on whatever that was bothering me. I remember, now that you’ve mentioned it, one of the steps of stress management was to reflect. Look at the problem and try and find solutions. Because to accept what is going on here, you must just acknowledge that you’re stressed, and then also move on to find solutions to alleviate the stress.”

“I think the way that I handle stress now and then, I would say it has improved but I am not there yet.”

“So, what the course did, I think, was allowed you to identify certain areas, so it will localise you. You start thinking... broadening and stuff. If you use that information, which I think I did okay, you will localise and try and identify faster where your stress is coming from.”

“...maybe calming myself down or looking at the situation from a different point of view.”

“Oh another thing is... conflict management is... asking for the other person’s perspective, and I know that is the one thing that I’ve learned, because I’m a very understanding person.”

*Authority Handling Improved:*

“Downward authority, well no, I have some people under me, but I, like, I use that instance, when I ever tell somebody to do something, I explain to them what we are doing and I make them part of the team, so I understand that you can’t just go to people and tell somebody,

‘Hey you’re doing it wrong, you’re doing it wrong’. I hand them the bigger picture and I say, ‘Ok, in the past we used to go there, but we need to sort this out first’. So, I bring them into my activity. I make them part of the team. So, they feel that they are doing something I’m not just using them.”

*Productivity Increased:*

“Yes, I was more productive.”

*Learned to Prioritise:*

“Ja, definitely there is, because from there on, I always try to prioritise my work though there are deadlines, but I’ve tried to prioritise my work. There are times when work... but both the times, you can try it and achieve my goals, and at the end of the day, without stressing myself or start over, without being stressed and panicking about that.”

*Mastered Time Management:*

“Yes, I would say, because there was one that I can recall, which was to write a thing, like an hourly diary on that was happening throughout the day. So, I think in that way you can now be accountable on how you handle your time as well, because I’m not sure about other people, but for me in particular, time management is a stress factor. When I saw now that they taught us, that you can write these things down. I notice that the stress of time management was now alleviated that practical thing of writing things down.”

*Assertiveness Improved:*

“... but I would, with the skills that I’ve learned. Perhaps because it was part of those skills that I have applied to be more assertive.”

“I understood I was less assertive. I realised why I was less assertive, and I realised how I was to become more assertive. Not really about to start talking loud or not, but I have to have some root, in order for me to become more assertive. So, it made me study more, research more, get help more, and then, yes I am more assertive now.”

“One day, she asked me to do it again and I told her: ‘Listen, I don’t like what you are doing. Not like, agree with what you are doing.’ And then, she, I mean, we did have an argument like for forty minutes or so, and people were watching us, and stuff, and she was loud, but I

was just talking calmly, you know. And I was saying. And eventually she says, okay, I can go. But then I felt much better after it as well, and she never... the following time she asked me to help her. Then she came and she explained to me and then she's like, 'this is where we want to go, and this is what we are going to do'." (Referring to a manager that expected her to perform her duties without allowing her to ask questions about why she must do it)

"I was just doing his work because he was absent. But when he comes, he needs to take over from where I am at and need to continue. So if I find someone that say: 'No, since you started, you need to finish up, so that is fair.' I have to be assertive: 'No I cannot do that.'"

*Positive Feedback on Course:*

"I found her very lively. I... you know the thing is, okay my thing is... okay, E, she controls the presentation. Do you get my point?"

"I found her nice, she wasn't boring... We had videos clips that livens it, always people just to relax for a while."

*Effective Personal Sessions:*

"Yes, it helped. Because he actually put me in the picture of you have to decide and you have to be, you have to think clearly on what you have currently and where you want to go with it forward and where you want to go with it you know in future... but that discussion went well. So ja, it is very important." (The participant referred here, to a session with an industrial psychologist).

*Could Help Others:*

"Whenever I find myself having to talk to someone about stress, or we share a problem... I do use some of the skills from the course to help them"

"And did you find that you could apply some skills, some knowledge?"  
Answer: "Yes, everywhere, with your friends, with your family, everywhere."

"Yes, then because sometimes when you don't know much you can even give destructive advice. So you think that you're helping someone, but you're actually giving destructive advice. But through the course I now learned, what they call it, proven techniques on how to

manage stress. So now, instead of just answering from the top of my head or what I think, now I'm able to give informed advice.”

“Could you effectively apply the knowledge and the skills that were taught to you in the course?”

Answer: “Yes. And there are times when I even have to go through the same manuals that we were given so that at least we can also help one or two people.”

*Better health:* “No it has improved. I used to, I don't know what happened but I know that I always used to have backaches and pain. Not that, that doesn't happen, but it does happen less frequently now, yes.”

#### 4.4.7.2 *Unsuccessful*

The main purpose of this study was to identify the effectiveness - or ineffectiveness - of SMI in Company X. According to the analysed data, represented in figure 5, there was a 9.33% unsuccessful application of SMI in Company X. The axial codes identified from the participants' responses, were:

- The application possibilities are/were weak
- No improvement in stress handling
- Non-application

The following open codes were identified: Self-application complicated, no application (2 remarks), and no improvement in stress handling (2 remarks).

Examples of the responses of participants were:

*Non-application:*

“...but it was not applied practically on what would you actually be doing practically, for me, I don't think.”

*No Improvement in Stress Handling:*

“And was there an improvement in your handling of stress after the course? The way you think about stress and how to handle it?”

Answer: “No.”

“And since you did the course on stress management, did your way of handling conflict improve? Did you get more ideas on how to handle conflict?”

Answer: “No.”

*The Application Possibilities are/were Weak:*

“No, it was only theory.”

#### 4.4.8 Employee Suggestions for Future SMI

As part of the research, the participants were asked for suggestions on the improvement of future SMIs in Company X.

The identified axial codes, derived from the participants’ responses were:

- Role-play
- Using company related examples
- Teaching employees how to identify stress
- Teaching employees how to measure stress
- One-on-one counselling sessions
- A refresher course once a year
- Allowing operators to attend the SMI course
- Assessments and assessment centre
- Adding spirituality

The following open codes were identified: Telling employees what others do to relieve stress, giving employees examples of handling stress, role-play, providing feedback on any questionnaires completed, addressing feasible workplace concerns, addressing feasible personnel concerns with solutions, providing company specific examples, providing information on coping mechanisms, teaching employees how to measure stress levels, informing employees where to go for help, adding spirituality, sharing frustrations, allowing operators to attend courses, updating and upgrading the course on stress management, a quick recap every 6 months on stress management, an assessment centre as part of SMI

course, teaching employees how to handle different kinds of stress, explaining how they can identify a stressed person, doing assessments first, one-on-one counselling sessions.

Examples of participants' responses in this regard were:

*Role-play:*

"Maybe examples of how to handle it. Not ways of, not just theoretical ways of, 'okay, this is how you handle stress, do this and do this and do this'. Give us, like, events like this one. This happened. This person was like this and this, is how you handle it."

"Yes, role-play within the environment we're in, don't role-play within general life. Yes, role-play within something that could actually help."

"Okay. Giving you the situation like in your department and you have to resolve it and we see if you can resolve it or not, and helping you to adjust. I'm just asking."

*Providing Company Related Examples:*

"I'll say, for example, also as part of the training of dealing with stress, the way I like to do it, is to actually find out what people do in order to alleviate stress."

"Here, when we work with Company N we take things that affect Company N. When we work with Company B we take things that affect Company B."

"I like people sharing their frustrations because you may find that you're facing this difficulty and another person will also face the same difficulty, and then when you share you'll feel that you're not alone there."

*Teaching Employees How to Cope with Stress:*

"In the workplace as well they should have specifics that if you are having stress with specific things, how you would you be able to deal with that specific problem."

"How, where you would, if you have such certain problems, where would you be going to get that help?"

"I would expect coping mechanisms."

"So, different kinds of stress, how do you handle it?"

*Teaching Employees How to Identify and Measure Stress:*

“How to identify to what level you are stressed. And because some people are really stressed, and because they don’t really see it until they actually collapse, you know so that you know when it is when you are at that point.”

*One-on-one Counselling Sessions:*

“Together with HR to say, ‘okay, maybe this person should go through a couple of sessions with the IR or the ... ja, or the industrial psychologist in terms of stress, or maybe family issues or ...’”

“A one-on-one conversation with an expert.”

*Refresher Course:*

“I think a follow up does help, because the thing is, it is not something that you learn like you know in High School. It is not something that you learn once and it doesn’t ... I think you need to constantly be reminded. I think that maybe the thing is not to be babied but sometimes just to help you handle things because I think you forget.”

“...or a quick recap of half an hour every 6 months on stress management, or anything else?”

*Allowing Operators to Attend Courses:*

“What I feel like, is that the course is mostly offered to supervisors it must also be offered to the shop floor.”

*Assessments and Assessment Centre:* “Could it be something like a small assessment centre type of thing, where you... “

“An observer to management and to one of us. Where ever we have a problem with example for me, technical... to go on record. Myself here, his manager, my manager and the observer.”

“...can start by an assessment you know, a short assessment via e-mail, internet and perhaps from line management as well.”



### *Adding Spirituality:*

“A little bit more spirituality, I would say. Because I think the course itself, it doesn’t touch too much on the spiritual self.”

## **4.5 Discussion of Results**

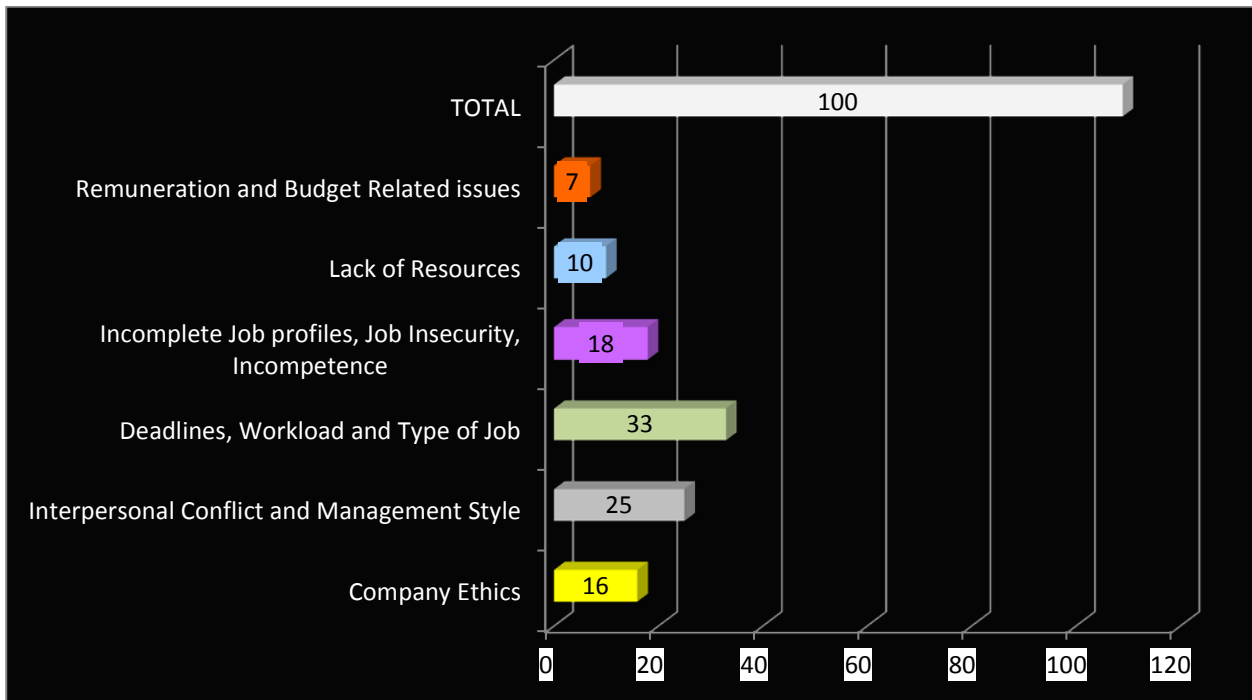
This research was done to obtain the responses of employees that went through stress management intervention programmes in Company X. From analysis of the data, certain themes emerged that indicated the SMI experiences in Company X. It is thus from the point of view of these participants that went through an SMI, that the results are discussed. One should, however, keep in mind that the semi-structured interviews could have had an influence on the outcome of this research since the researcher may have influenced the trends through some of the structured questions. Nonetheless, the participants had enough opportunity to react to open-ended questions at the beginning of each interview. Therefore, conclusions were drawn about certain identified trends that emerged during this study, indicating the measure of effectiveness of SMI in the company.

The results will be discussed according to the research objectives and questions stated. The corresponding selective and axial coding themes for each objective, as identified through the data analysis coding process, will be discussed.

### **4.5.1 Selective Code: Causes of Work Stress – Company-Initiated**

The following graph (figure 6) highlights the most important causes of work stress that originated from within the working environment of Company X, as indicated by the participants.

**Figure 6: Causes of Work Stress originated from the Company Environment**



Axial codes:

*Company Ethics and Culture*

It was evident from the results that company ethics and culture played a significant role in causing stress. Various comments clearly indicated that there is a problem with the culture of the company. In this regard, reference was made to the staff turnover in the company. When rapid staff turnover takes place, it can be an indication that there is a problem with ethics and culture, which causes stress in a company. The negative influence of a non-supportive culture on stress levels was emphasised by Chang and Lu (2007). They refer to the buffering effect of social support as a counteract to high stress levels. Ongori and Agolla (2008) confirm that good workers may resign when occupational stress levels increase. This finding is confirmed by Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, and Elshaug (2004), and Chang and Lu (2007).

Some of the results referred to the ethics that the company use in their recruitment process, indicating that the company may be more worried about financial issues than having quality personnel. This, in turn, causes stress in existing employees. There was support for this result indicating that many stress related problems in a company can be prevented at the recruitment and employment phase (Carr, Kelley, Keaton, & Albrecht, 2011).

The results also indicated that there is a significant influence from the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) requirements that cause stress, as some people can move freely to higher positions because of BEE regulations. Some of the participants experienced stress due to this type of discrimination. Other research expanded on this result by indicating that symbolic BEE is not adding to the value in a company (Cahan & Van Staden, 2009). Other research add to this view, referring to the temporary price of BEE liberalism causing less productivity that can eventually lead to enterprises going under (Makgetla, 2004).

One of the participants referred to management (other than the CEO) that misused travelling opportunities by flying first class instead of economy class. He experienced this as a waste of valuable money, which could have been applied more usefully in other areas of the company. This caused him stress.

Some employees do not feel valued, and this can also cause stress in the long run. They experienced criticism, inadequate feedback, limited recognition and almost no career development. One of the participants referred to the cancellation of a year-end function just before it took place. This caused some employees to experience a devaluation of their worth, which induced stress. De Bruin and Taylor (2005) agree that lack of recognition contributes as a source of stress. Research confirmed that unfounded criticism of proper work can lead to workers not feeling valued. This may lead to poor moral, which in turn may cause stress (Limm et al., 2011).

#### *Interpersonal Conflict and Management Style*

Some of the participants indicated that interpersonal conflict and management style played a significant role in causing them stress in the company. Results indicated that it is difficult to communicate with and satisfy the expectations of non-cooperative employees. Orpen-Lyall (2008) agrees with these findings, emphasising that depersonalisation takes place where negative and cynical attitudes are displayed. These, in turn, drive people away from each other. Goleman (as cited by Olivier, 2005) explains that intra-personal intelligence is an important aspect to have access to your feelings and to employ them to direct personal behaviour.

Management style was identified by the interviewees and the focus group as one of the significant contributing factors causing stress in the workplace. Ongori and Agolla (2008) confirm that management style is one of the issues that contribute to stress in the

workplace. It is clear that employees want to share their views with management, and experience that their voice is heard. Other research confirmed that if employees do not get the opportunity to share their views, they are likely to experience a stress increment (Murphy, 1995).

#### *Deadlines, Workload and Type of Job*

The type of job performed by the individual plays a significant role in originating stress. Participants confirmed that working on a production line or in the sales environment, having deadlines to meet and doing presentations increased their stress levels. Results from this study indicate that deadlines contribute significantly to the stress level of the employee. According to De Bruin and Taylor (2005) a wide range of tasks tax the skill of the employee and creates time pressure. Projects with deadlines also caused stress to employees. These results are similar to the other research findings, emphasising that deadlines are one of the internal stressors in a company environment (Naudé, 2006)

The participants indicated that workload also adds to the stress level in their company. Some respondents said that increased responsibility caused an increase in stress. Similar results were indicated by Caulfield et al. (2004) who found that in Australia, workload pressure is responsible for 37 per cent of work-related stress claims. This provides a clear indication of the importance of workload as a stressor.

#### *Incomplete Job Profiles, Job Insecurity and Incompetence*

Incompetence is listed as one of the Maslach Burnout Inventory components (Leung et al., 2011). Respondents experienced significant stress when other employees were incompetent in completing their jobs. Unfamiliar jobs added to their stress experience.

Job insecurity was also indicated as a factor causing stress. When an employee is not sure of the future of his job, it becomes a stressful situation. These findings are also reported by Palmer et al. (2004), who stated that job insecurity leads to increased illness and absence from work.

Incomplete job profiles were also emphasised as a factor causing stress in the participants' working environment. One participant experienced increased stress due to the fact that she was deliberately kept in the dark concerning the bigger purpose of her job. The purpose of different tasks was not explained to her. Another participant indicated that the moment he took on a temporary task to help someone else, it became his job, even though it was not

part of his job profile. This resulted in more stress. This finding is in accordance with the research results of Rothmann et al. (2005) which concluded that an employee performing tasks that are not in his/her job description is a primary stressor.

#### *Lack of Resources*

Some participants indicated a lack of resources and limited job-related knowledge as aspects contributing to their stress load. The participants also indicated that working with contractors whose contracts have not been renewed, increased the stress in their working environment. Additional frustration and stress were caused by factors such as poorly functioning office equipment and slow functioning technology. Naudé (2006) confirms that a lack of resources is known as a factor leading to occupational stress.

#### *Remuneration and Budget Related Issues*

With regards to remuneration, some participants remarked that the company is not paying market related salaries. They questioned the benchmarking of salaries. This caused some participants stress as they felt that Company X was not paying them a market related salary. These results are similar to the findings of Akussah (2012), who indicated that employees were stressed about the low remuneration they received.

A budget-related issue was raised by a participant with regards to the fact that essential operations could be performed by new recruits. However, this did not take place due to alleged budget restraints. This, in turn, caused stress, because the work was falling behind. Leung et al. (2011) confirm these issues when referring to project managers' stress being caused by tight budgets.

#### 4.5.2 Selective Code: Causes of Work Stress: Personal

Another factor to keep in mind when researching stressors in a company, is personal stress in a working environment (Caulfield et al., 2004). Each individual is unique; therefore their ability to cope with stress in a given situation will differ. One person may see a situation as exciting and challenging, while another person will see it as stressful (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

Axial Codes:

#### *Family and Other Relationships*

During the interviews, various personal issues that cause stress were raised. From the response analysis, it became clear that one employee was stressed because she was expecting her first child. Others indicated that it caused them stress to take care of their children. These findings are confirmed by Chang (2007) and Caulfield (2004) who also found that parenthood involves responsibility, and that, in turn, may cause stress to an employee. Relationships were also highlighted as a big stress factor: Some employees indicated that they experienced relationship problems during the SMI. De Bruin & Taylor (2005) also found that personal issues affect a person's efficiency at work.

### *Country of Origin*

Olivier (2005) refers to people (students) experiencing stress due to the fact that they are from foreign countries. The same aspect was also indicated by one of the participants as a personal stress factor. His family was far away in another country and he did not see them for extended periods of time. This employee was highly stressed when he started to work at the company. He had major emotional adjustments to make in a foreign country. This caused him extensive stress that was carried into his working environment.

### *Personal Finances*

Another stress-causing factor for some employees is personal finances. The lack of personal funds created stress with some of the participants. Similar findings by Murphy (1995) confirm this study's results, referring to a lack of personal finances as a significant stress-causing factor.

### *Studying*

Some of the participants identified studying as a causal factor of personal stress. They experienced that they have to work full-time and have to study after hours. At the same time the company expects that they will do well in their studies. Balancing study and work appeared not to be an easy task. Results from other research concurred that studying employees suffer from stress and disruption due to the combined requirements of studying, having a job and family life (Östlund, 2005).

### *Physical Health, Mental Health and Death*

The axial codes physical health, mental health and death formed part of the stressors causing personal stress, as identified by the participants. One participant lost a son which

caused him (and his family) a lot of stress. This also affected his mood at work. Similar results came from a study by Yavas, Babakus and Karatepe (2013) referring to the death of a loved one as a major stressor.

A remark was made by some participants that problems with their physical health caused them stress, as it distracts their attention from the job. Relating to this result, Ongori and Agolla (2008) emphasised that if someone is not healthy and still has a job, it causes stress to an employee.

Some employees experienced stress due to depression. Although Chang & Lu (2007) stated that depression is a result of stress, the researcher believes that it could function both ways, as confirmed by Akkusah et al. (2012) and Chang & Lu (2007).

#### 4.5.3 Selective Code: Stress Defined by Employees

When asked to define what their symptoms of stress are/were, the following responses emerged from the participants:

*Axial Codes:*

*Physical Appearance, Mental State, Absenteeism, Eating Habits, and Negative Attitude*

The participants described their symptoms of stress as: Short temper, someone acting out of sorts, withdrawal, sickness, tantrums, baldness, absenteeism, turning grey, refraining from eating, and indulging in food. It is informative to see from which point of view these employees are referring to stress. McVicar et al. (2014, p.19) gives the UK HSE (United Kingdom Health and Safety Executive) definition of workplace stress: "The process that arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to succeed." The researcher, however, reasons that this is a very broad description of work place stress. Ongori and Agolla (2008) refers more specifically to stress as a person's sociological and psychological reaction to the perception of challenge and demand.

#### 4.5.4 Selective Code: Ways to manage stress inside the Company

When looking at the variety of responses received from the participants, it is clear that employees manage their stress in different ways. Inside the company, the participants reported doing the following in order to handle stress:

Axial Codes:

##### *Authority Handling (Involving Management)*

Referring to his/her general manager and senior manager, a participant mentioned that their managers always support them and keep them motivated. Other researchers agree that supportive involvement from management is a crucial part of reducing stress for the employee in the work environment (Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010).

Some of the participants suggested that a manager/supervisor does one-on-one sessions with subordinates as a way to handle (or prevent) stress at work. Kohler and Munz (2006) stated that at least one manager should be available for individual SMIs. An effective SMI would improve the way employees cope with stress (Searle, 2008). Searle (2008, p.259) refers to Lazarus and Folkman who defined coping as "...efforts to manage demands, conflicts and pressures that severely drain, or exceed, a person's resources".

##### *Involving Human Resources Management (HRM)*

The involvement of HRM was stressed by some of the participants. They felt that HRM should be a significant role player in the management of stress within the company. Similar findings were reported where it was referred to the very important part that HRM plays in an SMI, and that the director of HRM took the leading role, in this regard, in a specific company (Clarkson & Hodgkinson, 2007; Kohler & Munz, 2006).

##### *Solving the problem*

One of the participants suggested that solving the problem is one of the best ways to reduce stress in the work environment. Instead of just trying to cope with stress, he emphasised that the problem that is causing stress should be solved. Nytrø et al. (2000) suggested that employees normally expect management to solve problematic issues. The researcher agrees that the onus starts with the employee, to see if they can find an initial solution to



problems before involving management. However, McVicar et al. (2013) differ from this opinion by stating that stress presents itself because people cannot cope with the current situation, although they have tried various solutions.

### *Talking to Others*

Some participants cope with stress by telling themselves that they are going to make it in their specific environment and by prioritising their duties in order to reduce stress. Another participant suggested that an employee should talk about his/her problem. When employees say what they are experiencing, a manager can act in time to reduce or alleviate the source of stress. These results are similar to the findings of Athur (2000) indicating that an effective EAP (Employment Assistance Programme) should include training of supervisors to identify problems and deal with it as a first line of solution.

### *Getting Job Profiles in Place*

One of the participants indicated that he was doing “almost everything”. The lack of a job description caused him stress. He needed a proper job profile to reduce some of his stress. Olivier and Venter (2003) reported similar findings. They emphasised that a proper job description ensures that the work is distributed evenly amongst employees and that overloading does not take place.

### *Prioritising*

Some employees realised that they should not take on a lot of tasks at the same time. They would rather take on something that they can finish adequately. It is important to have workload under control, as repetitive work and workload is associated with psychological risk factors causing stress (Panari, Guglielmi, Ricci, Tabanelli, & Violante, 2012).

### *Working Overtime*

Rothman et al. (2005) indicated that working overtime is a factor that causes stress. However, one of the participants in this study suggested that working overtime might solve the issue of stress in the company, because the workload will then be reduced faster. Contrary to this view, Ongori & Agolla (2008) indicated that overtime and working late are both significant factors causing stress in the long run.

### *Enjoying Work*

Bragard et al. (2006) indicate that a lack of job satisfaction (caused by ineffective communication) is responsible for stress in the working environment. Other research confirms these findings (Brinkborg, Michanek, Hesser, & Berglund, 2011). It is therefore important to like the job that you are doing. A respondent creatively referred to the use of a sense of humour to resolve problems and enjoy the job. Blaug et al. (2007) referred to the fact that one of the effects of work related stress is that a person loses his/her sense of humour.

### *Work-life Balance*

A participant suggested that one should distance oneself from work after working hours. Other researchers confirm that in order for employees to avoid work related stress, it is important to have a proper work-life balance, which includes a definite division between work and home (Caulfield et al., 2004; Kinman & Jones, 2005).

#### 4.5.5 Selective Code: Ways to Handle Stress Outside of the Company

Outside of the company, the following ways were identified in which these respondents handled their stress:

Axial Codes:

#### *Eating Related Habits*

Eating less and indulging in food were ways that employees handled stress outside of the company. Similar results were found by Carr et al. (2006), stating that a drastic change in eating habits normally indicates the presence of stress. Blaug et al. (2007) confirms this result, indicating that eating disorders are one of the signs of being stressed.

#### *Sense of Humour*

Having a sense of humour and laughing were ways that respondents used and suggested to minimise stress. Similar findings by Olivier (2005) confirmed that the use of humour helps to mediate stress. Blaug et al. (2007) confirm that loss of humour is one of the indications of stress.

### *Isolating Themselves*

Removing themselves from the presence of others assisted some respondents in handling their stress. Oliver (2005) indicates solitude as one of the methods to alleviate stress. Solitude should however not be confused with loneliness, as solitude is a deliberate action to be alone with a specific purpose (Conlon, 2013).

### *Recreational Activities and Physical Habits*

Recreational activities such as having sex, listening to music, reading, singing, smoking, exercising and watching movies were emphasised by respondents in the study as effective ways to handle stress away from work. Olivier and Venter (2003) and Gardner et al. (2005) agree that recreational activities, exercise, sufficient sleep, and a balanced diet will lead to a less stressful life. Being in the presence of others, and, for some, having physical contact with other people, assisted some participants to relieve their stress. The most significant sense modality of survival, is the sensation of being touched (Hekkert, 2006). Different types of exercises were indicated by respondents as a way to handle stress. Murphey (1995) and also Halpern (2005) identified exercise as one of the buffering factors against stress.

### *Family Time*

Most participants enjoy having family time, which at the same time helps them to relax and forget about stress. They indicated that flexibility in work hours can significantly contribute to lessening stress for them as parents. This would assist them in attending to urgent matters and activities of their children. Flexible working hours will reduce family related stress for parents and contribute as a mechanism to handle some of their stress factors (Halpern, 2005). She further indicated that if employees were given the option of working reduced hours or attending to family matters without the risk of losing their job, the turnover in a company will be increased, the reason being that employees would then tend to be more loyal because they feel valued.

### *Altered Sleeping Patterns*

Some participants indicated that they relax completely when they sleep. When a person does not get enough sleep, it causes a negative change in the human biological system responsible for handling stress responses (Meerlo, Sgoifo, & Suchecki, 2008). This stress-related reaction is also triggered when stress is already present. Therefore, an increase in

stress can cause sleep distortions, particularly when high demands of the employee is expected the next day. Fragmentation and reduction of sleep, specifically in sleeping stages three and four, could be experienced in such cases (Åkerstedt, 2006).

#### 4.5.6 Selective Code: Results of Stress on Employees

When enduring stress over a long period, it does have deteriorating effects on the human body and mind (Yavas, Babakus, & Karatepe, 2013). This also became clear in the participants' responses to the question on the effects of stress.

Axial codes:

##### *Physical Deterioration*

Health problems were mentioned by participants. More than one person indicated that their bodies were constantly aching and they were constantly tired. They related this experience to stress. Blaug et al. (2007) indicated that when a person is in a stressful situation, the blood flow to the muscles and brain intensify in order to enhance the fight or flee reaction. Other functions in the body, e.g. digestive processes, restorative and immune processes are suppressed. If this happens over an extended period of time, with the immune system being suppressed, it could lead to illness or disease (Akussah et al., 2012; Blaug et al., 2007).

With reference to coping behaviour, one needs to discern between positive and negative emotions. There are two sides to the coping coin. On the one side is the wear and tear of stress on mental and physical health, and on the other side is well-being and resilient capabilities in the face of stress (Akussah et al., 2012; Blaug et al., 2007; Lotz & Donald, 2006). The first deals with undesirable outcomes of stress and has harmful effects on the cardio-vascular system, genetic, biological, social mediating, and psychological pathways. The second focuses on coping mechanisms as a mature defence mechanism, being a dynamic process shaped by the person's resources of coping (Folkman, 2011).

##### *Eating Disorders*

Eating disorders were indicated as related to the effects of stress on some of the participants. One of the participants said that stress leads her to over-indulgence and the effect of this is now visible in her physical appearance. Other participants indicated that they

drastically reduced their food intake because of stress. Blaug et al. (2007) and Carr et al (2011) came to similar conclusions, i.e. that excessive work strain can cause damaging behaviour such as not eating or indulging.

### *Mental Health and Emotional Problems*

Some participants indicated that they could not focus on their work due to the stress they experienced. A participant implied that he would rather flee from the stress, instead of fighting it. This is confirmed by the results of research by Blaug et al. (2007) that the flight or flee responses are the two natural reactions of people in stressful situations. The control of emotions appeared to be a problem for some participants. Olivier (2005) suggests that the learning of social skills (e.g. controlling emotional outbursts) is part of SMI. One person also indicated the experience of depression. Similar research findings (Bhagat et al., 2010; Carr et al., 2011) indicate that depression is one of the results of psychological strain.

### *Productivity*

One participant referred to the fact that eustress (positive/good stress) caused him to be more productive in his work. Other participants confirmed that distress (negative stress) caused them to be tired and less productive. According to the results of the research, and as agreed by Ongori and Agolla (2008), stress can cause a person to be either productive or less productive. In order for an organisation to be profitable and to have a productive workforce, it is necessary that organisations get an engaged and positive approach from their employees. If companies do not obtain this approach, they will not be able to elicit a positive reaction from their workforce, and will then be less effective. In order to reach such a positive approach, the individual's energy should be directed and sustained. Consequently, the less stressed employees are the more positive and productive they'll be (Robertson & Tinline, 2008).

In a study by Donald, Taylor, and Johnson (2005) a model was suggested indicating that higher employee productivity is associated with better psychological wellbeing, an experience of greater commitment from the organisation, and more access to resources and information. These positive factors reduce the amount of stress that employees experience and prompt them to be more productive (Donald et al., 2005).

### *Sleeping Disorders*

Certain respondents indicated sleeping problems. This may also be caused by the effects of stress, that depletes the body from its energy and hampers the functioning of the immune system (Blaug et al., 2007). A more positive sleeping mode could be attained through a three month period of SMI (Willert et al., 2010).

### *Absenteeism*

Participants indicated that they themselves, as well as others within the company, experience absenteeism when stress increases. The absenteeism in turn causes more stress to the remaining workforce, as they have to increase their efforts and productivity. In another study it was found that absenteeism is directly related to job stress (Cunradi, Greiner, Ragland, & Fisher, 2005)

#### 4.5.7 Selective Code: Responsibility for SMI

The responses from the research indicated a variety of reactions to the issue of responsibility for SMIs in Company X.

Axial Codes:

#### *Company, Management, HRM and Self*

Firstly, employees themselves were indicated by the participants as the responsible people to initiate the SMI. There were also additional comments on the responsibility for SMIs relating to management and the company. The participants indicated that the company should implement effective ways to improve the functioning of incompetent people. This would result in the participants being better able to manage their own stress factors.

It is important that the individual, company, and management take responsibility for the SMIs in the company. For an individual just to wait for their company to take the first step to help them with their stress, was seen by the participants as an unfavourable situation. Employees should ask for an SMI whenever it is needed. SMIs should be an integrated effort starting with the organisation and its appointed work groups, before providing individual treatment to the employee (Fevre et al., 2006). This type of approach prevents companies from believing that they only have to focus on individual interventions. SMI

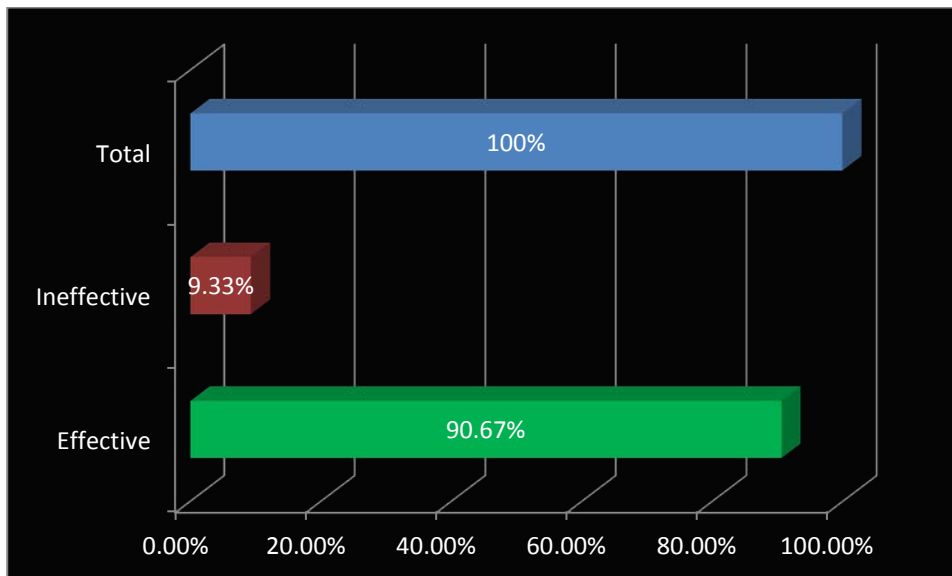
should be implemented by organisations, focusing on the reduction of work-related stressors, as well as assisting employees in coping with and minimising the negative impact of stress (Fevre et al., 2006; K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

The social and economic contexts of both the company and the individual should also be taken into account. It is also necessary for the nature of work itself to be considered as far as its effect on employees is concerned (Dewe, 2004). Weinberg et al. (2010) indicated that the problem is that organisations focus on reactive (curative) rather than proactive (preventative) programmes. In most cases, the organisation refuses to change the way they are running their business and that, unfortunately, leaves the employee with the message that they themselves have to adopt successful stress management coping mechanisms.

#### 4.5.8 Selective Code: Effectiveness of SMI – Successful

Figure 7 indicates the participants' views on the effectiveness of the SMIs in Company X. The responses indicating effectiveness represent 91% and those indicating ineffectiveness represent 9% of all responses in this regard.

**Figure 7: Comparison of the Effectiveness of SMI in Company X**



The focus of the research was to investigate the effectiveness of SMIs in Company X.

Axial Coding:

### *Effective Applications and Improvement of Stress Management*

The overall experience of respondents was that they needed extra assistance to manage their stress more effectively. One participant indicated that he previously dwelled on the causes of his stress, while he (after the SMI) feels more confident in handling stress now. The employees indicated that they were taught to reflect, look at the problem and then try and find solutions. According to Olivier (2005), problem solving skills are indicated as one of the SMI techniques to reduce stress. A participant emphasised that a person should acknowledge that he/she is stressed and then move on to find solutions to alleviate the stress. Richardson and Rothstein (2008) similarly concluded that, although stress cannot be eliminated completely, people can learn to manage it successfully.

One respondent indicated that he uses the training to identify where his stress is coming from. The fact that he can identify the cause of his stress enhanced his coping with stress. Identifying the cause of stress can definitely help a person (and company) to work on that specific area in order to help solve it (Dewe, 2004; Olivier, 2005). One participant gained control over inconsiderate talkativeness and is now thinking things through before speaking.

### *Authority Handling Improved*

Authority handling also improved and one interviewee indicated that she is now also trying to ask for other people's perspectives instead of only promoting her own ideas. Brody (2014) had similar research findings and illustrates how people can be influenced without having actual authority over them. She indicated that successful influencing is characterised by converting to a leadership mentality, taking greater responsibility and partnering with those in higher positions than one's own, for mutual benefit (Brody, 2014). Folger & Bies (1989) found that the authority of a manager should rather be referred to as responsibility. This idea is experienced more positively by the employee, rather than leaving the impression of autocracy (Folger & Bies, 1989).

### *Productivity Increased*

This was already discussed in paragraph 5.6 under the selective code: Results of Stress on Employees

### *Learned to Prioritise and Mastered Time Management*

One respondent was able to manage time more effectively at work. Similar findings by Richardson & Rothstein (2008) agree that time management also helps an individual to



reduce stress. Some of the other participants indicated that they were now able to stop stress and panic about deadlines by prioritising properly. It helps to relieve stress when a person properly prioritises their responsibilities (H. A. Richardson, Yang, Vandenberg, DeJoy & Wilson, 2008; K. M. Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). On the other hand, companies also need to prioritise their goals in order to relieve stress in their workforce (Mellor, Smith, Mackay & Palferman, 2013).

#### *Assertiveness Improved*

One participant was proud of the fact that he was now able to evaluate situations, and then apply the necessary solution, instead of just having one standard solution to all situations. Another respondent was able to be more assertive by requesting from her manager to explain the purpose of her job. Although the initial reaction was not positive, the manager then started to explain the reasons behind the allocated tasks. More assertive reactions came forward, such as a participant telling a manager that a requested task is not part of his job. Similar findings by Searle (2008) explained that assertiveness skills can be taught effectively to assist in reducing stress.

#### *Positive Feedback on Course*

Most of the participants who attended a course on SMI, remarked that it was presented lively and well and that they enjoyed the visual, informative and experiential input. They also indicated that they could apply the content of the course effectively in managing their own stress.

#### *Very Effective Personal Sessions*

One of the participants indicated that the personal sessions that he had had with an industrial psychologist assisted him significantly in enhancing his management of his stress. Searle (2008) similarly stressed that significant improvement took place when a personal change plan was compiled and implemented for each stressed employee. Their sources of stress were individually identified and specific training was provided.

#### *Could help others*

One participant responded that people can give each other destructive advice if they are uninformed. He was therefore very grateful that the training had provided him with techniques, placing him in a position to give more informed advice on stress management. Not having to cope by themselves can help employees to improve their coping skills. When

a support group is used to help in coping with stress, some positive results were obtained (Günüşen & Ustün, 2010).

#### *Improved Health*

One of the participants indicated that she had less back pain, once she had learned to handle her stress more effectively. Stress is often related to a significant amount of health-related problems. These findings correspond with those of Panari et al. (2012) that the reduction of stress improves health. Halpern (2005) found similar results and identified how time-flexible work policies reduced stress and improved health. Research results by Wolever et al. (2012) indicated that a worksite SMI programme resulted in better health for employees.

#### 4.5.9 Selective Code: Effectiveness of SMI - Unsuccessful

There were also a minority of remarks about the ineffectiveness of the SMI programme of Company X.

Axial codes:

#### *Application Possibilities Weak; No Improvement in Stress Handling*

It seems that the experiences of participants indicating the ineffectiveness of SMIs in Company X, were significantly less than the experiences of effectiveness. These results from a small number of participants highlighted the fact that they did not experience application possibilities for stress reduction. Neither did they improve in managing stress. They indicated that, for them, the SMIs had more of a theoretical significance. Although they represent a minority view, their input can still be utilised in future to provide informed guidance to the company in adjusting their SMI programme to improved effect. Some of the comments referred to the level of the SMI course that was presented indicating that it was not fit for a managerial level. Some other remarks indicated that more company related exercises and examples should be used during the SMIs. Orpen-Lyall (2008) indicated that the practical implementation of SMIs will lead to new insights into, and improvement of, stress handling.

In general, it is indicated in literature that SMIs that fail in companies, could be related to the fact that most of them are individually focused instead of company focused. More successful SMIs came forward where the focus was on both the company and the individual (Caulfield et al., 2004).

#### 4.5.10 Selective Code: Suggestions for Future Stress Management Interventions

As part of the study, participants were asked to indicate what their views of an ideal SMI in Company X would be. Some of their suggestions focused on the responsibility of the company, and others on the individual employee's effort.

Axial Codes:

##### *Role-play*

In order to make the training involved in the SMI programme more significant, some participants suggested that more role-play exercises should take place. They indicated that such role-plays will enhance the learning experience of employees. Practical application of SMIs, according to Orpen-Lyall (2008), should lead to new insights.

##### *Company Related Examples*

The results indicated that some of the employees would prefer company-related examples during the SMIs. Similar research results highlighted the fact that SMIs should be initiated with both the company and the individual in mind (Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2002; Karasek, 2004).

##### *Teaching Workers How to Identify and Measure Stress*

One of the participants indicated that he wanted to be equipped to identify the indications of a stressed person. He also requested to learn how to identify the level of a person's stress. His response indicated a desire to identify stress levels, in order to assist co-workers timeously, before their stress levels escalate too far. Similar results were found by Searle (2008), suggesting that stressors should be identified and future goals put in place to reduce these stressors, and consequently, employees' stress levels.

##### *Teaching Employees How to Cope with Stress*

Some of the suggestions referring to the company's responsibility for SMIs, emphasised that HRM, management and the company as a whole should take responsibility for SMIs in

Company X. A process where the manager or supervisor regularly communicates with the employees was suggested. Such a conversation is then conducted in accordance with a prescribed format. These conversations should be focused on identifying possible stress issues, as well as the current mental and physical state of the employee. This preventative process will then assist in identifying stress problems in time. Another way of starting this process could be through assessments that measure stress levels and coping skills (Searle, 2008).

A support group of people struggling with stress themselves was also one of the suggestions that came forward. In this group, there should, for example, be a sharing of similar experiences and successful tools that were applied in the process to reduce stress. Support groups to prevent burnout were tested amongst nurses and showed successful results (Günüşen & Ustün, 2010).

#### *One-on-one Counselling Sessions*

A few sessions with an industrial psychologist were also suggested in addition to the support group idea. Literature indicates the following personal SMI strategies: Relaxation training, cognitive behavioural skills, meditation, social support, time management, communication skills, planning abilities, and assertiveness training. These (and other) skills could be learned via a trainer, a CD/DVD or a book. Training can take place at a worksite or an outside location (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

#### *Refresher Courses Once a Year*

Most of participants agreed that a refresher intervention once a year could enhance their skills to reduce stress. Similar findings by Günüşen and Ustün (2010) stated that significant reduction in stress and burnout were experienced by employees attending refresher courses in stress management.

#### *Allowing Operators to Attend SMI Training*

Participants that do not work in the production line themselves requested that plant operators should be included in the stress management training and the SMIs in future. They believe that these employees are also exposed to a lot of stress. Shimazu et al. (2006) reported that successful interventions were done to reduce the stressful working environment of employees on the assembly lines in organisations.

### *Assessments and Assessment Centre*

Some participants asked for assessments to be done before SMIs take place. The reason they provide, is that informed decision-making can then be utilised to implement SMIs. Risk assessment and risk reduction strategies are also suggested by researchers for a long-term strategy to reduce stress (Randall, Griffiths & Cox, 2005). A research team should be tasked to manage these assessments.

### *Adding Spirituality*

One of the participants requested that a form of spirituality should be added to SMIs. Myers et al. (2004) suggested the use of the INSPIRIT-R assessment, which is a self-reporting questionnaire designed to measure relational and experiential aspects of religion. Higher scores indicated higher forms of spirituality and spirituality experiences. These in turn would also assist in significant reduction of stress in employees and an increase in positive mood states. Meditation and relaxation groups were suggested as types of spirituality experiences.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of stress management interventions in Company X. The data was obtained by interviewing twelve employees that went through an SMI in this company. Triangulation was done by making use of a focus group consisting of some of the employees that did the interviews. The researcher found that more energy and creativity was present during the focus group, resulting in response data with rich and thick content.

The following seven main themes were identified during the coding process: Causes of work stress (personal and company originated), employee definition of stress, how stress is handled (inside and outside of the company), the effects of stress, responsibility for an SMI programme, effectiveness of SMI and employee suggestions for future SMIs.

### **5.2 Conclusions**

Any employee can suffer from stress, regardless of status, age, gender, disability or ethnicity. It is important that managers, HR personnel, welfare staff, medical personnel and safety officers have a clear understanding of the main issues involved in workplace stress prevention and management (Palmer et al., 2004).

In order to achieve the primary objective of this study, the following problem statement was formulated in Chapter 1: Organisations assume that an SMI will be successful. Despite a lot of research in the field of stress interventions, it is still not clear whether this is true for either the organisation or the participants. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the subjective experiences and realities employees encounter with SMIs and to investigate their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of such programmes of stress reduction within an organisation.

#### **5.2.1 Causes of Work Stress (Personal and Company-initiated)**

### *5.2.1.1 Company-initiated*

The results of the study indicated that stressors originating from inside the company were: Company ethics and culture; interpersonal conflict and management style; deadlines, workload and type of job; job profiles, job insecurity, and incompetence; lack of resources; and remuneration issues.

It was indicated that company ethics and culture played a significant role as stressors for the employees. When rapid staff turnover takes place, it could be an indication that stress is present in the company (Caulfield et al., 2004; Chang & Lu, 2007). The reference to an “uncomfortable environment” by some of the participants also emphasised one of the reasons for experiencing stress. The ethics that the company use in their recruitment process by “hiring cheaper, rather than quality workers” were also experienced as a probable cause for stress. The negative influence of the BEE policies of the company was indicated as a factor causing stress, due to an unequal movement of people between positions. An uneven distribution of travelling benefits (more specifically flight benefits) also caused unhappiness and stress. The experience was that valuable money was wasted. A feeling of not being recognised as decision makers and a lack of respect for decisions made, caused negative feelings in some of the participants, resulting in stress. De Bruin and Taylor (2005) and Limm et al. (2011) in their research, also indicated that employees stress when not being recognised.

Interpersonal conflict played a significant role in causing stress in the company. According to Orpen-Lyall (2008), socialising and healthy interpersonal relations are important for an elevated positive mood. There was also an indication that the management style caused stress in the company. Employees experience stress when they are not recognised (Ongori & Agolla, 2008). The results of the research indicated that the type of job plays a significant role in generating stress - specifically jobs in certain departments, such as manufacturing and purchasing. Deadlines increased the stress levels of participants in the company, more specifically when their deadlines depended on other employees’ input. De Bruin and Taylor (2005) found similar results about simultaneous deadlines that caused stress in employees. Naudé (2006) also indicated that meeting deadlines was a significant stressor in the working environment. Workload was also indicated as a significant stressor in the company. Similar

results were obtained by Caulfield et al. (2004), indicating that 37 per cent of work-related stress claims came from work overload.

Incompetence also emerged as a stressor during the interviews, and results of Leung et al. (2001) indicate that it is listed under the Maslach Burnout Inventory components. Another identified aspect causing stress, was job insecurity. In the context of Company X, where they work with students and contractors, it is quite a relevant issue, as some employees are not permanently employed. When employees do not have a proper job profile, they also experience stress. This was confirmed through research by Palmer et al. (2004), who indicated that job insecurity leads to increased illness and absence from work.

A lack of resources was indicated as a factor contributing to the stress load of participants. Relevant areas that were indicated here were contract non-renewal, slow computers and restricted computer networks. Some participants also emphasised the absence of guidance to get acquainted with a new job. When referring to remuneration and budget related issues, some of the participants highlighted these as issues causing them stress. Some of the participants experienced that a tight budget was used as an excuse to hire incompetent people. Leung (2011) indicated that tight budgets can cause stress. It furthermore became clear that discrepancy in remuneration, when compared to similar positions in other companies, also caused stress. Akussah (2012) found similar evidence that employees get stressed about low remuneration.

#### *5.2.1.2 Personally-initiated*

The following areas in personal life contributed to stress in the participants: Family and other relationships, country of origin, personal finances, studying, physical health, death and mental health.

Family and other relationships seem to be a significant cause of stress for the participants. Participants have relationships outside of the work context. These relationships can also cause stress that the employee can carry into the workplace (De Bruin & Taylor, 2005). Parenthood also emerged as a source of stress for some participants. Other researchers support the findings that working parents often experience a sense of time-urgency that is related to their parental duties, causing them stress (Halpern, 2005; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001).



Country of origin was indicated by one of the participants as a personal stress factor. Not seeing one's family on a regular basis, due to working in another country can cause stress. Feelings of loneliness and severe longing caused the participant stress. Personal finances were also indicated by participants as an aspect impacting on personal stress. Murphy (1995) indicated that personal finances are a significant stressing factor on employees. Another factor that caused stress was studying whilst having a full-time job. These findings are confirmed by Östlund (2005), who indicated that a combination of working and studying causes stress. The results of the research indicated that a lack of physical- and mental health formed part of the personal stressors. One person lost a child. This caused him a lot of stress. Other participants indicated that they were struggling with physical and mental health that generated stress for them. Akussah et al. (2012) and Ongori and Agolla (2008) indicated that companies should continually focus on the well-being of their employees in order to reduce negative effects of stress on productivity. They further indicated that too much stress causes damage to an employee's health, relationships and productivity.

### 5.2.2 Employees' Definition of Stress

Degeneration of physical appearance, a negative mental state, absenteeism and unhealthy eating habits were descriptions of stress by participants. Their observations were affected by what they experienced in their working environment, e.g. people turning grey and being absent from work.

### 5.2.3 How Stress is Managed (Inside and Outside of the Company)

The participants remarked on the manner in which they manage stress inside and outside of the company. These behaviours varied from involving other people to handling stress and making use of their own resources. The participants' solutions were: Refraining from eating, indulging in food, exercising and doing sport, having sex, laughing, joking, talking to significant others, isolating themselves, watching movies, having family time, confronting the stressors, chewing nails, making use of the support from management, family support and not sleeping.

These results relate to the findings of Blaug et al. (2007), which indicate that an individual's personality and coping strategies determine how they will manage stress. According to Blaug et al. (2007) these coping mechanisms will vary from person to person. This is where an SMI is needed and in this company, it appears that when SMIs were done, they were mostly experienced as helpful as indicated by most participants.

#### 5.2.4 Effects of Stress

Some of the effects of stress that were identified by participants were: Physical deterioration, mental health problems, eating disorders, emotional problems, productivity loss, sleeping disorders, and absenteeism. This relates to what other researchers found regarding continuous stress, namely that it does impact the employee as a whole (McVicar et al., 2013).

#### 5.2.5 Responsibility for SMIs

When asked who should be responsible to initiate and implement SMIs in the company, the participants' responses indicated the company, management, HRM and the individual employee. A combined approach was mostly suggested. This relates to studies about more successful SMIs in companies, that indicate that management should not only focus on the individual, while emphasising the importance of company initiatives to prevent and eliminate company-originated stressors first, before expecting the individual to attend an SMI (Dewe, 2004).

#### 5.2.6 Effectiveness of SMI

The conclusion related to respondents' views about the effectiveness of SMI in Company X, suggested that it was experienced as effective by the majority of the participants. However, there were some reservations about this in participants, which will be discussed. The effectiveness was mostly indicated in terms of: Relatively successful applications, meaningful exercises applied, effective use of tools, improved handling of authority, increased productivity, prioritising learned, time management mastered, more assertiveness, positive feedback on the presentation of the course, very effective personal

sessions, ability to help others and improved health. Considering the variety of areas impacted positively by the SMIs in Company X, it is evident that the results relate to quite a number of personal as well as work-related areas. The participants who had had one-on-one sessions with either a medical assistant or an industrial psychologist, indicated that they experienced it as quite helpful.

There were also some reservations about the effectiveness of the SMIs in the company. A minority of the participants indicated that they could not apply what they had been taught on stress management. They also did not experience a significant improvement in their stressful situation. One of the participants remarked that the SMI course being used was not suited to more senior management, and that it should be adapted accordingly.

It seems very important that a combination of organisational and individual effort is used to obtain a successful SMI programme. Such a combined effort will provide the company with a more effective programme for managing and preventing stress in the workplace (Thompson, 2010).

#### 5.2.7 Employee Suggestions for Future SMIs

Suggestions coming from the participants regarding future SMIs in Company X, were: role-play exercises as part of a course on SMI, use of company related examples (case studies), providing knowledge on how to identify stress, teaching employees how to measure stress, one-on-one counselling sessions, refresher courses once a year, sharing with others, allowing shop-floor operators to participate, assessments and an assessment centre, aiding in programme operations.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The researcher would suggest the following in order to improve the effectiveness of the SMI programme in Company X. It would be advisable to attend effectively to all the stressors mentioned by the participants. The company-related stressors should be adequately addressed by senior management. Improving the working conditions of their employees would significantly contribute to the reduction of stress amongst employees.

The personal-related stressors could be addressed by not only allowing the identified stressed employees to be part of an intervention, but also allowing all employees in the company to go on a stress management intervention course once or twice a year. Horan (2002) implemented a workplace stress intervention programme that was assessed as quite successful. Over a period of nine weeks, participants met and shared their own success stories and read inspirational workplace stories. This type of intervention seems to be successful in reducing stress (Horan, 2002).

Managers and supervisors should be allowed to do a stress check-up on their subordinates with the help of a pre-designed questionnaire. The researcher was informed that such a system is already in use in a small area of the company. This could be expanded to include all employees, at all levels, in the company. Managers and supervisors should be aware of factors that cause stress in employees and should report these cases as soon as possible. The services of an industrial psychologist can also be used when more specialised help is required. The medical facilities can also be utilised to act as a first line of intervention in the case of stressed employees.

In agreement with Olivier (2005), the researcher proposes the following advice to employees and managers:

- Avoid stressors, e.g. do not take on tasks you cannot handle.
- Adjust the demand level: Do not take a task that is beyond your capabilities.
- Alter the stress-inducing patterns: Introduce original ways to approach the stressors or change the situation.
- Monitor stress.
- Learn to regulate emotions.
- Attack or confront stressors directly.
- Learn to tolerate stressors.
- Release the build-up of stress, by e.g. talking to someone about it.

## 5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

For the purposes of future research, the researcher suggests that a quantitative study in the same company be done to enhance the scope of this qualitative research. It may also advance the company's productivity and morale if the combined results are interpreted and incorporated in the company's future SMI programmes.

The same combined research could be expanded to include more companies, to provide the opportunity to generalise and predict the effectiveness of SMI in companies.

A further enhancement to this type of study would be to expand the number of participants in the research.

## 5.5 Limitations

It must be kept in mind that in Company X, not only SMIs improved people's resilience to cope with stress, but also other courses that formed part of the training and development of the employees. They also had the opportunity to attend other motivational and educational courses, such as time management, presentation skills, etc.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that certain cultures do not allow directly informing someone that his product or service is not good. This could be a factor that influenced this research, and could accordingly lead to a decrease of data indicating the effectiveness of Company X's SMI programme.

One also has to keep in mind that when a course was presented on stress management, different trainers with different approaches were involved, although the content generally remained the same.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that participants sometimes could not remember the content and other aspects of the SMIs they attended and experienced in detail.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

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