

## CHAPTER 3

### 3 THE EFFECT OF STRESS ON THE CORPORATE EMPLOYEE

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Stress is a word that has been used more and more within the last few years. During the seventeenth century stress referred to hardship, adversity and affliction (Keefe, 1988:475). In today's world it refers to the inevitable challenges that people have to face every day, some are enjoyed challenges and some challenges are full of strife, but they have to be faced. These challenges have a certain effect on people and often the effect thereof is stress.

In the past it was believed that people have to live with stress symptoms and that there was not much anybody could do about the symptoms, apart from taking medication. But, according to Looker and Gregson (2003:ix), stress is not a threat over which human beings have no control:

***Now, thanks to research into altered states of consciousness, deep relaxation, self awareness and biofeedback, we know that we exercise control over our responses and, once we have gained enough self awareness and tucked a few stress management skills under our belt, we virtually choose how we wish to meet the challenges of our day to day lives.***

Stress can affect an employee's performance at any stage of his/her life. Employees vary

enormously in their tolerance for externally caused stress. With some people performance is enhanced with moderate amounts of stress and other people may become immobilised, repeat useless behaviour and scatter their efforts if they experience too much stress (Cohen, Fink, Gadon & Willits; 2001:190). There is no one set of guidelines for stress management because the effect thereof on people differ as their personalities and backgrounds differ. These are factors that should be considered by the employees before they compile a personal stress management programme. What is important is self awareness. If employees are not aware of the fact that stress is affecting them and how it is affecting them, they are not going to do anything about it.

Any person needs a certain amount of stress to perform or live up to expectations, but if too much stress is applied, it could be to the detriment of the person's physical and mental health (Cohen, *et al.* 2001:190). Employees need to become aware of how much stress is necessary for them to work optimally, without it affecting their health.

Each employee has a Gestalt (refer to Chapter 2) that is affected by circumstances every day. When employees are confronted with stressful situations, their Gestalt moves out of its homeostasis and it is important that the employee lives at a level of awareness where he/she can realise when the balance of his/her functioning has been disturbed. The employee can then apply stress management strategies to ensure that the homeostasis (balance) is regained.

The focus is on the following aspects in this chapter:

- Definition of stress
- The causes and effects of stress
- Stress management techniques that can be used by corporate employees to manage their stress levels.

## 3.2 DEFINING STRESS

To define stress as a term is not as simple as it seems. Stress is usually a very unique experience. Some people would describe stress as having an argument with a friend or having too much work to do. Others will describe stress as emotions of anxiety and tension or as headaches or muscle pains or sleeplessness. There is one common factor: stress usually carries a negative connotation.

The concept of psychological stress was invented by Selye in 1936. He did research on rats which indicated that the body reacts to different demanding situations in the same way: blood pressure rises, muscles become tense, pupils are dilated and hormonal activity increases. The body is getting ready for the perceived threat from which it must run or it must attack (fight or flight). If the body is kept in this “heightened state” for continuous periods of time, the immune system and the vital organs are affected to the detriment of the individual (Ross & Altmaier; 1994:2). The concept of fight or flight will be discussed in greater detail in paragraph 3.6.1.

The difficulty in defining stress is the fact that the word is often used to describe both the sources and the effects of the stressful situation. According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:3), the word stress comes from the Latin word *strictus* and the term is used to explain both a stimulus and a response to that stimulus. Williams (1994:19) describes stress as follows:

***Stress is what happens to us when things go wrong. It is something we suffer from and has a negative quality. It has a physical, a psychological and an emotional component. There does not need to be an external cause, and the***

***consequences of being under stress can affect out physical, mental and social health***

Therefore, stress has the potential of affecting every aspect of a person's life. The one aspect is not necessarily exclusive of the other, for example: if the person is having financial difficulties the stress that he/she is experiencing can affect physical and mental health, relationships and work performance.

Stress has different meanings to different people and as the people differ so the definitions also differ. For Lazarus in Burns (2003:3), the term stress is about the perception that people have with regard to the demands that are made on them:

***Stress arises when individuals perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them or with threats to their well being.***

The way that people perceive the demands that are made on them and their ability to cope with those demands is also emphasised by Looker and Gregson (2003:25) when they define stress as follows:

***It is a mismatch between perceived demands and the perceived ability to cope. It is the balance between how we view demands and how we think we can cope with those demands that determines whether we feel no stress, distressed or eustressed.***

The researcher agrees with these two authors and is furthermore of the opinion that this is the reason why some individuals enjoy certain challenges and others do not enjoy the same challenges. It has to do with each individual's perception of his/her own abilities to

cope with a situation.

Stress can also be defined with regard to emotional and physical reactions to stressors in the environment of a person. Monat and Lazarus in Brehm (1998:1) define stress as follows:

***Stress is generally used to describe that feeling of anxiety and physical tension that occurs when demands placed on them exceed their ability to cope.***

Daft (1997:769) agrees with the above mentioned authors when he referred to stress as follows:

***...stress as the physiological and emotional response to demands, constraints, and opportunities that create uncertainty and lack of personal control when important outcomes are at stake.***

Stress is also more than the above mentioned definitions and Folkman (1986) focuses on the relationship between the person and his/her environment when defining stress as follows:

***Stress is the relationship between person and environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and as endangering well-being (Kantor, Schomer & Louw, 1997:16).***

This definition of stress strongly relates to people within a working environment who experience that the demands that are made on them are overbearing and often they do not have the resources to do the job expected of them.

Therefore, when defining stress there are many different opinions. The following definition can be derived from the above mentioned definitions. Stress is an inclusive term that is used when people experience a sense of threat. The threat could be physical or psychological. People do not perceive themselves as capable of coping with the demands that are made on them.

Stress is inevitable and all people experience stress. Furthermore, stress has the effect that people feel out of control and this causes an imbalance in the homeostasis of their Gestalts. The more out of control a person feels, the more stress is experienced.

According to Fineman in Newton (1995:120), although stress is experienced differently by each individual, the cultural and political surroundings of the organisation will have an effect on how people are influenced with regard to their experience of certain stressors:

***A particular interest group is likely to choose a stress meaning which most favours its cause.***

For example an organisation's management team may believe that the workers who are experiencing stress are weaker than other workers because they cannot manage their stress levels successfully.

### **3.3 POSITIVE STRESS**

In general people form a negative connotation with stress but on the other hand, many people feel that stress is necessary for them to perform at their best. According to Burns (2003:2), positive stress is often referred to as eustress:

***Eustress results from exhilarating experiences. It is the type of stress you are likely to experience when inheriting a large amount of money or receive an unexpected promotion or reward.***

This is stress that can serve to stimulate a person and could contribute to healthy functioning. According to Ross and Altmaier (1994:4), Selye believed in the concept of eustress that has also been called “good stress”. They explain that eustress can be experienced as a motivating factor and that it can enhance the growth and development of the individual. Furthermore, Cohen, *et al.* (2001:190) agree that some stress is necessary for optimal functioning:

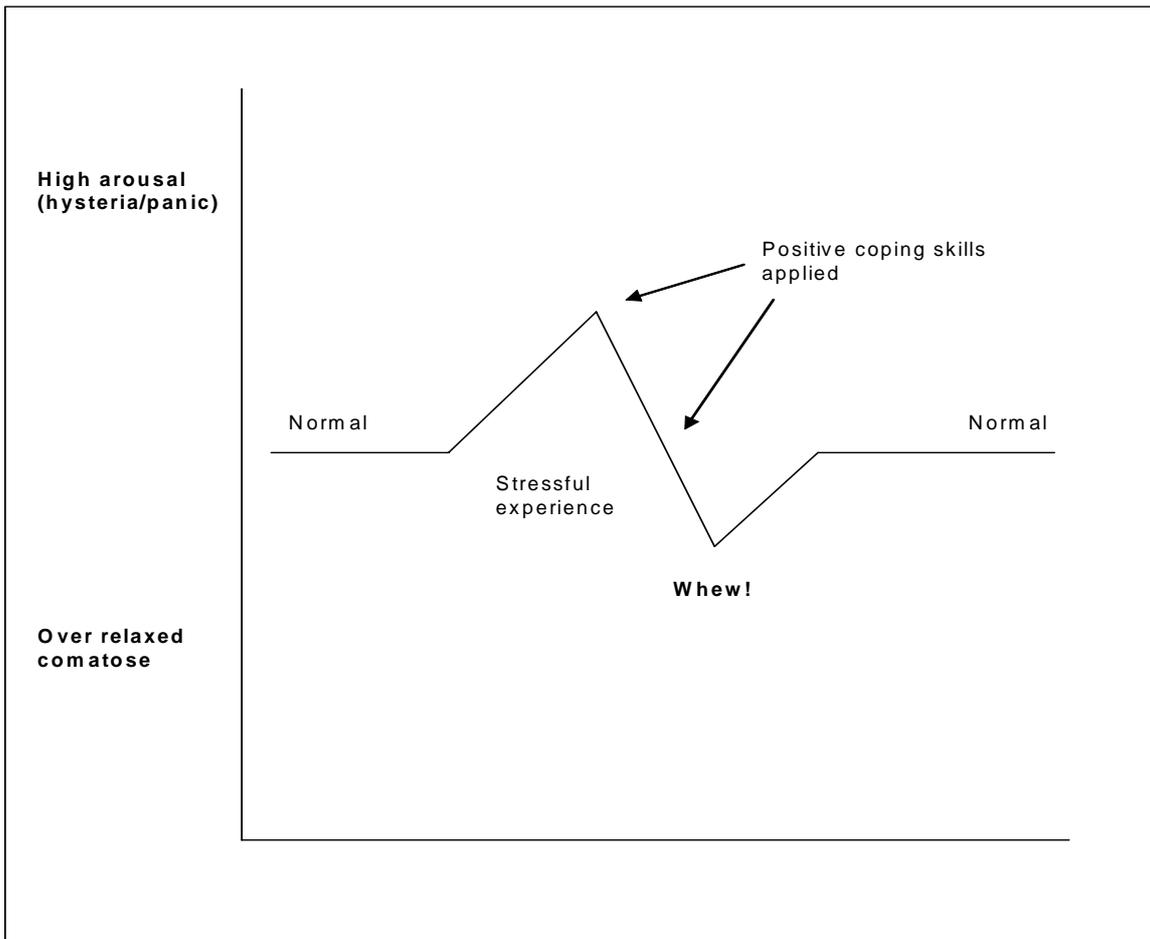
***Moderate amounts of experienced stress generate focus and mobilise a person’s resources. Performance is actually enhanced under moderate amounts of stress.***

Eustress can build a person’s confidence. These people feel that they are in control and that they have the ability/resources to cope with the demands that are made on them (Looker & Gregson; 2003:28). It is important to keep in mind that the stress experience is very unique and differs from individual to individual, thus the same amount of stress can be experienced positively by one person and negatively by the next person. Individuals differ from each other regarding their tolerance of stress.

A positive function of stress that can be mentioned is the fact that it signals danger and can protect people against unnecessary trauma and pain. It also motivates people to achieve their goals and fuels the creativity of the human being (Auerbach & Gramling; 1998:15). This will be discussed in more detail when considering the flight or flight

response.

Burns (2003:39) differentiates between healthy and unhealthy stress patterns. He states that people differ in their ability to cope with stress and that determines whether stress has a negative or a positive impact. The following diagram shows the healthy pattern:



**Figure 3.1 The Healthy Pattern (Burns, 2003:39)**

The bottom of the vertical line in the graph represents an extreme state of relaxation (comatose) while the top of the vertical line represents a state of hyper excitation (hysteria). It can be described as follows:

***The healthy pattern recognises that we can assist the body to cope with the stress adjustment process by applying a positive coping strategy, ..., such as relaxation, physical activity or positive thinking after a stressful experience (Burns, 2003:40).***

Stress is a part of life and if the individual takes the responsibility to assist the body to cope, the stress will have less of a negative effect on the person's mental and physical health.

Stress is necessary for people to be successful. Exposure to stress over a period of time can be a stimulus for growth in a certain area. The more people are exposed to the stressor, the more efficient their response is to the stressor and with this, comes improved performance (Loehr, 1997:4).

Therefore, stress is the force that drives people to perform and pressure is necessary for people to improve their performance. People have to find their own balance to decrease the risk of the effects of ongoing stress. Some stress is essential, but unhealthy stress, over a long period of time could be negative and detrimental to people's lives.

### **3.4 NEGATIVE STRESS**

Another way of describing negative stress is with the word "distress". It is explained by Burns (2003:2) as the stress experienced when there is a sense of loss, a sense of being a failure, working too hard for too long, experiencing criticism and/or feeling out of control. All people experience distress from time to time. This is the point where the person feels that the pressure he/she is experiencing exceeds the ability to cope. Distress means that the person's stress levels are too high and this affects the person in a negative and

harmful manner. This is usually the time when the performance of the workers start to decrease (Burns, 2003:2).

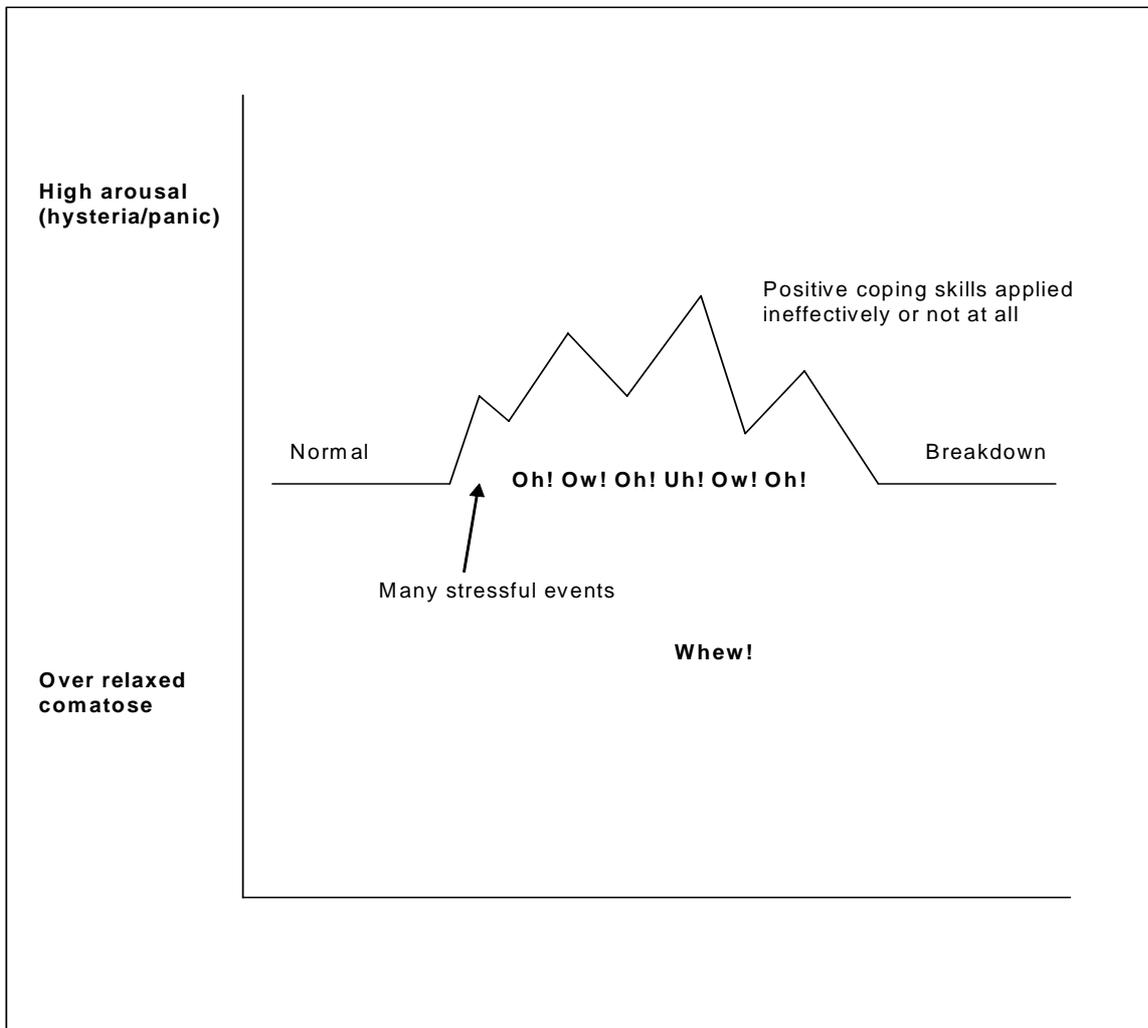
According to Cohen, *et al* (2001:190), stress often brings out the best in a person:

***...those who experience too little stress may not call into play their best attention and energy; those who experience too much stress may become immobilised, repeat useless behaviour or scatter their efforts.***

Every person needs some stress to function optimally but it is important to take note that too much stress **as well as** too little stress can be negative.

The researcher agrees that too much stress affects a person in a negative way. It affects the whole person, thus physically, emotionally, mentally and psychologically. The person is affected in totality and the whole organism needs to be addressed to manage the effects of negative stress on the person. As mentioned in Chapter two, the Gestalt of the employee is out of balance when experiencing ongoing stress and the organism will be affected negatively if homeostasis is not achieved.

The following diagram illustrates the effect of an unhealthy stress pattern on an individual:



**Figure 3.2 The Unhealthy Pattern (Burns, 2003:40)**

Once again the bottom of the vertical line in the graph represents an extreme state of relaxation (comatose) while the top of the vertical line represents a state of hyper excitation (hysteria). People would optimally try and function in the middle of these two extremes, but if they do not put the correct coping skills to practice they will still experience a breakdown. Thus, people function normally but then some stressful events occur. They are still in control but suddenly many stressful events occur in short succession of each other and if the person does not have the coping skills (stress management skills), he/she

will experience a breakdown or burnout. Burns (2003:40) describes this process as follows:

***The unhealthy pattern develops when either we fail to recognise the signals that the body sends seeking recovery actions, or fail to invoke any effective coping strategy. The continuing stress build-up eventually leads to stress overload with consequent physical and or psychological breakdown.***

According to Looker and Gregson (2003:27) people who perceive the demands made on their lives as exceeding the person's ability to cope, will move into the distress zone. In this zone the stress has a detrimental effect on people and they illustrate negative behaviour. An example would be if people feel that they can not cope with the stress in their lives and as a result of it they behave inappropriately by shouting at colleagues and /or arriving late for work.

People do not always have control over the stressors that become part of their lives but each person has to take responsibility to create effective coping strategies that can be used to deal with stress. The effective use of coping strategies will enable the person to return to a state of balance whereby the person can function efficiently and comfortably. Stress is inevitable, but how people react to the stress, is more important and this is each person's own responsibility.

### **3.5 STRESS CYCLE**

The way people experience stress in their lives depends on the meaning they attach to the different stressors. According to Brehm (1998:1), stress is an experience caused by a stressor. Stressors may actually exist, they could be distortions of reality or they could be

imaginary. The individual's perception causes the stress reaction, not the stressor. For example, if people perceive that they do not have the ability to write a report, even though they are well educated, it does not necessarily mean that they cannot write the report, but it means that they do not believe that they are capable of writing such a report and this causes stress in their lives.

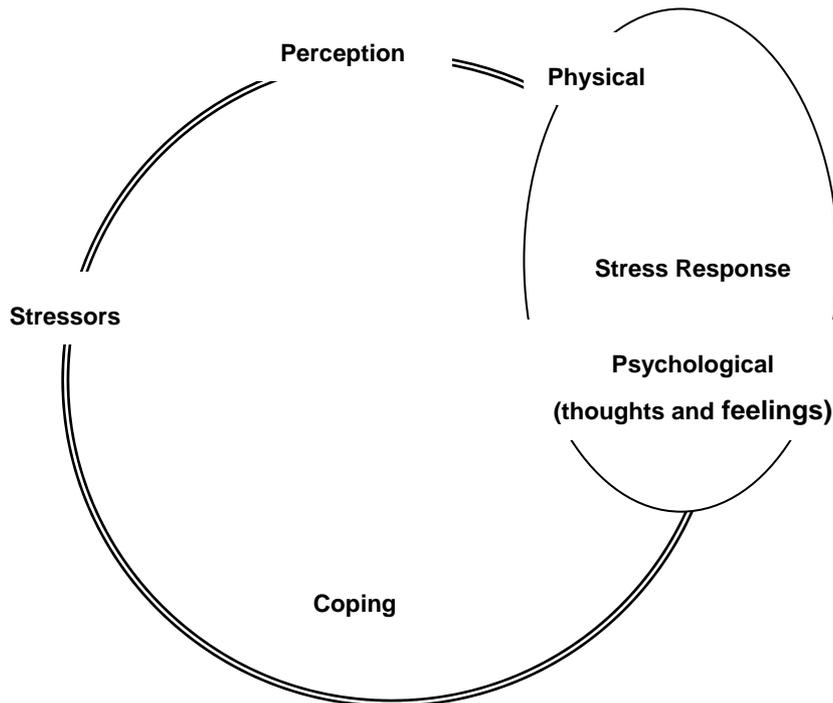
The stress cycle can continue and become a spiral that is to the detriment of the person's functioning. Stress has an effect on different aspects of a person's life and these aspects all have an effect on each other.

People react to a stressor and this is referred to as a stress response. A stress response can be physical or psychological. The physical response is experienced as the person's heart starts to beat faster, blood pressure is elevated, the muscles tighten and are ready to spring into action and breathing becomes faster and shallower (Brehm; 1998:1). There are many more physical reactions that will be discussed in depth at a later stage. A person's body and mind work together and cannot be separated, thus the physical response is linked to the psychological and emotional response - the person functions as a whole and thus the one has an influence on the other.

The stress cycle is outlined differently by different researchers:

### **3.5.1 The Stress Cycle**

According to Brehm (1998:5), the stress cycle involves the interaction between three factors namely: the stressors, the physical and psychological response to stress and coping behaviour.



**Figure 3.3 The Stress Cycle (Brehm, 1998:5)**

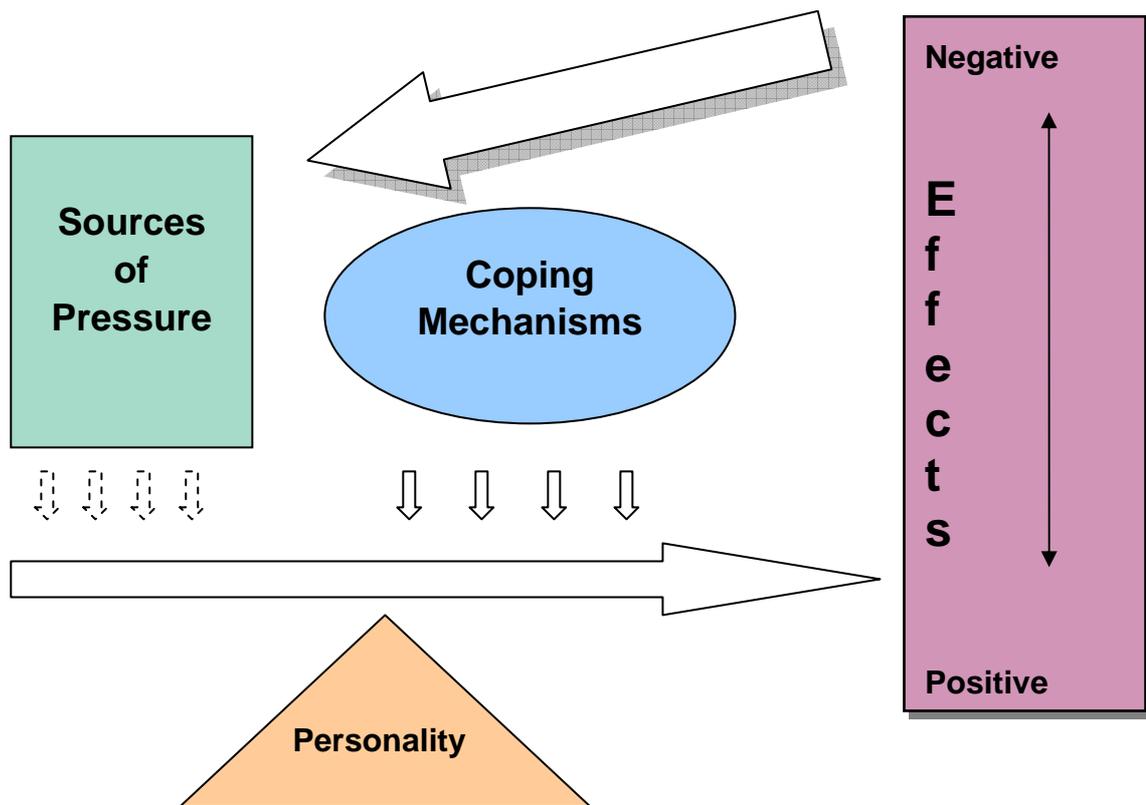
A person's stress cycle differs from day to day because there are other factors such as health, eating habits, lack of sleep, noise in the room, discomfort in the person's work area and the current political and or economic climate (Brehm, 1998:5). Perception has an influence on the person's stress levels. What the person experiences as stressful today, may not be experienced as stressful tomorrow.

### **3.5.2 Four way model**

The stress cycle is explained by Williams (1994:41) as the four way model of stress:

***Stress occurs when the perceived pressure on an individual exceeds that individual's perceived ability to cope.***

There are four factors that need to be considered when discussing the four way model of stress, namely: Sources of pressure, coping mechanisms, positive or negative effects and personality. These factors are illustrated in the following diagram.

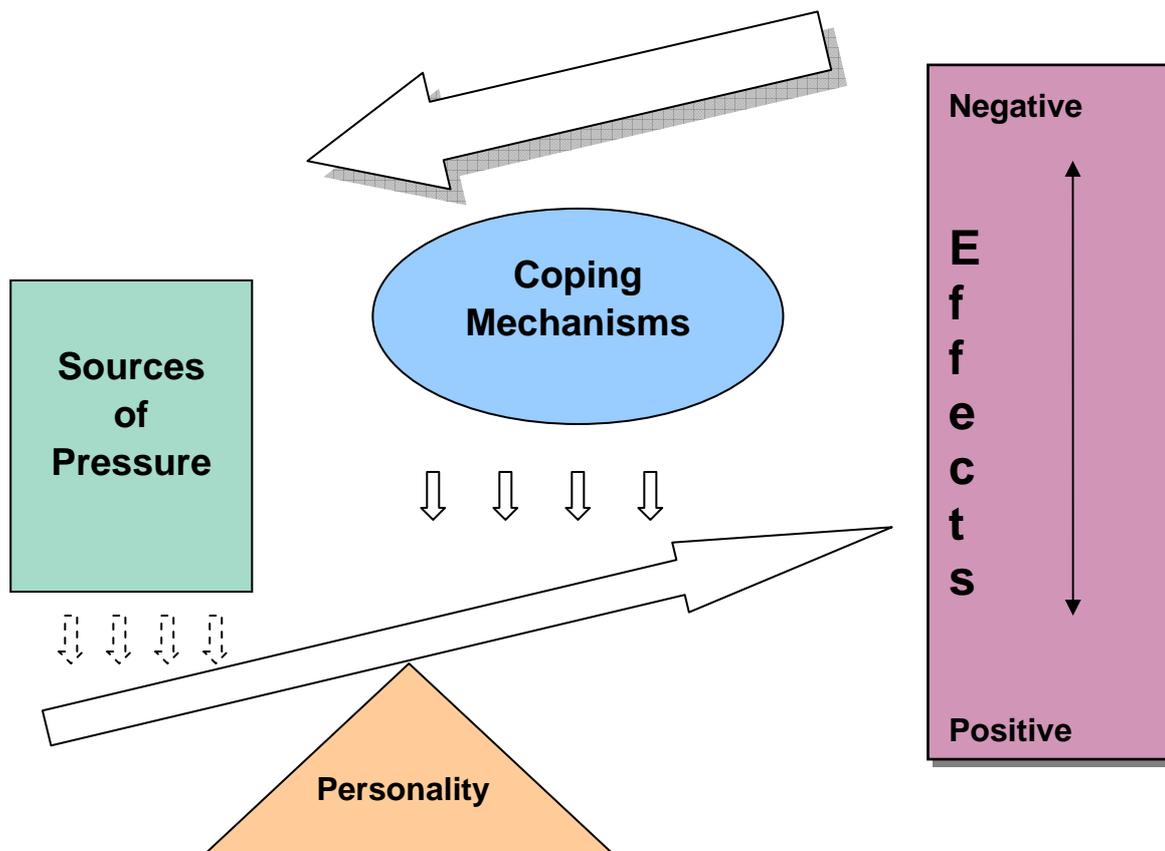


**Figure 3.4 The Four Way Model (Williams, 1994:41)**

Figure 3.4 indicates that if the amount of pressure increases, more negative effects will be experienced by the individual and with less pressure, more positive effects will be experienced by the individual.

Figure 3.4 illustrates that the sources of pressure in the person's life and the

person's coping mechanisms, should be in balance for the person to be able to perform optimally. Every individual has the responsibility to ensure that his/her sources of pressure and coping mechanisms are in balance. People do not always have control over the stressors in their lives, but they do have control over their reaction to the stressors.



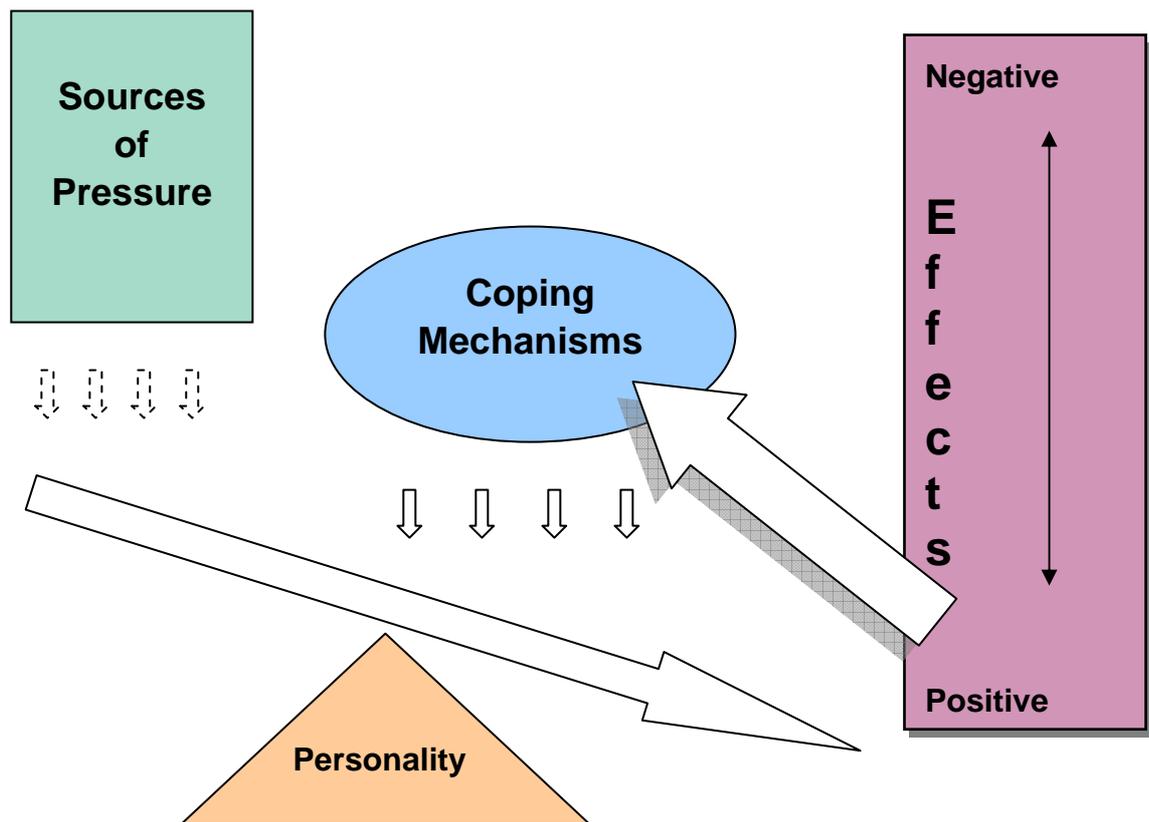
**Figure 3.5 The Four Way Model: Out of Balance (Williams, 1994:41)**

Figure 3.5 illustrates that if the sources of pressure and the coping mechanisms in people's lives are out of balance, the pressure will move towards having a negative effect in their lives. It is obvious that personality has an effect on how people cope with stress. Some people have personalities that are more "hardy" and they

regulate the effects of stress. Others find it difficult to regulate the effects of stress and their personalities cause an increase with regard to the effect of the stressors (Williams, 1994:41). If people have hardy personalities, more pressure is required for the arrow to tip to the left, but if the person's personality is prone to react to stress, then less pressure is required for the arrow to tip to the left.

Personality plays a role in the effect that pressure has on the person. If the person's personality is prone to react negatively to stress, it would be more necessary to build life skills training and expose the person to stress management programmes to ensure empowerment to manage stress more effectively.

In figure 3.6 it is shown that if people have coping mechanisms in place, it will outweigh the pressure and reduce the negative effects of stress. People need to take responsibility for their own lives and make an effort to improve their coping mechanisms and stress management techniques.



**Figure 3.6 The Four Way Model: Coping Mechanisms (Williams, 1994:41)**

### 3.5.3 General Adaptation Syndrome

The above mentioned term was coined by Hans Selye in 1956. According to Selye, people's bodies respond in a certain way when demands are made on them. It does not matter whether the demands are external or internal, the body always responds in a universal way. He called this pattern of response the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:2).

The GAS consists of three stages, namely alarm, resistance and collapse. If left untreated, these three stages always lead to infection, illness, disease and eventually death (Burns, 2003:48; Williams, 1994:34). These three stages are

illustrated in the following diagram:

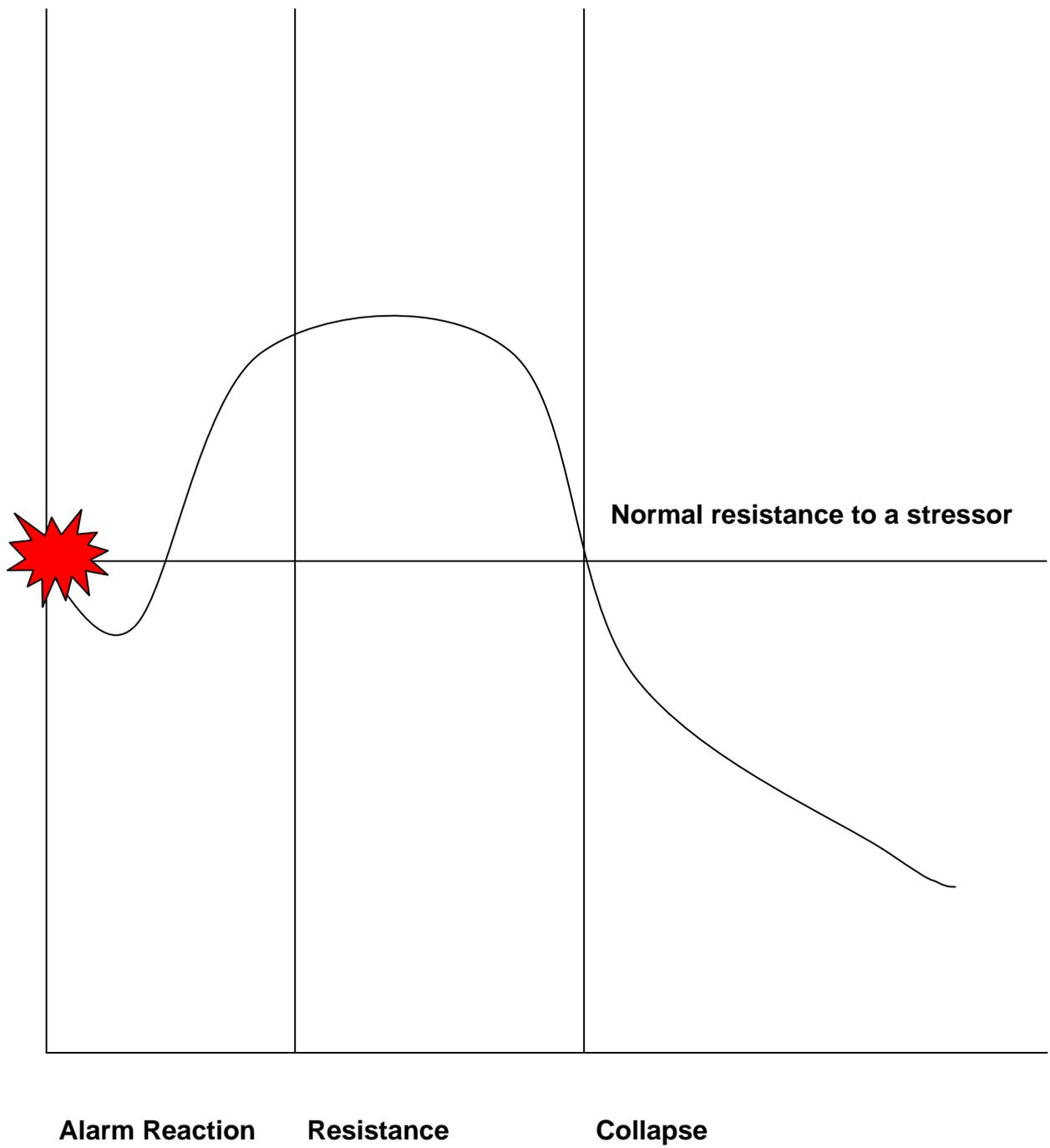


Figure 3.7 General Adaptation Syndrome (Burns, 2003:48; Williams, 1994:34)

**ALARM REACTION:** This is the body's first response to the stressor. There is a short period where the body's resistance is lowered after which a period of heightened resistance will follow. It can be described as follows:

*In this stage the body prepares itself for quick response by such means as increased heart rate and blood pressure and a release of glucose to provide energy for action (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:2).*

Brehm (1998:28) explains further that this reaction is linked to the body's autonomic nervous system's immediate response to stress (thus the fight or flight reaction) (Brehm, 1998:28). The body's reaction will be triggered immediately if there is a stressor. The immune system is depressed because the body's general resistance is lower during this period, and because of this, the body is more susceptible to infections and disease (Burns, 2003:48). The alarm response is not a response that can deal with long term threats and demands and, therefore, the next part of the stress response takes over, namely resistance (Looker & Gregson, 2003:32).

**RESISTANCE:** If the stressor continues to be a threat, the second stage, namely resistance, comes into action. During this stage the alarm reaction is replaced by the person's ability to adapt to the stressor. The individual is continuously trying to adapt to the stress that he/she is experiencing (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:3). The body fights to cope with the demand that is being made on the system. At times the body adapts to the extent where the person falsely believes that he or she can carry on and that the stress will not have an effect on him/her in the long term (Burns, 2003:49). The duration of this stage differs from individual to individual.

**COLLAPSE / EXHAUSTION:** This stage indicates the fact that the body cannot cope with ongoing stress indefinitely. The individual becomes tired and does not have the energy to make the adjustments that are necessary to maintain the body (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:3). The person loses resistance against the stressor and exhaustion and even death can occur because of it. Williams (1994:34) refers to this stage as the exhaustion stage. During this stage a person experiences a sudden drop in resistance and without any reserves succumbs to what Selye calls the diseases of adaptation. A person can no longer sustain the imbalance in chemistry which occurs in his/her system.

This stage can also be referred to as “burnout”. Daft (1997:771) explains burnout as follows:

***Extended periods of high stress can lead to burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and diminished accomplishments.***

Burnout is exhaustion that is brought about by a long period of stress. This stage can be initiated with the smallest incident that acts as the last straw in the person’s life, and can continue for a long period of time. Some of the symptoms of burnout are: lack of energy, view colleagues as objects rather than human beings, withdrawn and isolated socially, negative attitudes and become irritable and impatient for the smallest reason (Daft, 1997:771).

#### 3.5.4 Transaction Model

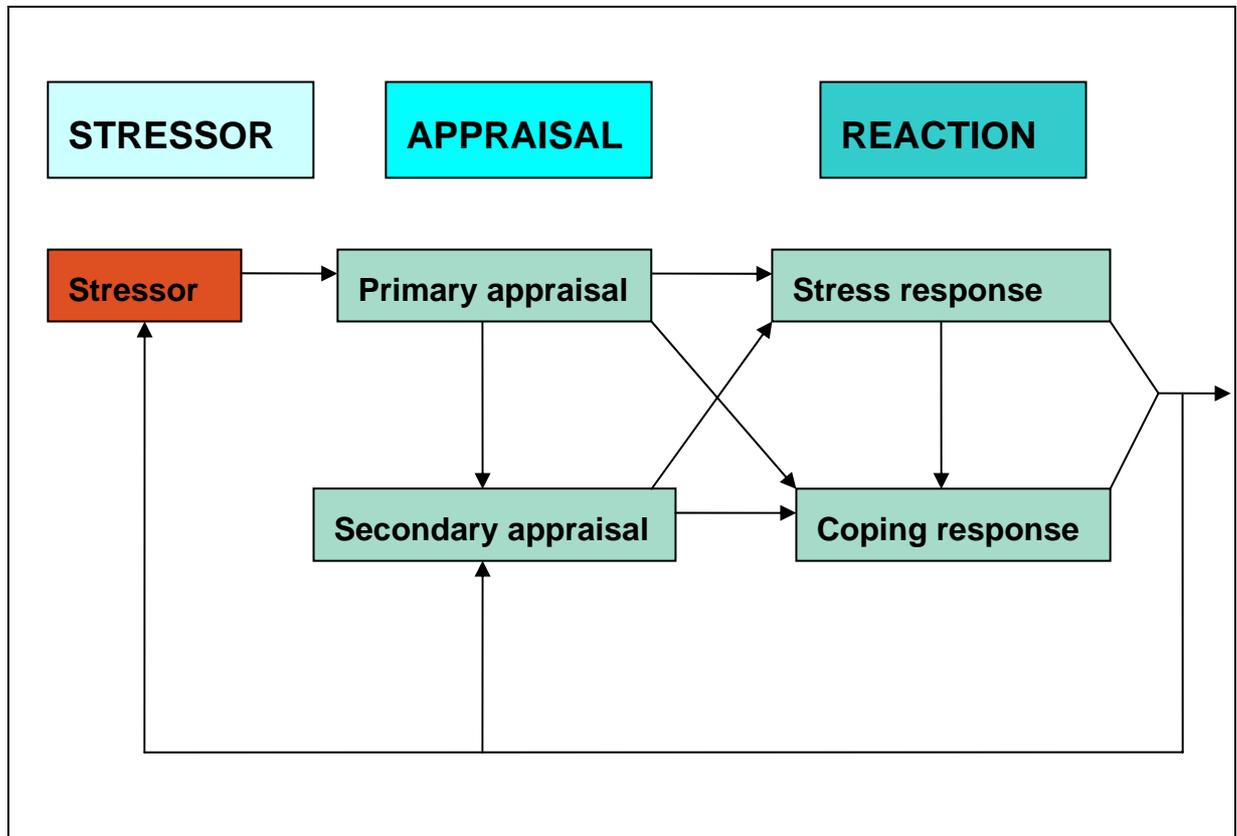
This transactional model (Figure 3.8) was created by Lazarus. With regard to the model, Ross and Altmaier (1994:5) emphasise the importance of balance in a person's life, when managing stress:

***...stress as occurring when there is an imbalance between demands and resources, and emphasizes the ongoing nature of balance or imbalance.***

The researcher is reminded of the Gestalt Theory where the focus is on the individual who strives to gain balance within him/herself and moves in and out of homeostasis continuously because he/she is confronted by new challenges every day.

Figure 3.8 indicates how the stress cycle is explained by the transactional model of stress and coping. It is probably the model which is the most widely regarded by professionals in the field of stress. Ross & Altmaier (1994:5) describe the model as follows:

***This model defines stress as occurring when there is an imbalance between demands and resources, and emphasises the ongoing nature of the balance or imbalance. In addition, this model says environments can influence people and that people can influence environments; thus, any particular person-environment encounter has implications for both the person and the environment.***



**Figure 3.8 Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:5)**

The model can be summed up as the process from when a person perceives a stressor, decides whether he/she has the coping recourses to cope with the stressor and then has a stress reaction accordingly.

**PRIMARY APPRAISAL:** The model begins where the person evaluates a specific situation or demand and decides whether negative outcomes can occur from the encounter. The primary appraisal can indicate harm that has already occurred or the threat of harm that may still occur (stress response). The person can also evaluate the situation and decide that the situation or demand is a challenge that has to be addressed (coping response) (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:5).

**SECONDARY APPRAISAL:** The person evaluates the options that are available for dealing with the situation of the demands. Ross & Altmaier (1994:6) explain it as follows:

***Thus the stress response is truly a transactional one, where the balance of demands and resources defines stress: if the demands are greater than the resources then stress occurs.***

According to Ross and Altmaier (1994:7), this model underlines the interaction between the demands made on people and the resources that they have available to help them cope with the situation.

***Thus, the stress response is truly a transactional one: if the demands are greater than the resources, then stress occurs. The reverse is also indicated: if resources are available to meet the demand, then the secondary appraisal might be one of challenge rather than harm or threat, and thus would be less stressful to the individual.***

This means that stress is not in the environment but is a state within oneself. The way in which one transacts and interacts with the environment determines how much and what type of stress one creates for oneself (Looker & Gregson, 2003:34). Once again the perception of the individual plays a role in the stress response that he/she experiences. Therefore, people have to take responsibility for their own stress levels and make sure that they have the resources and coping skills to manage the stress in their lives.

With all the information gathered from the above mentioned authors and the models that they created, the researcher compiled the following model regarding stress. Stress causes an imbalance in the homeostasis of people. They experience stressors in themselves, from their family, social lives and from their working environment. They are out of contact with themselves and have a lack of awareness regarding the effects of stress on their lives and how to manage their stress levels:

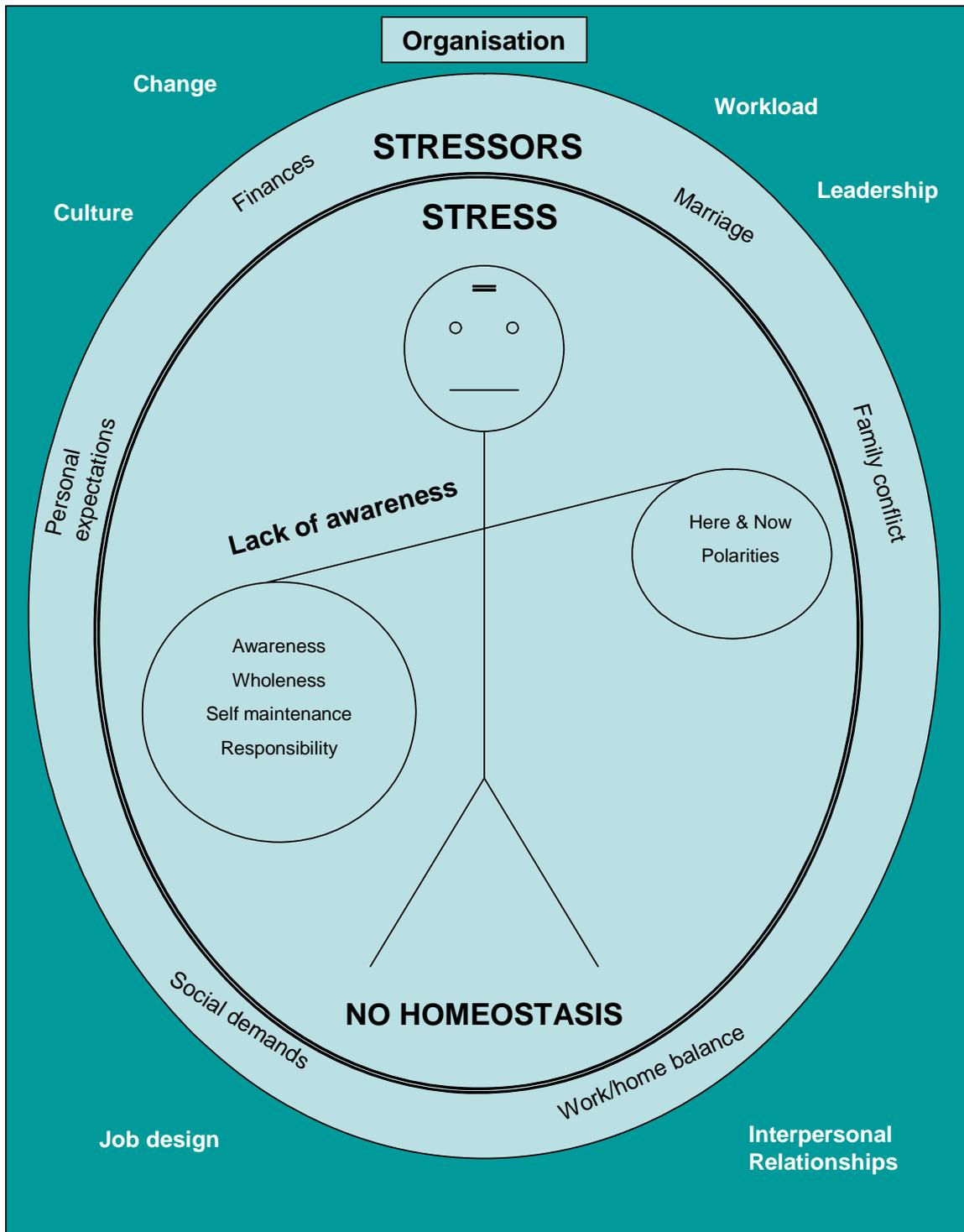


Figure 3.9 Stress: No Homeostasis

### 3.6 EFFECT OF STRESS

In general, people become aware of the ways in which stress may affect them physically, psychologically, socially, emotionally or behaviourally. Some of the stress related symptoms that they experience are for example, physically they could have headaches or muscle pains, emotionally they may become tearful and withdraw from others, psychologically they may become depressed, socially they could isolate themselves and behaviourally they may become verbally or physically aggressive to others on a regular basis. All of these effects in some way or another relate to the physiology of stress and how stress causes illness in human beings.

#### 3.6.1 The Physiology of Stress

The body reacts to any stressful event that takes place – whether it is eustress or distress, there is a physiological reaction to the stress. Looker and Gregson (2003:39) state that the sensory system of the body gets information regarding the environment and passes the information on to the brain for processing, interpretation and decision making. If people cannot handle the situation they experience distress, but if they feel that the situation can be managed without too much difficulty, they will experience the effects of eustress. Burns (2003:46) explains this process as follows:

- ***The front of the brain receives stimulus from the eyes, ears, etc. (e.g. awareness of danger); inability to cope with perceived context.***
- ***The hypothalamus in the brain activates:***
  - ***The pituitary gland to release hormones.***

- ***The involuntary nervous system, which signals via nerves to various parts of the body.***
- ***These in turn cause the adrenal glands to release the hormones adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisone, leading to the following changes:***
  - ***Mentally alert; senses are activated for survival vigilance.***
  - ***Breathing rate speeds up; nostril and air passages in lungs open wider to get oxygen in more quickly.***
  - ***Heartbeat speeds up and blood pressure rises.***
  - ***Liver releases sugar, cholesterol and fatty acids into the blood to supply quick energy to the muscles.***
  - ***Sweating increases to help cool the body.***
  - ***Blood clotting ability increases, preparing for possible injury.***
  - ***Muscles of the bladder or bowel openings contract, and non-life supporting activity of the body systems ceases temporarily.***
  - ***Blood is diverted to the muscles and muscle fibres tense ready for action.***
  - ***Immunity responses decrease (useful in short term to allow massive response by body, but harmful over a long period).***

According to Brehm (1998:17), this reaction can also be described as the fight-or-flight response that informs the body to get ready to leave the situation in a hurry or to counter the attack. The author explains it as follows:

***The fight-or-flight response is controlled by the brain. The brain sends messages to different organs, for example the muscles in the body to ensure that these organs are ready for action. The first and fastest is***

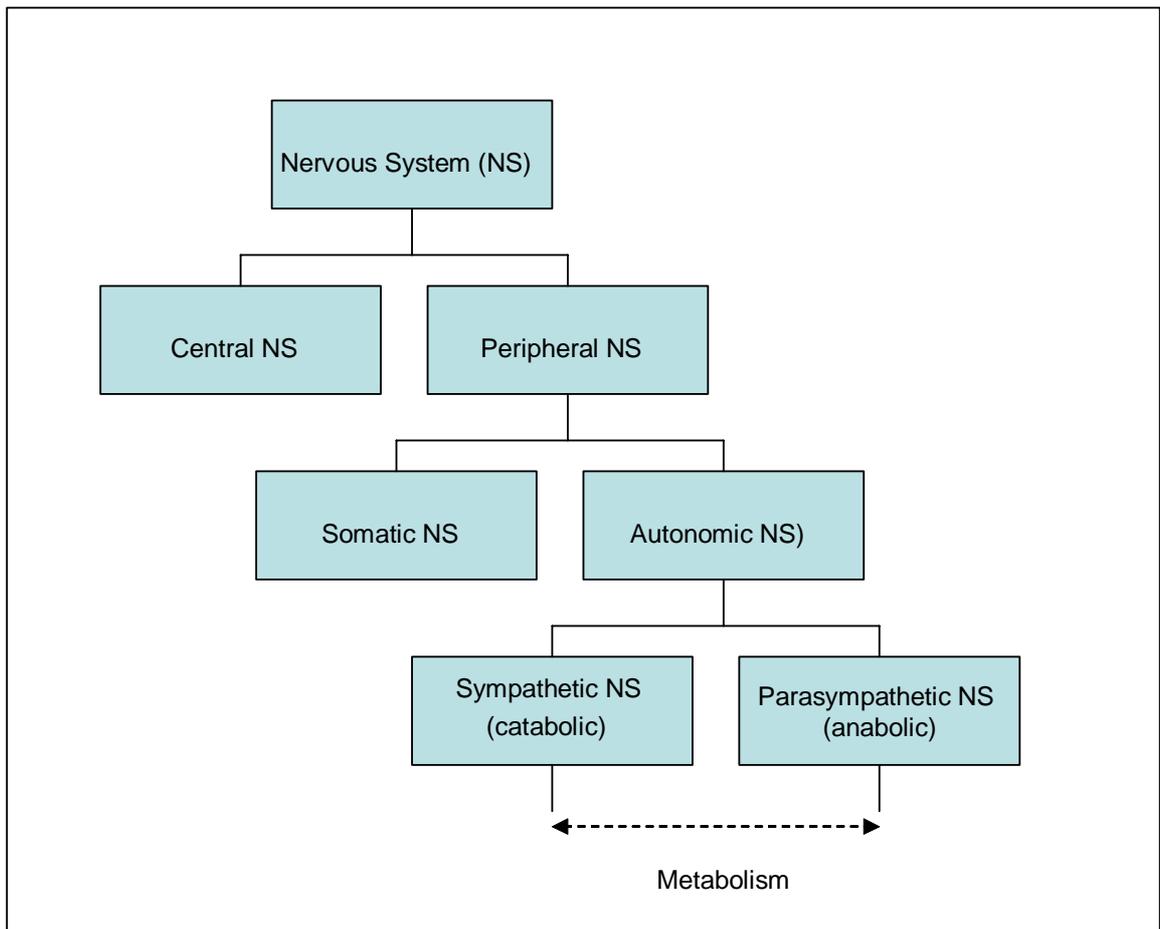
*via the nervous system, which activates the fight-or-flight response through direct communication with target organs via the nerve cells. The second is the endocrine system. It activates the fight-or-flight response through the action taken by chemical messengers called hormones that reach target organs through the circulatory system.*

The fight-or-flight response produces enhanced performance and also serves as a defence mechanism that helps the body to produce a physical response to a physical threat (Williams; 1994:21). Therefore, the fight-or-flight response can also occur when people feel emotionally threatened.

- **The Nervous System**

This process takes place automatically and is under control of the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system consists of two parts, namely the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for the body getting ready for the fight-or-flight response that has to be given. During this time stored energy is converted into usable energy. The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for reversing the previous process and building up energy to be used when the need arises. These two branches of the automatic nervous system are responsible for the balance that is required within our bodies. This is called homeostasis (Williams, 1994:32).

The divisions of the nervous system are illustrated as follows:



(Compare Gregson & Looker, 2003:42; Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:73)

### **Figure 3.10 The Divisions of the Nervous System**

The nervous system has the function of co-ordinating all the parts of the body to work together as a whole. The nervous system is divided into the central nervous system (CNS) and the peripheral nervous system (PNS). The CNS consists of the brain and the spinal cord. All the other nerves fall under the PNS (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:78 & Brehm, 1998:17).

The body produces movement through the impulses that are sent from the CNS via

the somatic nervous system to the skeletal muscles. This part of the nervous system is responsible for the physical reaction that people experience when they have to decide whether to fight or to flee. The autonomic nervous system is responsible for messages from the central nervous system to the non-skeletal systems such as the circulatory, respiratory, digestive, urinary and endocrine systems.

***In the fight-or-flight response, your brain activates the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which speeds up those functions necessary for immediate survival. For example, the liver releases more sugar into the blood stream to fuel the working muscles, the heart beats faster and harder to circulate plenty of blood. The SNS suppresses such functions as digestion, which can be postponed (Brehm, 1998:18).***

According to Brehm (1998:20), once the threat has disappeared the parasympathetic begins to function and the body starts to relax. All the body functions that were experiencing strain return to their expected tasks. Therefore, the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems balance each other and as long as there is balance, the body experiences less detrimental health effects from the stressor. When balance is not gained by the body, the body stays alert and ready for attack at all times. Williams (1994:33) emphasises that if the body does not return to its normal balanced state and the person can no longer sustain the imbalance in his/her body chemistry it will eventually cause collapse or exhaustion. The author describes the outcome as follows:

***The chemicals and hormones that were initially secreted to help the person will eventually destroy the person.***

At this point it is important to emphasise the homeostasis principle. If the Gestalt of the person is out of balance continuously, it is detrimental to the physical and mental health of the person. If the person regains balance and allows for relaxation, the effects of stress will be less detrimental. Sternberg and Gold (1997:82) state the following regarding homeostasis:

***The brain's stress response system is activated in threatening situations. The immune system responds automatically to pathogens and foreign molecules. These two response systems are the body's principal means for maintaining an internal steady state called homeostasis. A substantial proportion of human cellular machinery is dedicated to maintaining it.***

- **Instructions from the brain via the hormonal system**

Because hormones travel in the bloodstream and can reach all the body organs when the body is under stress, the body organs are instructed by the hormones to change their activity or function during the stressful period. The pituitary gland (also known as the master endocrine) controls the release of the adrenal cortex hormones, which include cortisol and sex hormones. These hormones are decreased when a person experiences stress. (Looker & Gregson, 2003:45). The hypothalamus sends a message to the pituitary gland that certain hormones need to be released. Cortisol is released and this ensures a supply of fuel to the body muscles and also aids the body's defence mechanism to deal with injury and infections. In this way fat and sugar levels in the body are high whilst the immune system is suppressed (Williams, 1994:33; Looker & Gregson, 2003:45).

The sex hormones play a role in reducing fertility and lowering libido. These body functions are seen as secondary body functions whilst survival functions are experienced by the body as primary functions that need to be activated to ensure survival. For this reason the blood flow is stronger to the brain and muscles (which the body needs to fight or flee) and away from the digestive and reproductive systems (which are considered lesser systems by the body in times of threat) (Looker and Gregson, 2003:45 and Burns, 2003:47).

### **3.6.2 Stress and Illness**

The relationship between stress and illness is not clear-cut. Stress does not automatically cause health problems. There are many variables that play a role in a person's health such as genetic factors, environmental factors and personality factors (Brehm, 1998:37). Cannon was one of the first researchers to mention the relationship between symbolic stressors in initiating the "flight-or-fight" response. Selye observed a gradual deterioration in health and eventual death in animals that were exposed to severe physical stressors. Weiss conducted experiments on rats to support the notion of physical deterioration with psychological stressors. He went further and proved that if there is a certain amount of control, the deterioration in health is less than when faced with the same stressor but without any control (Auerbach and Gramling, 1998:96-97).

According to Sternberg and Gold (1997:86), there is a relation between the brain and illness:

- **Any disruption of communication between the brain and the**

**immune system leads to greater susceptibility to inflammatory disease and, frequently, to immune complications.**

- **Susceptibility to inflammatory disease that is associated with genetically impaired stress response can be found across species.**
- **Evidence of a casual link between an impaired stress response and susceptibility to inflammatory disease comes from pharmacological and surgical studies.**

If the stressors continue over an extended period of time, people's ability to adapt becomes exhausted and eventually they can collapse as a result thereof. As has already been mentioned, there are certain hormonal changes that take place in the body when the body is anticipating a threat or a challenge. The cortisone, adrenalin and noradrenalin cause an increase in blood pressure, blood sugar and fats which results in the following:

- Increased heart rate, increasing blood supply to the muscles.
- Increased respiration rate – lung function improves.
- Increased blood supply to the brain, improving judgment and decision-making ability.
- Dilated pupils.
- Dry mouth.
- Sweating.
- Reduction in blood supply to less vital organs.

(Compare Williams, 1994:35; Cartwright and Cooper, 1997:7-8; Brehm, 1998:56-59).

According to Williams (1994:36), these bodily reactions are not a problem if they take place and the body has the opportunity to stabilise and reach homeostasis, but if these physical changes continue over a long period of time they can lead to stress related diseases such as:

- Hypertension or high blood pressure – blood is deployed to the voluntary muscles in the stomach and intestines as well as in the skin.
- Coronary thrombosis or heart attack:

***Stress hormones can also lead to the constriction of arteries damaged by atherosclerosis. Such constriction of already narrowed vessels causes a further decrease in blood flow, which can lead to chest pain, heart attack or stroke (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:42).***

- Migraine.
- Hay fever and allergies.
- Asthma.
- Pruritus or intense itching.
- Peptic ulcers:

***Stress hastens the development of ulcers because activation of the sympathetic nervous system during the fight or flight response leads to a reduction in activity all along the gastrointestinal (GI) tract..... these changes result in a high vulnerability for the stomach (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:108).***

- Constipation.
- Colitis.
- Rheumatoid arthritis.

- Menstrual difficulties.
- Nervous dyspepsia or flatulence and indigestion.
- Hyperthyroidism or overactive thyroid gland.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Skin disorders.
- Tuberculosis.
- Depression.
- Cancer.

***Many patients seem to have their cancer reactivated, after apparently successful treatment, by the onset of some acute form of stress, and in many cases the recurrence proves fatal (Burns, 2003:52).***

Williams (1994:36-37) mentions the following physical symptoms linked to stress:

- Altered sleep patterns, for example, difficulty getting to sleep and/or early waking.
  - Tiredness.
  - Lethargy.
  - Breathlessness, bouts of dizziness, light-headedness.
  - Indigestion, heartburn.
  - Nausea: Stress causes many people to experience nausea, loss of appetite and stomach ailments. This could be as a result of the same factors that cause ulcers and may even result in ulcers over time (Brehm, 1998:47).
  - Bowel disturbance, for example diarrhoea, constipation.
  - Headaches.

- Muscle tension, for example, neck pain, back pain.
- Nervous twitches.
- Alteration in habits.
- Increase or decrease in eating.
- Increased drinking.
- Loss of sexual drive.
- Increased smoking.

Williams (1994:36-37) goes further and indicates that the following mental symptoms can be linked to stress:

- Irritability and aggression.
- Anxiety and apprehension:

***Anxiety is most common in people who drive themselves too hard, or who are under too much pressure, or who, because of circumstances, have to restrain their naturally aggressive impulses (Burns; 2003:55).***

- Poor decision making.
- Pre-occupation with trivia.
- Inability to prioritise.
- Difficulty in coping.
- Mood changes and swings.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Deterioration in recent memory.
- Feelings of failure.
- Lack of self-worth.
- Personal isolation.

Apart from the physical and mental symptoms, altered appearance often gives an indication of stress being experienced.

- Lack of care in appearance.
- Looks miserable.
- Looks tired.
- Looks nervous or apprehensive.
- Looks agitated.

(Williams, 1994:39)

According to Cohen, *et al* (2001:192), it is necessary to pay special attention to people who show signs of stress. The following guidelines can be used:

- ***If the signs persist for a prolonged period of time (weeks or months), then they should be judged serious and potentially damaging to the health and welfare of the person.***
- ***If many signs of stress are occurring at the same time, it is probable that the level of stress is unduly high and is not likely to subside quickly.***
- ***If the behaviour of the person is out of character, that is, it represents a departure from what is normal for that person, and it persists, then the level of stress is likely to be unhealthily high.***

### **3.7 SOURCES OF STRESS**

There are many different reasons why people experience stress and these reasons differ from person to person. Therefore, generalising will be a mistake. There are, however, certain causes that stand out and claim the researcher's attention:

### 3.7.1 Personality

- **Type A/B Personality**

It is interesting to note that people react differently to stress. Two people who are exposed to the same amount of stress will not necessarily have the same stress response. Many factors play a role in this regard such as attitudes, beliefs, socialisation and personality.

Friedman and Roseman developed the “Type A, Type B” personality theory. The Type B personality qualities are the opposite of the Type A personality qualities. These two researchers believed that there is a correlation between the way people perceive their environment and their personalities (Burns, 2003:62).

According to Daft (1997:770), Type A personalities exhibit the following characteristics:

- ***Impatience when standing in a line at the bank, store or restaurant.***
- ***Excess energy and a tendency to have many projects going at once.***
- ***Burning the candle at both ends.***
- ***Irritability and a “hair trigger”.***
- ***Excessive need to lead in any group or organisation.***

The people who show these characteristics are often strong leaders who are creative and very ambitious. They are often an asset to the organisation but they are prone to heart attacks and burnout because they drive themselves too hard.

People who have very few of the above mentioned characteristics are referred to as Type B personalities. These individuals are calm, content, controlled, easy-going, good listeners, not easily irritated, patient and unhurried (Looker & Gregson, 2003:85). These are the people who tend to have lower stress levels and less stress related symptoms.

The researcher is of the opinion that this is important information to be aware of but all people do not necessarily fit into the above mentioned categories. A combination of the above mentioned characteristics are also possible to find in one person. The importance is to notice that some people are their own source of stress. They drive themselves (and often others) hard and they do not always realise that this has a detrimental effect on themselves. They are their own worst enemy. They need to learn to relax and take things easy. They need to balance the stressful times with rest and fun.

- **Personality Traits**

There are different aspects of a person's personality that can play a role in the person's ability to manage stress.

- **Hardiness**

Commitment, control and challenge form part of hardiness. Hardiness influences a person's perception of a stressful event. Hardy people live every day to experience every moment, they believe that they can control their experiences and they view change as normal and see this as a challenge rather than an obstacle (Auerbach and Gramling, 1998:41 and Brehm, 1998:74).

Furthermore, they have ***a sense of commitment to themselves, their work, families and other important values*** (Brehm, 1998:74).

The researcher is of the opinion that hardiness can be cultivated with exposure to the stressor. If an experience was very stressful the first time, but the person “survived” the experience, it may establish a foundation for belief that the person is capable of coping with this specific demand and the person may experience the situation as less stressful the following time.

- **Locus of control orientation**

Internal locus of control means that the person has the belief that he has personal control over events and the individual can influence what happens to him through personal behaviour.

External locus of control means that the person believes that the outcome of situations are determined by others or by luck – thus by factors outside of their control (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:41).

To take control means taking back the power in your life. To depend on control by others means being like a “puppet on a string”, therefore, dis-empowering yourself.

- **Learned resourcefulness**

According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:41), learned resourcefulness can be described as follows:

***Learned resourcefulness refers to problem solving and to emotion regulation self control skills that contribute to the belief that one can deal with “manageable levels of stress”.***

Resourcefulness can be practised and improved on. The more people are exposed to challenging situations, the more resourceful they will become.

- **Optimism**

Optimism is basically the belief that good things will happen. Defeats are viewed as temporary setbacks or as challenges that stimulate greater energy to overcome the stumbling blocks (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:41).

### **3.7.2 Life Events**

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. Every person will be affected by one or more situations such as personal illness, illness of family or friends, death in the family and others such as marital disharmony and problems with children (Looker & Gregson, 2003:93). In this regard it is necessary to consider the “hardiness” of the person.

Many events that take place in a person’s life require some adjustment such as moving house, change of job and change of school. All people are exposed to stressors at some or other time, but if more than one or two of these stressors occur within a short time span, it causes difficulty in the adjustments that need to be made (Looker & Gregson, 2003:93).

Major life events can take people to the limit of their ability to manage the demands that are being experienced. The following are examples of life events that can apply pressure to any individual:

- Moving house.
- Death of a partner, close friend or relative.
- Marital problems.
- Pregnancy.
- Legal problems.
- Losing job.
- Difficult relationship with children.
- Difficult relationship with parents.
- Serious illness of yourself or close family member (Scaap, 2002:3.11).

### **3.7.3 Occupational Stress**

It is difficult to separate stress experienced in one area of a person's life from the next area where the person has a role to play. Experiencing stress at home can have an effect on work performance and *visa versa*. If employees experience stress at work it will filter through to their lives at home and if they experience stress at home, it will in all probability, filter through to the work.

According to Palmer (2001:1), work is one of the greatest stressors a person can experience:

***Work is the main stressor, and this is an increasing trend until age 50.***

Professionals in some occupations are under tremendous pressure to keep their emotions in place. The helping professions are also shown in research to be the professions with the highest stress levels and burnout rates. Fineman in Newton (1995:131) explains it as follows:

***More or less explicit feeling rules are already part of the world of some professionals, especially helpers. For example, police officers are instructed and trained to curb their anger when under provocation; the clergy are expected to show compassion, whatever; probation officers are expected to work sympathetically with clients, regardless of how they feel about their misdemeanours; and doctors are supposed to react coolly and dispassionately to whatever ailments their patients bring. Indeed, the very notion of being professional has come to imply a set of rules about doing a job at an emotional distance from the client/customer, with heavy sanctions against getting too personally involved.***

There are many sources of stress in the workplace. A few of these sources will be discussed in this chapter. The sources of stress in the workplace will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 (Organisational Behaviour).

- **Uncertainty or ambiguity**

Uncertainty is often created by a lack of communication in the workplace. If the employees are not sure of what is expected of them or, of what is happening within the department or organisation where he/she is working, it creates uncertainty (Cohen, *et al* 2001:193). If there is change within the organisation and the outcome

of the change is not communicated, people are often negative towards the change. Fineman in Newton (1995:137) explains the effect of stress when change occurs as follows:

***Many stress and stress-related conditions are related to change and stress could be seen as part of the increasing uncertainty of modern life.***

Therefore, corporate employees can experience stress in the working environment with any change that takes place. The employers need to do stress audits to ascertain what the stress levels of employees are so that they can address these stress related symptoms appropriately.

Cartwright & Cooper (1997:17) suggests the following about role ambiguity:

***Role ambiguity arises when an individual does not have a clear picture of work objectives, co-workers' expectations, and the scope of responsibilities of his or her jobs.***

This causes stress in the lives of employees because they feel uncertain about their places within the organisation and perhaps even about their future within the organisation.

- **Unfinished tasks and intrusions**

Unfinished tasks and intrusions can be a great cause of stress to some. If employees feel they can never get through their work and that they always have

unfinished tasks, it can immobilise them (Cohen, *et al* 2001:193).

The physical environment in the workplace can have an effect in this instance. If employees work in an open-plan area, it may be difficult to work privately without being disturbed by (for example) a telephone conversation from the employees sitting around them.

- **Role expectations**

Role expectations are often overwhelming. Employees have to fulfil many different tasks because they have been given a certain role. Many times these tasks are too many for one person and they feel they cannot complete one task before the next arises (Cohen *et al* 2001:193).

According to Cartwright & Cooper (1997:16), stress can be kept to the minimum if the expectations placed on the employees, are clear and non-conflicting.

Therefore if role expectations are not clear, the employees should make an appointment with their managers and clarify their roles, thereby taking responsibility for the role clarification to ensure that this aspect does not lead to higher stress levels.

- **Growth and development**

Each person needs the opportunity to grow and develop. The position they are in can become a comfort zone but it can also lead to boredom (Cohen, *et al* 2001:193). This entails that employees need to be developed with regard to skills,

but they must also have the opportunity for promotions and salary increases. These aspects can lead to different reactions in the different stages of life. Young employees may work hard to improve themselves, but during middle age, employees may find their career progress slowed or stopped. Some employees may even believe that they suffer from some erosion of status before they retire (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:21). All of these stages in the working environment bring about stress in different ways and the employer must ensure that there is enough room for development at all levels within the organisation. Employee assistance programmes can play a role in helping the employees to deal with this stress by running stress management training sessions and preparation for retirement sessions.

- **Co-workers**

Co-workers and the behavioural problems that they exhibit can be a great source of stress at work. Co-workers can affect the morale and level of productivity of the person (Bennett & Lehman, 1999:299). According to Cartwright and Cooper (1997:18), relationships at work can be experienced as stressful by the employees. This would include relationships with the boss, relationships with subordinates and with colleagues. Employees can benefit from communication and conflict management training to improve relationships between co-workers and thereby reduce stress.

## 3.8 MANAGING STRESS AT WORK

### 3.8.1 Defining Stress Management

Stress management is the person's way of trying to cope. According to Folkman *et al* in Kantor, Schomer & Louw, (1996:1), coping is defined as follows:

*...the person's cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage (reduce, minimise, master or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources.*

The secret to managing stress is in finding the perfect balance. This balance is gained when one does enough of what one loves to do, to be able to do what one wants to do.

*The difference between stress and growth is successful coping. It is not how well we cope that matters but how well we think we can cope ... we need to take action to improve our ability to manage pressure (Williams, 1994:63).*

Furthermore, Williams (1994:64) explains that ***stress disappears when our desires, our behaviours and our abilities are in harmony.*** The Gestalt Theory emphasises some of the basic principles of stress management:

- Homeostasis.
- Being in control starts with positive choices.

- Each person is responsible for his own life.

Stress management is defined by Brehm (1998:8) as some sense of control. Stress management allows individuals to become aware of their own stress cycles, create a greater understanding of themselves and thus enhance their ability to cope effectively with stress. According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:124), stress management can be defined as follows:

***Stress management interventions are defined as any procedures designed to enhance the ability of people to cope with stress or with the negative emotions elicited by them.***

Stress management is also more practical in the sense that each person needs to learn skills and techniques that can be modified to his/her circumstances. Some of these techniques include relaxation therapy, lifestyle management, improving of personal life skills and modifying Type A behaviour. According to Ross and Altmaier (1994:60), stress management can be grouped into two categories: preventive coping and combative coping. Preventive coping is reaction to alleviate stress as the stressor is initially perceived and combative coping strategies include strategies for combating stressors that have already occurred.

According to Ross and Altmaier (1994:61), the two coping strategies can be broken down further into the following intervention strategies:

Primarily preventive	Primarily combative
<p><b>Monitoring stressors and symptoms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stress diaries</li> <li>• muscle monitoring</li> </ul> <p><b>Finding resources and attacking stressors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social skills training</li> <li>• assertiveness training</li> <li>• problem solving skills training</li> </ul> <p><b>Tolerating stressors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive appraisal</li> </ul> <p><b>Lowering arousal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxation</li> <li>• Guided imagery</li> <li>• yoga</li> <li>• physical exercise</li> </ul>	<p><b>Developing coping resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social support</li> <li>• time management</li> </ul> <p><b>Altering stress inducing behaviour patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type A behaviour pattern</li> </ul> <p><b>Avoiding stressors through adjustment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family/work balance</li> <li>• Career planning</li> </ul>

**Table 3.1 Coping Strategies (Ross and Altmaier, 1994:61)**

The intervention strategies will be discussed briefly in the following section.

### 3.8.1.1 Primarily Preventive

- **Monitoring stressors and symptoms**

Employees can develop a greater understanding for their stress cycles by recording events and the sequence in which it takes place, to ascertain what their stress responses are to these events. Thus, their stress responses can be

recorded in a stress log. According to Brehm (1998:79), the stress log should include the following information:

- A description of the source of the stressor.
- The person's physical response (muscles, stomach, headaches, jaw clenching etc) to the stressor.
- What the thoughts and feelings were that the person experienced when he/she was confronted with the stressor?
- What actions did he or she take to cope with the stressor?
- The person must evaluate whether his/her coping strategies worked.
- The person must ascertain if there were any health behaviours (for example eating habits and lack of exercise) that could have an effect on his/her stress level.

- **Utilising resources and attacking stressors**

Employees should work towards improving their coping skills on an ongoing basis. Nobody is perfect and all employees have some limitations that they need to work at improving. Two of the interpersonal skills that employees can work on to improve their interpersonal relationships in the work place, are communication skills and conflict management skills. Furthermore, it is important that the employees should realise who and what their resources are so that they can make use of these resources as a support system (Brewer, 1995:41-42).

According to Looker and Gregson (2003:179), employees who are experiencing stress should work towards improving their general life skills. This would include aspects such as increasing love and support, working towards enhancing self-esteem, learning to be assertive and developing a sense of humour. These aspects

could be used pro-actively and re-actively with regard to stress management. In the process of enhancing these aspects, the employees work towards hardiness in their own personalities which will also help them to manage life's challenges more effectively.

- **Cognitive appraisal of stressors**

Cognitive appraisal means taking stock of the situation. The person is taught to place the situation into perspective. The stressor is compared to a major world event. He is taught to ask himself to decide if the stressors (for example a colleague who is late for a meeting) would matter in five years from now, or in one year from now, or in one month from now (Ross & Altmaier, 1998:67).

The person is, therefore, taught to stand back from the stressor and cognitively to decide whether the stressor is really worth the emotional and physical energy. The researcher is of the opinion that this technique can work well if combined with a relaxation technique.

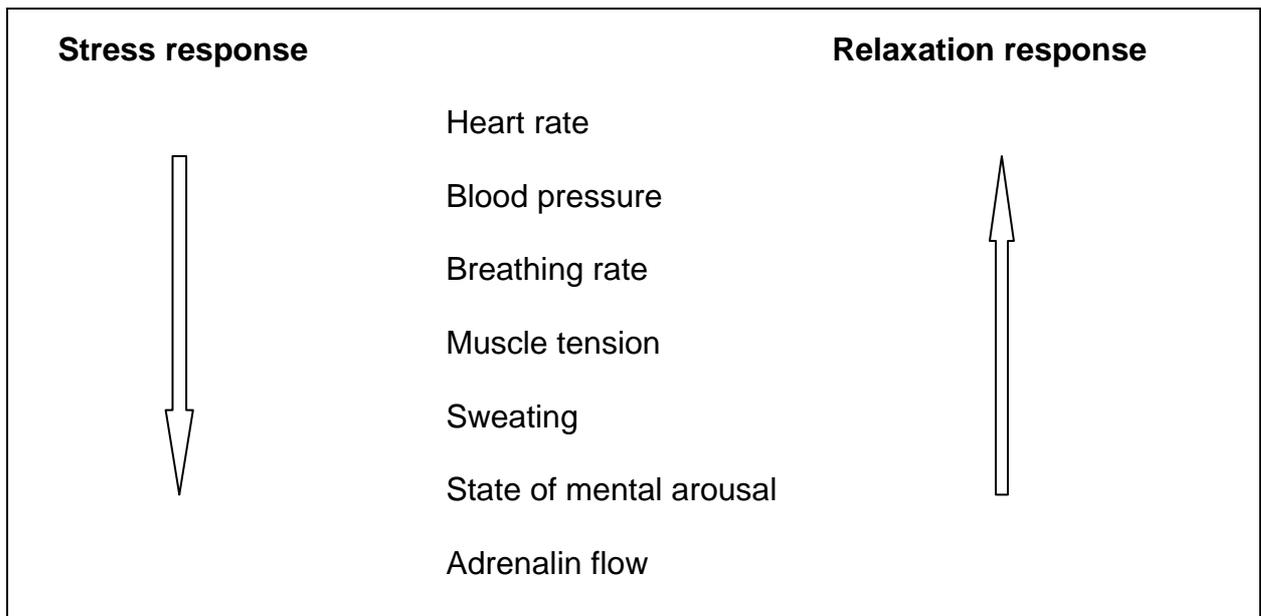
- **Lowering Arousal**

People have to realise that at some time you have to let go. All the relaxation exercises in the world will probably be unable to help people with these internal 'I must perform well' messages that they give themselves and try to live by (Palmer, 2001:1). Relaxation is something that is unique to the individual. People have their own way of achieving balance in their bodies and their minds. Some people find it difficult to relax and therefore relaxation techniques need to be practised regularly for them to become a habit in their lives (Williams, 1994:85).

Relaxation techniques need to become part of the daily routine of all individuals. Employees can choose from a variety of forms of relaxation, for example yoga, meditation, progressive and deep muscular relaxation, autogenics, self-hypnosis and biofeedback (Looker & Gregson, 2003:128). For the purpose of this study the focus will be on certain aspects of relaxation as outlined in the literature. According to Brehm (1998:331), the following guidelines can be utilised for successful relaxation practice:

- Schedule a convenient time and place.
- Be as comfortable as possible.
- Try not to try.
- Keep a relaxation log.
- Avoid falling asleep.
- Finish relaxation sessions by coming back slowly.

Relaxation causes the body to act in exactly the opposite way that it would act when experiencing stress.



**Figure 3.11 The Benefits of Mastering Relaxation (Burns, 2003:103-104)**

According to Burns (2003:103-104), there are some specific physical reactions that take place during relaxation:

- ***The brainwaves become slower and deeper.***
- ***Breathing becomes shallower because less oxygen is needed.***
- ***Heart rate decreases and blood pressure drops.***
- ***The presence of stress hormones in the bloodstream decreases rapidly.***
- ***Sweating decreases.***
- ***There is a decrease in muscle tension.***

### **The advantages of Relaxation**

According to Brehm (1998:331), there are many advantages for the use of relaxation:

- Practicing relaxation skills helps people to counteract the fight-or-flight response.

- Self awareness is increased by practising relaxation techniques.
- Communication takes place more effectively when employees are relaxed. They can set goals, discuss problems and find solutions for those problems.
- Optimal health and well-being is maintained by practicing relaxation techniques regularly.
- Relaxation skills may help prevent stress related illnesses such as headaches and heart disease.

Burns (2003:103-104) mentions six major advantages to practising relaxation:

- Relaxation can reduce the stress response.
- Relaxation can reduce pain.
- Relaxation can reduce fatigue.
- Relaxation can promote sleep.
- Relaxation can improve personal relationships.
- Relaxation can increase self esteem through self awareness.

### **3.8.1.2 Primarily Combative**

- **Developing coping resources**
  - **Social Support**

In a stressful environment social support can play a large role between coping and not coping. Some people try to manage pressure on their own without asking for help from others. It is not a sign of weakness to ask for support from others but actually a sign of strength (Thompson, 2002:27).

Social support can take place within a structured environment but it can also imply having good friends and family as a support system to fall back on. According to Williams (1994:95), the worst thing that a person can do is to keep all his/her emotions inside. If the person has the opportunity to talk to a friend or colleague, the situation is placed in perspective and the pressure is shared.

At times stress can become so intolerable that it is impossible for the person to manage alone. In such a case professional help is needed. Many organisations offer employee assistance programmes or referral services to ensure the well-being of the employees. They have a choice whether they will make use of these facilities or not. If they do not feel comfortable using company resources, they could make use of an outside therapist as an alternative (Underwood, 1992:3).

- **Time management**

Time management is an essential coping resource for stress management. Thompson (2002:26) states that if one manages time effectively, one maintains control, which helps to manage stress levels. The employee can go about it as follows:

***When faced with too many tasks, try to get started and focus on them one at a time.***

The first step for employees to manage their time is to consider their values, decision making and goal setting. It is about creating self awareness and taking stock of priorities:

***Time management is about planning your course in life. ... Life is full of surprises, but your travel plan allows you to adapt and take advantage of the opportunities and grow from the challenges (Brehm, 1998:113).***

Time management is an aspect that should be included in every stress management programme. Many corporate employees work under immense pressure and they have to get their work done within a certain time frame. Time management skills will help to reduce stress levels.

- **Altering stress inducing behaviour patterns**

Certain behaviour characteristics are indicative to the Type A personality (such as being competitive, hard driving, aggressive and impatient. Refer to par 3.7.1). These people are prone to coronary heart disease and, therefore, the stress inducing behaviour needs to be altered. To alter the above mentioned behaviour, a programme such as the following is suggested:

- Relaxation techniques.
- Control over own behaviour.
- Learning to control cognitive stress responses.
- Learning to anticipate and plan for predictable stress situations.
- Learning to 'cool it' in stressful situations.
- Building stress resistance.
- Stress management as a lifelong investment (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:84-85).

- **Avoiding stress through adjustment**

Corporate employees can become aware of situations that cause stress in their lives and make adjustments accordingly.

A career can add a tremendous amount of stress to the individual's life. Change within the organisation, such as acquisitions and mergers, can be extremely stressful to the individual as this can result in job loss and or job insecurity. Other factors such as working conditions, role conflict, relationships at work and career development can all play a role in the stress that the individual experiences within the working environment (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:16-19). It is expected of employees to perform in spite of these stressors. If they do not perform they can lose their jobs.

Underwood (1992:2-3) explains the demands in the working environment and the demands of a personal life as follows:

***Trying to meet the demands of work, the needs of a partner or family and finding time for your self is a juggling act. Most executives admit it is difficult to equitably meet the needs of work and family and often there are trade-offs, with work getting the lion's share of your time and energy.***

The only way for people to solve this problem is to take a look at their values and priorities. People have to work more efficiently (at work) to ensure that they have more time to spend with their families and friends at home.

Apart from the stressors within the working environment, employees have to cope with stressors from home. There may be illness or death in the family, financial problems and other stressors within the home environment. The individual needs to find a way in which he/she can balance these aspects. Time management is of great value in accomplishing this.

According to Looker and Gregson (2003:146), people have to do a lifestyle review and make adjustment if they want to manage stress in their lives effectively. This would mean that the employees have to take a look at the following aspects in their lives:

- Diet.
- Caffeine and alcohol consumption.
- Smoking habits.
- Fitness and exercise.
- Body weight.
- Sleep and rest.

Adjustments should to be made in the employees' lifestyles to improve their general well-being. Employees have to take responsibility for their lifestyles. This means that they have to make positive choices and implement those choices to experience the positive effects thereof.

### **3.8.2 Stress management programme**

There are many different opinions regarding what a stress management programme should consist of. All the aspects that have been mentioned above can be addressed in a stress management programme. According to Kantor, *et al*

(1997:16), the following interventions can be included in a stress management programme:

- ***Skills that reduce or modify exposure to stress.***
- ***Skills that reduce excessive physiological functioning.***
- ***Techniques that will facilitate expression of the stress response in a healthy manner.***

Such a programme will address the person's lifestyle by focusing on the following aspects:

- Nutrition.
- Exercise.
- Relationships.
- Work environment.
- Coping mechanisms.
- Health beliefs and behaviours (Kantor, *et al* 1997:16).

It is, therefore, essential for participants in a stress management programme to become aware of their stress levels and the causes thereof. They must have the opportunity to de-stress during the programme and must acquire skills to help them relax once they are back at work.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

Stress is something that touches every person's life. It has an effect on people on every level of their being, emotionally, physically and psychologically. People must take responsibility to become more aware of their stress levels and to take positive action in this

regard.

There are many different causes for stress in the lives of employees and they have to find a balance between all the demands that are being made and the expectation that they should still be able to perform optimally at work. Employees have to cope with stress in the working environment, in their family lives, with their finances and within their social environment. Therefore stress management is essential.

In the following chapter focus will be on play therapy and how the mediums can be utilised as part of a stress management programme for corporate employees.