THE USE OF PLAY THERAPY MEDIUMS IN A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME WITH CORPORATE EMPLOYEES

by

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With thanks to

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Dedicated to: Wilkie, Vickus and Chanté

SUMMARY

THE USE OF PLAY THERAPY MEDIUMS IN A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME WITH CORPORATE EMPLOYEES

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There is a growing need for corporate employees to be able to manage their stress levels and use stress to their own, and to the organisation's, advantage. Various literature references show that the damage to the workplace and to the worker costs millions of rands annually*.* Organisations are loosing money because of employees who are not able to manage their stress levels. Employees often experience stress because of an excessive workload, a high expected work pace, difficult work schedules, role conflict, uncertainty regarding career security, poor interpersonal relationships and unpleasant working conditions and many more. This stress manifests in conflict, depression, absenteeism, headaches, hypertension, alcoholism, drug abuse and more which as a result, impacts the organisation's profitability due to decrease in productivity.

In this thesis, research was done regarding the use of play therapy mediums in a stress

management programme with corporate employees. The following research question was formulated: Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees, have a positive effect on their stress levels? The purpose of this stress management programme was to create greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their lives and to indicate to them how they can go about managing stress to their advantage. The aim of the research was to use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of, and to manage their stress levels. Play therapy mediums were therefore used to aid the de-stressing of the corporate employees and to facilitate greater awareness regarding the effects of stress on their lives.

The researcher applied the Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework for this study. This theory supports the notion of awareness as a tool that can be used by a person to be in control of his/her life. The Gestalt Theory as a theoretical framework emphasises the fact that healthy behaviour occurs once people reach a point where they can regulate the emotional state that they are in. The literature research has shown that when this comes about, people experience a feeling of unity and integration in their lives. It is also concerned with the total existence of a human being. The people are addressed as whole and integrated beings, who strive to gain balance in an ever-changing environment. The Gestalt Theory is holistic and can form the theoretical framework for work with any type of individual and has been used effectively with individuals, groups and in teaching.

Research was done within the corporate environment. The researcher developed a stress management programme which was presented to corporate employees. The aim was to establish whether the programme would have an effect on their stress levels and whether play therapy mediums can be used successfully with corporate employees during a training programme to reduce their stress levels and to improve their awareness of the causes of

stress in their lives and their reactions to stressors in their environment. This stress management programme served as an intervention because it could enhance the functioning of the corporate employees with regard to their stress levels and also their general functioning within the organisation and in their personal lives. Pre- and post-test results were compared to evaluate the effect of the programme.

Play therapy is traditionally used with children but relevant literature and the researcher's own experience from the research has shown remarkable results in the use of play therapy mediums with adults. The literature as well as the empirical study showed that play itself has a number of therapeutic elements that produce behaviour change. Furthermore play also offers opportunities to re-live past stressful events and the emotions associated with them in a safe and therapeutic environment.

The research findings indicated that stress levels improved after the stress management programme was presented to the corporate employees. From the research findings the researcher developed a model as a guideline for a stress management programme using play therapy mediums in the corporate environment.

Key Words:

Play therapy mediums

Awareness

Corporate employees

Gestalt Theory

Organisation

Stress

Stress management programme

Employee assistance programme

OPSOMMING

THE USE OF PLAY THERAPY MEDIUMS IN A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME WITH CORPORATE EMPLOYEES

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Toenemend bestaan daar behoefte onder korporatiewe werknemers om in staat te wees om hulle stresvlakke te bestuur asook om stres tot hulle eie voordeel en tot voordeel van die maatskappy aan te wend. Verskeie literatuur bevestig dat die nadeel van stres vir die werkgewer asook vir die werker miljoene rande jaarliks beloop as gevolg van die feit dat werknemers nie in staat is om hulle stresvlakke te bestuur nie. Werknemers ervaar dikwels stres weens hoë werkslading, 'n hoë verwagte werkspas, moeilike werkskedules, rolkonflik, onsekerheid oor loopbaansekuriteit, swak interpersoonlike verhoudinge, onaangename werksomstandighede, en vele meer. Hierdie stres manifesteer in konflik, depressie, afwesigheid van werk, hoofpyne, hipertensie, alkoholisme, dwelmmisbruik, en nog meer, wat tot gevolg het dat die produktiwiteit binne die maatskappy afneem.

In hierdie verhandeling is navorsing gedoen oor die rol van spelterapie-mediums in 'n stresbestuurprogram met korporatiewe werknemers. Die volgende navorsingsvraag was

geformuleer: Sal die gebruik van spelterapie mediums in 'n stresbestuurprogram vir korporatiewe werknemers 'n positiewe effek op die stresvlakke van die werknemers hê? Die doel van die stresbestuurprogram was om groter bewustheid onder korporatiewe werknemers aangaande die effek van stres op hulle lewens te kweek, en om aan te dui hoe hulle te werk kan gaan om die stres in hulle lewens tot hulle eie voordeel te bestuur. Die doel van die navorsing was om spelterapie mediums in 'n stresbestuurprogram te gebruik om die korporatiewe werknemer in staat te stel om bewus te word van sy/haar stresvlakke sodat hy/sy dit doeltreffend kan bestuur. Spelterapie-mediums was derhalwe gebruik om ontspanning te bewerkstellig en om groter bewustheid oor die effek van stres by die korporatiewe werknemer te kweek.

Die navorser het die Gestaltteorie as teoretiese raamwerk vir die studie gebruik. Hierdie teorie ondersteun die konsep van bewustheid as hulpmiddel wat 'n persoon kan gebruik om in beheer van sy/haar lewe te kom. Die Gestaltteorie as teoretiese raamwerk beklemtoon die feit dat gesonde gedrag voorkom wanneer mense 'n stadium bereik waar hulle hul emosionele toestand kan reguleer. Die literatuurstudie het getoon dat wanneer dit gebeur, persone 'n gevoel van eenheid en integrasie in hulle lewens ervaar. Dit is ook gemoeid met die totale bestaan van die indiwidu. Mense word in geheel as geïntegreerde wesens aangespreek, wat daarna strewe om balans in 'n voortdurende veranderende omgewing to bekom. Die Gestaltteorie is holisites en kan die teoretiese raamwerk vir enige tipe indiwidu vorm. Dit is reeds met vrug toegepas onder indiwidue, groepe, asook in onderrig.

Navorsing is binne die korporatiewe omgewing gedoen en 'n stresbestuurprogram is ontwikkel wat aan korporatiewe werknemers aangebied is. Die doel hiervan was om vas te stel of die program 'n impak op hule stresvlakke sou hê, asook of spelterapie mediums doeltreffend met korporatiewe werknemers gedurende 'n opleidingsprogram gebruik kan

word. Hierdie stresbestuurprogram het gedien as intervensie aangesien dit die funksionering van die korporatiewe werknemers ten opsigte van hulle stresvlakke en algemene funksionering binne die organisasie en hulle persoonlike lewens kan verhoog. Voor- en na-toets resultate was vergelyk om die effek van die program te evalueer.

Spelterapie word tradisioneel met kinders gebruik maar relevante literatuur asook die navorser se persoonlike ondervinding het merkwaardige resultate met die gebruik van spelterapie mediums onder volwassenes getoon. Die literatuur, asook die empiriese studie het getoon dat spel opsigself 'n aantal terapeutiese elemente bevat wat gedragsverandering meebring. Verder bied spel ook 'n geleentheid aan die volwassene om stresvolle gebeure van die verlede te kan herleef en om die emosies wat daarmee gepaard gaan in 'n veilige en terapeutiese omgewing te kan ervaar.

Die navorsingsresultate het aangedui dat stresvlakke verbeter het nadat die stresbestuur-program vir die korporatiewe werknemers aangebied is. Vanuit die navorsingsresultate het die navorser 'n model ontwikkel as riglyn vir 'n stresbestuurprogram waar gebruik gemaak word van spelterapie mediums in die korporatiewe omgewing.

Sleutel Woorde:

Spelterapie-mediums

Bewustheid

Korporatiewe werknemers

Gestaltteorie

Organisasie

Stres

Stresbestuurprogram

Werknemerhulpprogram

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CHAPTER 1

1   INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

1.1 TITLE

The use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Stress is a reality that every person lives with. It has an effect on almost every aspect of a person's life. Hardworking, dedicated executives and corporate employees must keep up with the pace that is expected of them. This causes a great amount of stress and stress in the workplace is one of the greatest issues with which organisations need to cope.

There is a growing need for corporate employees to be able to manage their stress levels and use stress to their own and to the organisation's advantage:

> *It has been estimated that the damage to the workplace and to the worker costs approximately 16.3 billion dollars annually (Cherbosque, 1999:67).*

Organisations are loosing money because of employees who are not able to manage their stress levels. Employees often experience stress because of an excessive workload, an expected work pace, difficult work schedules, role conflict, uncertainty regarding career

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security, poor interpersonal relationships and unpleasant working conditions – to name but a few. This stress manifests in conflict, depression, absenteeism, headaches, hypertension, alcoholism, drug abuse and other conditions. The organisation does not only lose money by paying the medical bills, but there is also a loss of productivity. No organisation can afford to ignore the issue of stress in the workplace without suffering the consequences.

The purpose of this stress management programme is to create greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their lives and to indicate to them how to go about managing stress to their advantage. The play therapy mediums will be used to aid the de-stressing of the corporate employees and to facilitate greater awareness regarding the effects of stress on their lives. Corporate employees need to be made aware of the fact that stress can be positive. This awareness starts from within each person. Corporate employees must become aware of what causes stress in their lives, what the effect of stress is on their bodies and health, the role stress plays in their job performance and how stress affects their relationships with significant others. As soon as the corporate employees become aware of the effect that stress has on their lives, they can consciously start making changes to ensure more effective stress management in the future. These individuals will then be able to accept responsibility for the fact that they are the programmers of their own lives and they cannot blame external factors for where they are and how they are reacting to whatever is happening in their lives.

1.3 MOTIVATION

It has become apparent to the researcher that stress within the workplace is creating a challenge for the employees as well as the organisation. Ray & Miller (1991:506) explain it as follows:

> *Stress in the work place is unavoidable but its effects are often deleterious both to the stressed individual and the organisation. At the individual level the effects may include physical and psychological problems, drug and alcohol abuse and low morale. At organisational level, low productivity and absenteeism are among the costly results.*

Employee Assistance Programmes (hereafter EAP) address the general wellness of employees, which include stress management. In South Africa much emphasis is placed on HIV/Aids education and training, which is definitely a concern, but it leaves very few resources for other areas of employee well-being. A further concern regarding the EAP is that many companies consider the EAP as a "nice to have" and not as a necessity in working towards a healthy working environment. Harper (1999:22) explains it as follows:

> *The position of the EAP's as primarily a part of social responsibility means that in times of cutbacks, EAP's have short-sightedly often been seen as a convenience rather that an integral part of business.*

In South Africa there are not enough EAP's or human resources within organisations to address the issue of stress and the probable effects on employees and, therefore, on the

organisation. This could have a negative impact on the productivity of the employees in the organisations.

The stress management training will be conducted within a company where there is an EAP in place, but the company does not have the resources to undertake the training of employees in a stress management programme. This research study will enable the organisation to become aware of the stress that employees are experiencing. The organisation will take action with regard to stress management by allowing employees to partake in this research study.

Stress can be to the advantage of the employees and the organisation for which they work. If people do not experience stress they are passive and bored. People need a sense of purpose and that often coincides with stressful events. Stress has a unique effect on different people. Some researchers argue that stress is very negative for the employee. Grobler & Hiemstra (1998:19) describe it as follows:

> *An attitude of: if the job is too stressful find another, indicates a short-sightedness and an inability on the part of the doctor to comprehend fully the extent of the problem, ….*

On the other hand some feel stress is necessary for the employee to perform optimally. Loehr (1997:415) feels that stress could be a driving force in the lives of employees:

> *Stress of all kinds - physical, mental and emotional - is good for you. Stress could be the energy that drives the person to better performance.*

It is important for corporate employees to become aware of the stress triggers in their lives and whether the stress is to their advantage or to their detriment.

Stress is a part of life and will not disappear, so it is to the benefit of employees to manage stress in their lives rather than to try and get away from it. Employees within a corporate environment are exposed to stress every day. Organisations expect performance to ensure rewards. For this reason employees need to become aware of what causes stress in their lives and what their response is to stress.

> *Success was always linked to the same two things – stress exposure and stress response (Loehr 1997:4).*

The greater the awareness, the more employees can start working towards being in control of their own lives. Corporate employees can use stress to their advantage. In the researcher's experience the more demands that are made on individuals, the less they feel in control and they therefore experience negative stress which is to their detriment. With this stress management programme each individual will have the opportunity to become aware of the stress triggers in his/her life and by living according to their own stress management programme they will be able to regain control of their lives.

During this research the corporate employee's awareness will be facilitated by means of the Gestalt Theory as a frame of reference. According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:113) the Gestalt Theory promotes individual awareness:

> *The central goal in Gestalt therapy is the deepening of awareness, which promotes a sense of living fully in the here and now.*

The researcher will make use of play therapy mediums (such as clay, drawings, sensory activities and relaxation techniques) to ensure an active learning environment which will enhance awareness. The stress management programmes that are available on the market tend to be traditional and very little or no participation is expected from the respondents. These stress management programmes consist of a variety of educational and therapy groups or one-on-one counselling sessions (Kendall, http://www.work4food.com.playforlife/problem.html). The researcher is of the opinion that adults can enjoy the learning experience and make it worthwhile by including creative mediums in the programme. Adults can experience learning positively when it is combined with creative experiences.

Stress management can be a fun experience. In communicating with corporate employees it has become obvious that there are few enjoyable activities in their daily lives because work and its demands take up too much time. If corporate employees can incorporate more enjoyable and relaxing activities in their daily lives, more effective stress management will most probably be the result. This stress management programme will aim at enabling corporate employees to become aware of the effects of stress on their lives and facilitate the realisation that stress management begins with taking control and finding ways to relax and make life enjoyable.

In the past, the researcher has enjoyed working in the corporate environment and has found the reactions of the adults towards the play therapy mediums of great interest. This research grants the opportunity to investigate the effects of the play therapy mediums on adults who undergo a stress management programme.

1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Stress in the workplace is a reality. If it is left unattended, the impact could be to the detriment of the employee as well as the company. Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (2001:191) state the following regarding stress in the work place:

> *One traditional school of thought is summed up by the notion that companies should basically ignore stress. Another school of thought suggests that companies should avoid offering stress management programmes to employees, for fear of law suits*

In reality the organisations who do not offer stress management programmes usually realise their mistake at a later stage when productivity is lost in employees who cannot cope with the stress in their lives. Hellriegel, *et al.* (2001:191), explain it as follows:

> *Work-related stress is not a trivial concern and organisations that ignore the impact of stress on employees and productivity run far greater risks than companies that attempt to manage the impact of stress on employees effectively.*

It will be to the advantage of an organisation to involve the employees in a stress management programme. A stress management programme can address the stress that employees are experiencing and it can enable them to use stress to their advantage and, therefore, to the advantage of the organisation.

The question of how "stress" should be defined has been asked many times. There are many different definitions for stress. Girdano, Everly and Dusek (1993:7) describe stress

as being **the body reacting to pressure**. The effect that stress has on the human being, physically, emotionally and psychologically can exhaust the body to the extent of illness or malfunction. Stress is negative when the person feels he/she cannot cope anymore, when illness within the body occurs as a result of stress or when behavioural problems materialise (Girdano, Everly and Dusek, 1993:7). Corporate employees who experience the above mentioned symptoms will most probably cost the company in productivity and/or medical accounts.

Every person reacts to stress in a unique way. In South Africa the stress that corporate employees experience is also exacerbated by the transformation process that the country is still experiencing. Affirmative action and retrenchments occur frequently and few people are assured of job safety. According to Grobler and Hiemstra (1998:19-20), about half of the working population in South Africa are unhappy in their jobs. Approximately 75% of the people who consult psychiatrists are experiencing problems that originate from a lack of job satisfaction and an inability to relax.

Stress is a reality within the workplace that affects companies to the extent that they lose large amounts of money because their employees develop stress-related problems. According to Van den Bergh (2000:5) a survey that was done by Employee Assistance Professionals in South Africa, which indicated that the most prevalent problems in the work place are:

- Family issues (25%)

- Stress (23%)

- Depression (21%)

- Alcoholism (14%)

- Job conflict (9%)

- Drug abuse (2%)

Therefore, stress is a major factor in the work place and many stress-related problems such as depression, alcoholism and job-conflict also rate very high among the referrals to the EAPs.

This research is aimed at addressing the stress-related corporate environment in South Africa. Greater awareness amongst corporate employees will motivate and enable the employees to be more in control of their lives and to create stress management programmes that will suit their needs. The Gestalt Theory will be utilised as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory supports the notion of awareness as a tool that can be used by a person to be in control of his/her life*.* Passons (1975:21) states the following regarding the Gestalt Theory:

> *Gestalt therapy uses as a tool, awareness. Now, awareness is the capacity to focus, to attend. If I am unaware of what I am doing, I am not responsible for what I am doing*

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim

To use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of and to manage their stress levels.

1.5.2 Objectives

- To conduct a literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees.

- To design a stress management programme using play therapy mediums to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.

- To implement a stress management programme that will enable employees to manage their stress levels more effectively.

- To evaluate a stress management programme for corporate employees.

- To formulate conclusions and recommendations which will be based on the empirical findings obtained from the study.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is the question that needs to be answered by the proposed research study. According to Grinnell (1988:436-437), there are a few aspects that need to be considered when writing a research question:

- *A general question may not always precisely identify the variables which are the subject of the study.*

- *The general research question or specific hypotheses flow from prior components of the proposal.*

- *Our questions and components must also follow logically from the perspective and definitions provided by the literature review and conceptual framework.*

By taking these aspects into consideration the research question can be formulated as follows:

Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees have a positive effect on their stress levels?

1.7 HYPOTHESIS

The stating of an hypothesis and the testing thereof is an important part of the research process. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:37), state the following regarding the hypothesis:

> **Problems are questions about relations among variables and hypothesis are tentative concrete testable answers to such problems.**

The hypothesis is, therefore, the suggested answer to the problem (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:37).

Babbie (1992:55) states that the hypotheses inform the participants of what is to be expected of the study:

> **…hypotheses are specified expectations about empirical reality, derived from propositions.**

The following hypotheses are made, guided by the expectations regarding the proposed research study.

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Will be aware of what stress is.

- Will become aware of the effect of stress on their lives.

- Will become aware of what causes stress in their lives.

- Will be able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release.

- Will be able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives.

- Will be able to take responsibility for their lifestyle.

- Will be able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives.

- Will be able to compile a personal stress management programme for themselves.

- Will be more productive and motivated to the benefit of the organisation.

1.8 RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two main research approaches that the researcher can adapt during the research study. This distinction lies between the qualitative and quantitative research methods:

> *We can use quantitative methods to count and correlate social and psychological phenomena. Likewise, we can use qualitative research methods to seek the essential character of these social and psychological phenomena. Both methods attempt to describe and explain social reality (Epstein, 1988:185).*

The researcher is of the opinion that both research methods can make a positive

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contribution to the research process. It is difficult to differentiate which research approach would be more appropriate for the research study that is to be undertaken. Schurinck (1998:241-243) mentions that the qualitative as well as the quantitative approaches have aspects that the researcher can make use of for the successful implementation of a study:

> *The main aim of the quantitative approach is to measure the social world objectively, to test hypothesis and to predict and control human behaviour. The qualitative approach is more interpretive and holistic in nature with its main aim to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life situations.*

The researcher is of the opinion that this research will be completed more successfully if some aspects of the qualitative research approach and some aspects of quantitative research approach are incorporated. The researcher agrees with Mouton and Marais (in De Vos, 2002:364) who state that a combination of the two mentioned approaches gives the researcher a fuller picture of the subject being researched:

> *That the phenomena that are being investigated in the social sciences are so enmeshed that a single approach most certainly cannot succeed in encompassing human beings in their full complexity. It would, therefore, be futile to behave as though one approach should be fully accepted and another entirely rejected.*

Quantitative research will be used during this study but for the sake of a more comprehensive study, some aspects of qualitative research will be incorporated.

With regard to the quantitative approach, the respondents will complete questionnaires

before and after they have undergone the stress management programme. The questionnaires will give an indication of the stress levels that the respondents were experiencing before the stress management programme and what the effect of the stress management programme was on the respondents' stress levels. These results will be analysed statistically to ascertain the impact of the stress management programme on each individual. The respondents will also be asked to complete a checklist at the commencement of the stress management programme which they will make use of during the compilation of their own stress management programmes. The checklist will not be submitted to the researcher for analysis, but will remain the property of the respondents. In this regard a quantitative approach will be followed.

Qualitative data will also be gathered throughout the research. The researcher will make use of a semi-structured interview schedule to conduct individual interviews with each of the respondents who will take part in the study. This will enable the researcher to become aware of the participants' current knowledge concerning stress and expectations regarding the stress management programme and to draw some conclusions with regard to the effect of the training on the respondents.

1.9 TYPE OF RESEARCH

1.9.1 Applied Research

The type of research that is done in a study can be classified broadly as basic (also called pure) research or applied research (Bailey, 1994:24). Applied research is when social work research sets out to solve problems in social welfare and basic or pure research attempts *to advance knowledge just for knowledge sake* (Rubin & Babbie, 1993:99). Basic research is if the only interest that the researcher has is to

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add to the knowledge base of social work – therefore to gather information that will be added to existing information (De Vos, 1998:69). Applied research can be defined as knowledge development, knowledge utilisation and/or intervention design and development (De Vos, 1998:69 & 70).

Bailey (1994:24) draws the reader's attention to the fact that applied research and basic research are not always mutually exclusive and at times basic research would, for instance, include some practical aspects. In essence, applied research will be utilised during this study. Applied research is directed towards providing possible solutions to problems that exist. This is part of knowledge development (De Vos, 1998:69). For the purpose of this study a stress management programme will be developed that will be utilised by corporate employees with the purpose of relieving and managing their stress levels, to the advantage of the individual as well as the company.

1.9.2 Intervention Research

This study will also include an aspect of intervention research which is described by Schilling (in De Vos, 2002:396) as follows:

> *An intervention is an action undertaken by a social worker or other helping agent, usually in concert with a client or other affected party, to enhance or maintain the functioning and well-being of an individual, family, group, community or population.*

A stress management programme will be developed to be introduced to a group of employees from a corporate environment. After the completion of the programme, a

post-test will be done and the pre-and post-test scores will be compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. The proposed research will follow the process of intervention research (see paragraph 1.10).

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the guideline according to which the research will take place. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:67) state that the research design is carefully tailored to the exact needs of the researcher and that the research design is part of the planning of any scientific research project from beginning to end.

> *A research design is any specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test specific hypothesis under given conditions (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:65).*

The researcher is of the opinion that the research design guides the researcher throughout the course of the research. Grinnell and Stothers (1988:219) explain it as follows:

> *A research design is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study, from the conceptualisation of the problem right to the dissemination of the findings.*

The research design that will be used for this study is the quasi-experimental design and more specifically the one-group pre-test/post-test design. According to Bailey (1994:224), this design includes the following steps:

- Select subjects

- Select experimental environment

- Pre-test

- Administer experimental stimulus

- Post-test

With the quasi-experimental design, the pre-test results will be compared to the post-test results (Fouche & De Vos, 2002:144). During this study, a group of corporate employees will be selected, they will be asked to complete a pre-test regarding their stress levels and their stress management skills, whereafter they will undergo stress management training. Thereafter, they will complete the same test as the pre-test. This will be to ascertain the effect of the stress management programme on their stress levels and stress management skills.

1.11 RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND STRATEGY

The research procedure suggested by Rothman and Thomas (1994:386) is the Design and Development Model. The procedure is as follows:

- **Problem analysis**
  - o Identify and involve clients
  - o Gaining entry and co-operation from all involved
  - o Identify concerns of the population
  - o Analyse concerns
  - o Setting goals and objectives

- **Information gathering and synthesis**
  - o Use existing information sources

- o Study natural examples

- o Identify functional elements of successful models

- **Research design**

  - o Designing a system

  - o Specifying procedural elements of the intervention

- **Early development and pilot testing**

  - o Developing a preliminary intervention

  - o Conducting a pilot test

  - o Applying design criteria to the intervention concept

- **Evaluation and advanced development**

  - o Selecting an experimental design

  - o Collecting and analysing data

  - o Replicating the intervention under field conditions

  - o Refining the intervention.

In this study the Design and Development Model will be incorporated into the combination of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. It will be used as a guideline for the research procedure specifically in terms of the development of the stress management programme, the pilot study, the implementation and the evaluation of the programme.

1.11.1 Data Collection

Data collection methods are described by various authors in great detail (compare De Vos, 2002; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995; Grinnell, 1988 & Babbie, 1992). Data

collection in qualitative research basically consists of the following methods:

- Interviews.

- Documentation.

- Visual imagery.

- Observation.

The quantitative approach mainly makes use of:

- Questionnaires.

- Checklists.

- Indexes.

- Scales.

(De Vos, 1998:89).

The qualitative data collection methods that will be used in this study are mainly:

- **Individual interviewing**

In qualitative research interviewing is probably the most prominent method of data collection (Greeff, 2002:292). According to Bergum in Greeff (2002:292), an interview refers to a discussion and it includes the attitude of interaction. Schurinck (1998:298) defines the interview as *a social interaction between equals in order to obtain research relevant information.*

This means that the researcher has the responsibility to involve the interviewee in the conversation and whilst doing so, gather information that is relevant to the study.

By using a semi structured interview schedule, an individual interview will be conducted with each of the respondents in this study. The purpose of these interviews will be to enlighten the respondents regarding the research study and to explore the attitudes, needs and expectations of all the respondents regarding stress in the workplace. This will be used as background information for the stress management programme.

The following themes will be addressed during the interviews:

- **Defining stress**
  - What is stress?
  - Is stress positive or negative?

- **Causes of stress in the life of an employee**
  - What causes stress in your life?
  - Do you experience stress within your working environment? Explain.
  - What causes stress in your home life?

- **The effects of stress physically, emotionally and psychologically**
  - How do you experience stress physically, emotionally and psychologically?
  - If you do, how does it affect your life?

- **The use of stress management techniques.**
  - What do you do to manage your stress levels?
  - Do you think you can improve on your stress management techniques?

In terms of the quantitative research the focus will be on the following data collection methods:

- **Questionnaires**

The questionnaire is an essential part of this study as it makes up the pre and post-test that will be completed by the respondents before and after exposure to the stress management programme. A questionnaire can be defined as follows:

> *A questionnaire is a set of questions on a form that is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project (New Dictionary of Social Work, 1995:51).*

There are different types of questionnaires that can be applied in various ways:

- o Mailed questionnaires.
- o Telephonic questionnaires.
- o Personal questionnaires.
- o Questionnaires delivered by hand.
- o Group administered questionnaires (Delport, 2002:172-174).

Group administered questionnaires will be used for the purpose of this study. All the respondents will be together throughout the duration of the stress management programme and a suitable venue will not be a problem. The researcher will be available to give instructions and clarify uncertainties that may occur.

It must be noted that the construction of a questionnaire must be done systematically and the appropriate questions must be included. According to Bailey

(1994:108), the relevance of the questions is important for the successful use of the questionnaire:

> *…the key word in questionnaire construction is relevance. The questions that are to be asked must be relevant to the goals of the study and to the individual respondent that will be taking part in the study.*

According to Mouton (2001:103 & 104) some common errors may occur in the construction of questionnaires such:

- o No piloting or pre-testing is done.

- o Words are undefined, vague, or assume too much about the respondents.

- o Double-barrelled questions.

- o The order or the sequence of the question may affect the response.

- o Leading questions.

- o Negatively phrased questions.

- o Poor and confusing layout of questionnaire.

- o Instruments that are too long.

- o Sensitive and threatening questionnaires.

- o Avoid yes/no questionnaires.

The questionnaire that will be used for this research study has been selected from published literature. The student did not develop a questionnaire because there are many questionnaires regarding stress on the market. The questionnaire is appropriate because it is short (which is helpful because the employees working in the corporate environment do not have a lot of time to spare to complete long questionnaires) and yet it addresses the important aspects of stress management.

The questionnaire will be completed in a pilot study before the commencement of the research.

- **Checklist**

Delport (2002:184) describes a checklist as a type of questionnaire as follows:

> *A checklist is a certain type of questionnaire consisting of a series of items. The researcher can develop a checklist for the research study or he/she can make use of an existing checklist. The respondent will then be requested to indicate on the checklist, which items are most applicable to him.*

During this study each of the respondents will be asked to complete a checklist during the first session of the programme. The researcher is of the opinion that the checklist is ideal at this stage of the programme because it is short and uncomplicated, therefore not time-consuming. The checklist will serve the purpose of giving an indication of the causes of stress in the lives of the corporate employees.

1.12 PILOT STUDY

It is essential that the researcher gather background knowledge regarding the research problem before the research is initiated. Strydom (1998:178) explains it as follows:

> *The pilot study is one way in which the prospective researcher can orientate himself to the project he has in mind.*

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The pilot study forms an important part of the research that will follow and is described by *Strydom (2002:211) as follows:*

> **The pilot study can be viewed as the dress rehearsal of the main investigation.**

The pilot study can include the following: literature study, consultation with experts, feasibility of the study, testing of questionnaires and measuring instruments.

1.12.1 Literature Study

A literature study enables the researcher to be informed regarding research that has been done in the past and where the need for research lies in the future. According to Babbie (1992:110), the researcher needs to ask: "What have others said about this topic? What theories address it and what do they say? What research has been done previously?" Strydom (1998:179) agrees that the researcher can only reach the goals that he has set out to reach if he is up to date with current knowledge regarding the research subject.

The researcher must take responsibility to continue reviewing literature throughout the research process. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:23), state the following regarding the literature study:

> **…in the course of research, new aspects and problems arise requiring new information**

A literature study is an ongoing process that enables the researcher to understand and question issues relating to the area of study.

The literature review will focus on the following aspects:

- Stress: Defining stress, where it originates from, what the effect of stress is and relevant stress management programmes.

- Corporate environment: How is the corporate environment structured? Who forms part of the corporate environment? What is the effect of the work place on the corporate employee? How (if at all) do management levels affect the corporate employees?

- Play therapy mediums: Defining play therapy mediums. How will play therapy mediums be used in a stress management programme? The use of play therapy mediums in working with adults.

- The Gestalt Theory: The theoretical framework that will form the basis of the study.

Relevant literature will be studied regarding the above mentioned focus areas. South African as well as international literature will be included in the literature review. The researcher will make use of the Academic Information Centre of the University of Pretoria, the World Wide Web, information gained from relevant courses and information gained from consultations with experts.

1.12.2 Consultation with Experts:

Gathering background information from literature is important but it is not the only means of gathering information. It is necessary for the researcher to consult with experts who have experience in this field of study. According to Bless & Higson-

Smith (1995:25), consultation with experts is necessary for the following reason:

> *Useful background information can be obtained in direct discussion with people involved in a similar subject issue.*

The following experts have been identified and will be contacted regarding this study:

- Ms Annie Bodenstein: HR manager with Origin Insurance – she will be consulted regarding her expertise within the corporate environment and her first hand experience of the stress that corporate employees experience.

- Ms Linda Botha: EAP professional with Pikitup (Waste Removal Company) – she will be consulted regarding specific stressors within the research environment.

- Dr Chris Heunis: Adventure experience professional – he will be consulted regarding stress management through physical experience and how these activities can be included in a stress management programme.

- Dr Elaine Lee: Educationist – she will be consulted regarding the effects of stress on concentration and work performance.

- Dr Violet Oaklander: Gestalt social worker (Contacted via e-mail) – she will be consulted regarding the use of play therapy mediums as metaphors for stress relief.

- Dr Peter Mortola: Gestalt social worker (Contacted via e-mail) – he will be consulted regarding the use of play therapy mediums with adults.

- Dr Susan Steinman: President of the Workplace Dignity Association in South Africa will be consulted regarding her expertise in trauma caused in the workplace because of bullying.

- Dr David Gold: Mental Health professional of the United Nations will be consulted regarding the setting up of a stress management programme and the time frames for that programme.

- Mr Stephen Tiley: Project Manger for the SAB internal auditors will be consulted regarding background information of the competitive corporate environment of which he is part.

The researcher is of the opinion that the above mentioned experts can contribute to this research study from their different fields of expertise.

1.12.3 Feasibility of the Study

More and more organisations are realising that the effect of stress on the employees in their companies is far reaching. The employees, who do not have the ability to manage stress, do not contribute to the work place in a positive way. This is seen in absenteeism, stress related illness and general loss of productivity within the workforce. Organisations are losing time and money because their employees are not able to manage their stress levels.

The researcher has identified an organisation where the need for stress management has been communicated. The human resources division has given the researcher permission to undertake a stress management programme with employees from this organisation. The respondents will undergo a pre-test and a post-test, before and after the programme has been completed. The company has set aside the time, personnel and the venue for the research and the training to be done.

Stress management forms part of the general wellness of the corporate employee. General wellness is a function that is fulfilled by the EAP within the company, but because of a lack of resources they are not able to address stress management by using their own personnel.

1.12.4 Testing of Questionnaires and Measuring Instruments:

Semi structured interviews will be conducted by following a combination of the informal conversational interview and the general interview guide (Greeff, 2002:297). Use will be made of a checklist to ensure that the interview is guided to the extent that issues of concern are included, but time will be allowed for questions that flow from the immediate context.

The **questionnaire** and the **checklist** will be pre-tested with a group of individuals who have similar characteristics as the target group before being utilized in the ongoing research study. These individuals will not be included in the research study. This will ensure streamlining of the questionnaire and the checklist before presenting them to the targeted group of respondents.

1.13 DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIVERSE, POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHODS

1.13.1 Universe

The universe is described by Arkava and Lane in Strydom & Venter (2002:198) as follows:

Universe, they write, refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested.

For the purpose of this study the universe will be one of the departments within ABSA, the organisation in which the research will be done. This will be explained in more detail at a later stage.

1.13.2 Population

Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:85) define population as follows:

...the entire set of objects and events or group of people which is the object of research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics.

Seaberg (1988:240) describes a population as inclusive of all who are involved:

…the totality of persons, events, organizational units, case records, or other sampling units with which our research problem is concerned.

Furthermore, a population can be described as the sum total of all the units of analysis (Bailey, 1994:83). The unit of analysis refers to "what" it is that the researcher is interested in investigating (Mouton, 2001:51).

Within a corporate organisation the sum of the employees would make up the population of the research study. There are many different corporate organisations

within the South African economy and the infrastructures within these organisations differ. The research for this study will be done within one of the departments of ABSA, a banking organisation in South Africa.

For the purpose of this study probability sampling and more specifically, simple random sampling will be used. Strydom & Venter (2002:204) explain simple random sampling as follows:

> *In this situation each individual case in the population theoretically has an equal chance to be selected for the sample.*

A meeting will be conducted with the Human Resources department of the organisation to explain the extent of the research and what resources (such as a venue, tea and coffee) will be needed to conduct the research. The Human Resource Department will identify a department in which they feel stress management training is necessary. This department will form the universe (approximately six hundred people). The universe consists of different teams and the personnel from the human resources department and will identify three teams who will form the population. The employees who form part of the population will then be invited to partake in the research study on a voluntary basis and, therefore, form the sample for the study.

1.13.3 Sample and Sampling Method

It would be ideal to study the whole population to gather the information required but it is seldom possible where the population is large. Babbie (1992:192) agrees with this view by saying:

> *… sampling will allow a researcher to make relatively few observations and generalise from those observations to a much wider population.*

The sample is, therefore, the elements of the population that are included in the study (Arkava and Lane in Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). The sample will be studied in an effort to gain understanding of the population from which it is drawn.

A probability sampling technique and as mentioned before, more specifically the simple random sampling technique will be used to select respondents for the study. The following criteria will be taken into consideration:

- All the respondents are required to have an understanding and verbal ability of the English language.
- All respondents' work schedules should be between eight o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon.
- The population from which the sample is taken should be multi-cultural, consist of males and females and include personnel from different levels.

1.14 DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS

1.14.1 Play Therapy Mediums

Play therapy is traditionally used with children but relevant literature and the researcher's own experience has shown remarkable results in the use of play therapy mediums with adults. Schaefer (1993:p.xi) states that "play itself has a number of therapeutic elements that produce behaviour change". Furthermore, play

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also offers opportunities to re-live past stressful events and the emotions associated with them in a safe and therapeutic environment (Kendall, http://www.work4food.com/playforlife/literature.html).

The play mediums can be categorized according to different forms of play. The following forms of play will be used during this study:

- Relaxation play: music and games.

- Creative play: clay, water, paint and drawings.

- Metaphors: Metaphors will be used to communicate symbolically with the respondents – at times using the abovementioned mediums and at times using story telling as medium (Schoeman, 1996:12-13 & 86).

The researcher is of the opinion that play therapy mediums give adults the opportunity to let out creative energy and in doing so, they have the opportunity to become aware of themselves and make contact with unfulfilled needs in their lives.

1.14.2 Stress

Stress could be described using feeling words such as tension, anxiety or panic and the implications of these feelings in our lives. Warren & Toll (1994:9) define stress as follows:

> *Stress is the response to the perceived relationship between the demands on us and our ability to cope.*

Stress is, therefore, a person's reaction to changes that take place around him/her, all the time (Brewer, 1995:3).

Stress is pressure that all people have to face every day of their lives. People experience demands from family, friends, jobs and personal ambitions in different ways and at different times in their lives. People react to stress in a unique way and they could use the pressures in life to their advantage.

1.14.3   Stress Management

Girdano *et al.* (1993:7) define stress management as follows:

> *…the ability to reduce stress arousal or to cope in a competent manner with stressors.*

Stress management is living with the stress in a positive way. Stress is a part of daily life but a person can manage the effect that it has. According to Newman (1992:27), stress is in the eye of the beholder and not in the event. He describes stress as **the gap between what you have and what you want.**

1.14.4   Organisation

An organisation can be defined as a coordinated unit consisting of at least two people who function to achieve a common goal or set of goals. Furthermore, organisations are entities that enable society to pursue accomplishment that cannot be achieved by individuals who are acting alone (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 2000:17).

1.14.5 Corporate Employees

To understand the meaning of "corporate employee" it is necessary to consider both parts of the concept:

> *A business corporation is a legal entity permitted by law in every state to exist for the purpose of engaging in lawful activities of a business nature. It is an artificial person created by law, with many of the same rights and responsibilities possessed by humans (Skaliski (ed); 2001:195).*

An employee is described as a staff member or wage-earner of an organisation (Chambers Thesaurus; 1997). Therefore, a corporate employee can be described as a person within an organisation where he/she has to fulfil a function with many other corporate employees. All of these individuals work towards a common business goal within the organisation.

1.14.6 Gestalt Theory

A Gestalt can be defined as follows:

> *… a configuration or a totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which cannot be derived by summation from the parts and their relationships…. It may refer to physical structures, to physiological and psychological functions or to symbolic units by English and English in 1958 (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:109).*

The Gestalt Theory underlines the following:

- A person tends to seek closure – if the Gestalt is incomplete it demands attention until balance acquired.

- A person will complete Gestalts in accordance with current needs.

- A person's behaviour is a whole which is greater than the sum of its specific parts.

- A person's behaviour can only be meaningfully understood in context.

- A person experiences the world in accordance to the principles of figure and ground (Passons, 1975:12 &13).

Therefore, the Gestalt Theory takes the whole person into consideration. The person has to take responsibility for every part of his/her being and work towards gaining a balance in his/her Gestalt.

1.14.7 Employee Assistance Programme

Employee assistance is a generic term depicting more or less structured programmes that utilise technical, administrative and professional human services and personnel people, on either a contractual or employment basis, to meet the need of troubled employees (Myers, 1984:4).

An employee assistance programme can also be described as a work-based intervention programme aimed at the early identification and/or resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance (Burgess, 1996:25).

Therefore, an employee assistance programme is a structure within an organisation that works towards the health and well-being of the employees. Action can be taken regarding work related issues in a pro-active or a reactive manner.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are not as simple as "what is right" and "what is wrong". Different cultures and communities will differ vastly in terms of the criteria for what the right thing is to do and what the wrong thing is to do. In social research it becomes even more complicated because research is not done within a sterile laboratory but the research is focused on human beings.

During the course of the research the researcher can come face to face with ethical issues. Ethics define the proper way to conduct research but these ethics begin and end with the researcher. The researcher's personal morals and beliefs are the best prevention against unethical conduct (Neuman 1997:443).

Bailey (1994:454) defines ethical conduct, according to Websters' Dictionary, as conforming to accepted professional practices. According to Babbie (1992:464-469), the following ethical agreements should be considered in social research:

- **Informed consent**

The research will be conducted with voluntary respondents. All the respondents will have the option of taking part in the stress management programme and, therefore, the research. The respondents will be permitted to withdraw from the research at any given time. Strydom (2002:65) explains this aspect as follows:

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Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed, as well as the credibility of the researcher be rendered to potential subjects or their legal representatives.

The respondents will be informed regarding the goal of the research as well as the advantages and possible disadvantages of the study. They will also sign a consent form before the commencement of the research.

- **No harm to respondents**

The research will be conducted in a respectful manner. All respondents will be exposed to the same questionnaires and stress management programme. Strydom (2002:64) states the following:

Subjects can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner. One may accept that harm to respondents in the social sciences will mainly be of an emotional nature, although physical injury can not be ruled out completely.

Everything possible will be done to ensure that the respondents do not suffer physical or emotional harm.

- **Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality**

The information received from the respondents will be treated confidentially. Singleton in Strydom (2002:67) states the following:

> *The right to privacy is the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his/her beliefs and behaviour will be revealed.*

Before the commencement of the stress management programme a contract will be set up with the respondents requesting confidentiality regarding conversations that take place during the course of the stress management programme.

- **Deception of respondents**

The researcher will inform the respondents of the role that she will play in the research process, before the start of the stress management programme. Attention will be given to the elimination of misconceptions regarding the research. Neuman in Strydom (2002:66) describes deception as follows:

> *Deception occurs when the researcher intentionally misleads subject by way of written or verbal instructions, the actions of other people, are certain aspects of the setting.*

- **Release or publication of the findings**

A report will be compiled after the results of the research study have been analysed. The report will be made available to the respondents as well as the management of

the organisation. Strydom (2002:71) states the following:

> *The findings of the study must be introduced to the reading public in written form otherwise even a highly scientific investigation will mean very little and will not be viewed as research.*

1.16 FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research study will consist of 7 chapters and will be divided as follows:

CHAPTER 1: General introduction and framework of the study

CHAPTER 2: The use of the Gestalt Theory in a stress management programme

CHAPTER 3: The effect of stress on the corporate employee

CHAPTER 4: The use of play therapy mediums with corporate employees

CHAPTER 5: Organisational behaviour

CHAPTER 6: Empirical procedure and findings

CHAPTER 7: Conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

2 THE USE OF THE GESTALT THEORY IN A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gestalt Theory as a theoretical framework emphasises the fact that healthy behaviour occurs once people reach a point where they can regulate their emotional state. When this comes about, people experience a feeling of unity and integration in their lives (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992:110). It is also concerned with the total existence of a human being. The people are addressed as whole and integrated beings, who strive to gain balance in an ever-changing environment. The Gestalt theory is holistic and can form the theoretical framework for work with any type of individual and has been used effectively with individuals, groups and in teaching (Congress, 1995:1121). The Gestalt Theory is praised for its immediacy, directness and its resourcefulness (Robinson, 1991:1). Awareness is created by bringing people into contact with the present and helping them to take responsibility for their behaviour and their lives.

The Gestalt Theory has definite theoretical concepts which can be used successfully to form guidelines in a stress management programme. People who experience stress often feel that they have lost control over their lives. They cannot regulate the state that they are in and very seldom take responsibility for what they are experiencing. People often blame the environment, other people, their work or their own inability and, therefore, relinquish control over their lives. With the Gestalt Theory as frame of reference, people are

encouraged to make choices and to take responsibility for those choices and ultimately grow towards maturity and self regulation. It also focuses on the cognitive and emotional totality of each person, each moment and during each situation (Clarkson, 1989:1).

This chapter will define Gestalt, explore the background of the Gestalt Theory, and give insight on the theoretical concepts of the Gestalt Theory, therapeutic techniques used in Gestalt therapy and the types of dysfunction that can occur when the corporate employee's Gestalt is out of balance. The principles of the Gestalt Theory can be used effectively in a stress management programme. With the use of these principles the corporate employees have the opportunity to understand themselves better and to become more aware of how their own behaviour plays a role in their stress levels.

2.2 BACKGROUND TO THE GESTALT THEORY

Fredirick (Fritz) Perls was the founder of the Gestalt Theory. He received a medical degree from the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin in 1921 and thereafter continued his training in psychoanalysis. In 1933 he was forced to flee Germany and he settled in Amsterdam until Nazism drove him to South Africa in 1935. He lived in South Africa for twelve years and many of the basic Gestalt concepts were formulated during this time. In 1946 he moved to the United States of America and set up a private practice and conducted Gestalt training workshops (Belkin, 1980:241).

Perls saw the human being as a whole, a unified organism with integrated mental, physical, emotional and sensory processes, that are expressed in the "here and now" (Glass, 1984:60). He was of the opinion that all actions were linked to people's emotions and thoughts and that they had control over those actions.

The Gestalt Theory was developed as an alternative to the Freudian Theory. Perls criticised Freud's approach that focused on the past. The Gestalt Theory focuses on the present in which people find themselves (Congress, 1995:1117). It arose from the existential-humanistic school of psychology, which portrays individuals optimistically, with the belief that people strive to achieve their full potential. Gestalt social workers are of the opinion that individuals freely choose their actions and are, therefore, responsible for their behaviour. Independence and uniqueness is emphasised in the Gestalt Theory. This was explained by Perls as moving away from environmental support and towards self-support (Beck, 1996:743).

The following section will look at the definition of Gestalt and the theoretical concepts that form the basis thereof.

2.3 DEFINING GESTALT

The word Gestalt is of German origin and roughly translates to the English word "pattern" or whole (Belkin, 1980:240). According to Glass (1984:60) Gestalt is defined as follows:

> *…means a configuration or whole, an entity which is more than the sum of it's parts.*

Congress (1995:1117) suggests that Gestalt translates as whole <u>and</u> as total figure-ground configuration. These translations become relevant when the theoretical concepts are explained.

A gestalt was defined by English and English in Thompson & Rudolph (1992:109) as:

… a configuration or a totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which can not be derived by summation from the parts and their relationships…. It may refer to physical structures, to physiological and psychological functions or to symbolic units.

Perls in Belkin (1980:241) says the following about Gestalt:

The basic premise of the Gestalt Psychology is that human nature is organised into patterns or wholes, that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can only be understood as the function of the patterns of wholes of which it is made.

There are many different definitions for Gestalt and it would seem that these definitions do not always focus on the same aspects. The researcher is of the opinion that Gestalt refers to the whole person who is made up of different parts, and he/she needs to be aware of those different parts and strive towards homeostasis between each of the parts. This means that the person has to take responsibility for his/her own self regulation.

The Gestalt Theory underlines the following aspects:

- People tend to seek closure – if the Gestalt is incomplete it demands attention until homeostasis is acquired.
- People will complete Gestalts in accordance with their current need.
- A person's behaviour is a whole, which is greater than the sum of its specific parts.
- A person's behaviour can be meaningfully understood only in context.

- A person experiences the world in accordance to the principles of figure and ground (Passons, 1975:12 &13).

Although the figure and ground principle will be discussed in more detail later, Belkin (1980:241) explains it as follows:

… a healthy personality exists when a person's experiences form a meaningful whole, when there is a smooth transition between two sets of experiences that are immediately in the focus of awareness (what they term the figure) and those that are in the background (the ground)

The person's Gestalt is in tact when he/she is able to balance the different parts that form the Gestalt – the parts that form part of the foreground as well the background.

Corey in Robinson (1991:4) stated the following about Gestalt:

Gestalt is a form of existential therapy based on the premise that people must find their own way in life and accept personal responsibility if they hope to achieve maturity.

Furthermore, Robinson (1991:4) mentions that the basic goals of Gestalt are:

… for the clients to gain awareness of what they are experiencing and doing, and by becoming aware to take responsibility for what they are feeling, thinking and doing.

These goals form the basis of a stress management programme. People need to gain

awareness of what they are experiencing in their bodies and in their lives and how they are contributing to the reactions within their bodies and then they need to take responsibility for their feelings, thoughts and actions by making some changes in their lifestyles.

2.4 THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF THE GESTALT THEORY

The Gestalt Theory is built on the foundation of certain theoretical concepts. These concepts enable the individual to create a greater understanding of the theory. The decision to use the Gestalt Theory in a stress management programme for corporate employees stems from the fact that the Gestalt Theory emphasises homeostasis. Corporate employees will have to increase their levels of awareness to understand why they are feeling out of balance. Awareness is, therefore, the key concept of the theory as all the other aspects are grounded in this component.

2.4.1 Awareness

Awareness is a central theme in the Gestalt Theory. Perls (1951) states the following about awareness:

> *It is only through the recognition of your emotions that you can be aware, as a biological organism, either of what you are up against in the environment, or of what special opportunities are at the moment presented. It is only if you acknowledge and accept your longing for someone or something…that you obtain orientation for appropriate action (Greenberg, Rice and Elliott, 1993:39).*

If people are not aware of what they do and what they feel, they cannot understand

or acknowledge any of their needs and feelings. They just function from day to day without confronting any difficult situation in their lives. Corporate employees who experience ongoing stress are often so pressurised by the general demands of life that they do not take time to live in the present moment. They are not fully aware of themselves and of their environment – so they just do what they have to do to survive.

Awareness is described by Polster and Polster (1973:211 - 212) as follows:

> *At its best awareness is a continuous means for keeping up to date with one's self. It is an ongoing process, readily available at all times, rather than an exclusive or sporadic illumination – like insight – only at a special moment or under special conditions.*

Thus, awareness is a continuous process that is renewed with each moment. The individual's awareness should be facilitated in the "here and now". Awareness is the ability to focus, to give attention and to be in contact with the here and now (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:113).

An awareness continuum is not a purpose, but it can be a means to a goal. If people become more aware, they can determine how they lose awareness and how this process interferes with homeostasis. If awareness increases, they can become aware of unfinished business in their lives and work towards completing their fragmented Gestalt (compare Aronstam, 1989:63a & Van Wyk, 1984:25). According to Glass (1984:60), a continuing flow of needs and wishes come into awareness and each one of these can be thought of as a Gestalt. When people are functioning healthier, they are mobilised to meet each need by making contact with aspects in

the environment that are necessary to meet their needs. In this way homeostasis is achieved.

People should be aware of themselves as well as their environment. As children, human beings are aware of themselves and their surroundings. They have the ability to be aware and to grow but they are often taught that certain thoughts and behaviours are not acceptable and, therefore, they learn to suppress those thoughts and feelings. An example of this is when a boy is told that he is not allowed to cry because he is a boy. This could cause confusion and emotional blockage within the child and as an adult he may find it difficult to express his feelings. The Gestalt social worker should help people become more aware of their feelings and as internal and external awareness increases, emotional growth can take place (Congress, 1995:1119).

Awareness is one of the central themes of the Gestalt Theory. If the awareness of corporate employees increases, they will have a clearer understanding of the effect of unfinished business in their lives and how this can affect their stress levels. The corporate employees can function as whole integrated human beings if they are more aware of their feelings, behaviour and needs.

2.4.2   Wholeness

Wholeness is emphasised in the Gestalt Theory. There is no distinction between the mind and body or the thoughts and actions of people. They do not refer to feelings as separate from themselves – it is an integral part of them and should be viewed as such (Congress, 1995:1119). If people are not functioning as a whole, there is unfinished business in their lives or their Gestalt is out of balance. This

means that much of their energy is being spent on regaining their balance, instead of giving full attention and all their energy to meet needs (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992:113).

The researcher is of the opinion that wholeness is the opposite of the fragmented self. If the fragmented gestalt can become a whole, the corporate employee will experience homeostasis. This process is facilitated during a stress management programme by means of activities that enhance the employees' awareness.

Practical example:

If corporate employees are experiencing financial difficulty, they will focus more on their problem than on their work. This could affect their productivity and their relationships because they will use much more of their energy to solve the financial problem than for their work.

2.4.3   Homeostasis

The word homeostasis is often used interchangeably with balance or self regulation. For the purpose of this study reference will be made mainly to homeostasis. When people experience a fragmented Gestalt, they feel out of balance and their homeostasis is disrupted. This leads to the fact that people feel that their lives are out of control. Homeostasis can be described as the process whereby the organism retains balance during different circumstances (Aronstam, 1989:633). Self regulation or homeostasis can only be achieved if people have sufficient awareness. They have to be in touch with their feelings and their thoughts as they occur from moment to moment (Glass, 1984:60). Carmer and Rouzer in Belkin

(1980:242) take this idea further by stating the following:

> *…organism/environment - interaction, is regulated according to the principle of homeostasis. From a relative stage of equilibrium, needs arise which must be met to restore the balance.*

People are continually striving to regain balance. If their needs are not being met, they are not in a state of equilibrium. Perls was of the opinion that self-regulation entailed that the people have to take responsibility for their own lives and behaviour. He held the belief that people have the capacity to regulate their own needs and to support themselves. This process is enhanced when self awareness is improved and the people can regain contact with themselves (Congress, 1995:1119).

Therefore, corporate employees who are experiencing ongoing stress may feel out of control. They do not experience homeostasis and they need to start regulating their own needs and take responsibility for their lives and their behaviour. This process can start with a stress management programme, whereby awareness and contact with themselves can be facilitated.

2.4.4 Unfinished Business

The Gestalt refers to the whole person or the person in totality. When there is unfinished business in people's lives, the Gestalt becomes fragmented. This means that these people have an incomplete Gestalt. People who have unfinished business cannot give their full attention to a specific situation because they have unfulfilled needs, unspoken needs or unfinished situations that colour their perceptions (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:111).

Robinson (1991:04) says the following about unfinished business:

> *The focus is on direct experience in the here and now; the past is only relevant as it affects the present, and closure, or the finishing of unfinished business, is crucial in the client's struggle to free themself to live fully in the present.*

Unfinished business needs to be addressed to allow people the energy to focus totally on the present. People become aware of unfinished business in their lives by enhancing their personal awareness. At times people do not even realise that their way of dealing with a situation is because of unfinished business in their past. When people's awareness levels increase they can complete the unfinished business in their lives and move on. One can often see how people project unfinished business onto the clay, sand or drawings when the play therapy mediums are being used. This can also be introduced in a stress management programme whereby the employees will be assisted to deal with their unfinished business.

2.4.5   Here and Now

The most important aspect to keep in mind when working with people from a Gestalt point of view is that awareness is facilitated in the present. They need to be in touch with the "here and now". Everything that is said should be related to the immediate present (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:113). According to Smith (in Congress, 1995:1119), the most fundamental concept of the Gestalt therapy is the focus on the here and now. With Gestalt the objective is primarily to increase self awareness and awareness of their environment at that given moment. There is no

reference to the past. Information about the people's past is shared during the course of the conversation without probing for it.

Awareness can only be focused on one situation at a time. If people are occupied with the past or the future, they cannot give their full attention to the here and now. Polster and Polster (1973) state the following about the "here and now":

… only the present exists now and… to stray from it distracts from the living quality of reality **(Glass, 1984:60).**

Furthermore Dierks (1999:56) states the following regarding the here and now:

…in a healthy, adult state, I have rational thoughts and feelings that are appropriate in the moment. It would take a lot to overwhelm me if I am in the moment with my feelings.

The objective of a stress management programme would include the enhancing of awareness in the here and now. Corporate employees should have the opportunity to increase their levels of awareness and to make changes that will enable them to move towards self-support instead of environmental dependency.

2.4.6   Figure-ground

The concept of figure-ground describes people in relation to their environment (Congress, 1995:1119). Belkin (1980:241) refers to the figure-ground dichotomy. This means that healthy personalities exist when people's experience forms a meaningful whole. If the transition between the figure experiences (what is in the

awareness) and the ground experiences (those that are in the background) takes place smoothly, people are seen to have healthy personalities (Belkin, 1980:241). Figure refers to what is on the foreground of people and ground refers to what is in the background.

According to O'Leary (1992:11), Gestalt forming and destruction entails:

A promise underlying the figure-ground principle is that the individual must be able to differentiate between more prominent stimuli in the surroundings at any given time.

People must be able to identify what is on the foreground in that given moment and what is in the background. People strive towards a well-balanced, well-integrated Gestalt. If this is accomplished the fore/ and background will be well differentiated (Aronstam, 1989:631). They need to have an opportunity to enhance their awareness regarding their fore/ and background needs. They can determine whether these needs are contributing to their stress levels and work on an effective stress management technique.

Practical Example:

If people are experiencing financial difficulties, they will concentrate on solving that problem (which is in their foreground) and their work will not be their main priority – it will move to the background. This may lead to a drop in productivity.

The following model, shown in Figure 2.1, was created by the researcher and shows that people need to balance different aspects in their lives. They need to become aware of themselves, as whole entities, in the here and now. There are choices every

person has to make and they need to take responsibility for their choices and the consequences thereof. People have to function within a working and/or social environment, which means that input has to be received from the environment and feedback, is given from the person. This leads to homeostasis.
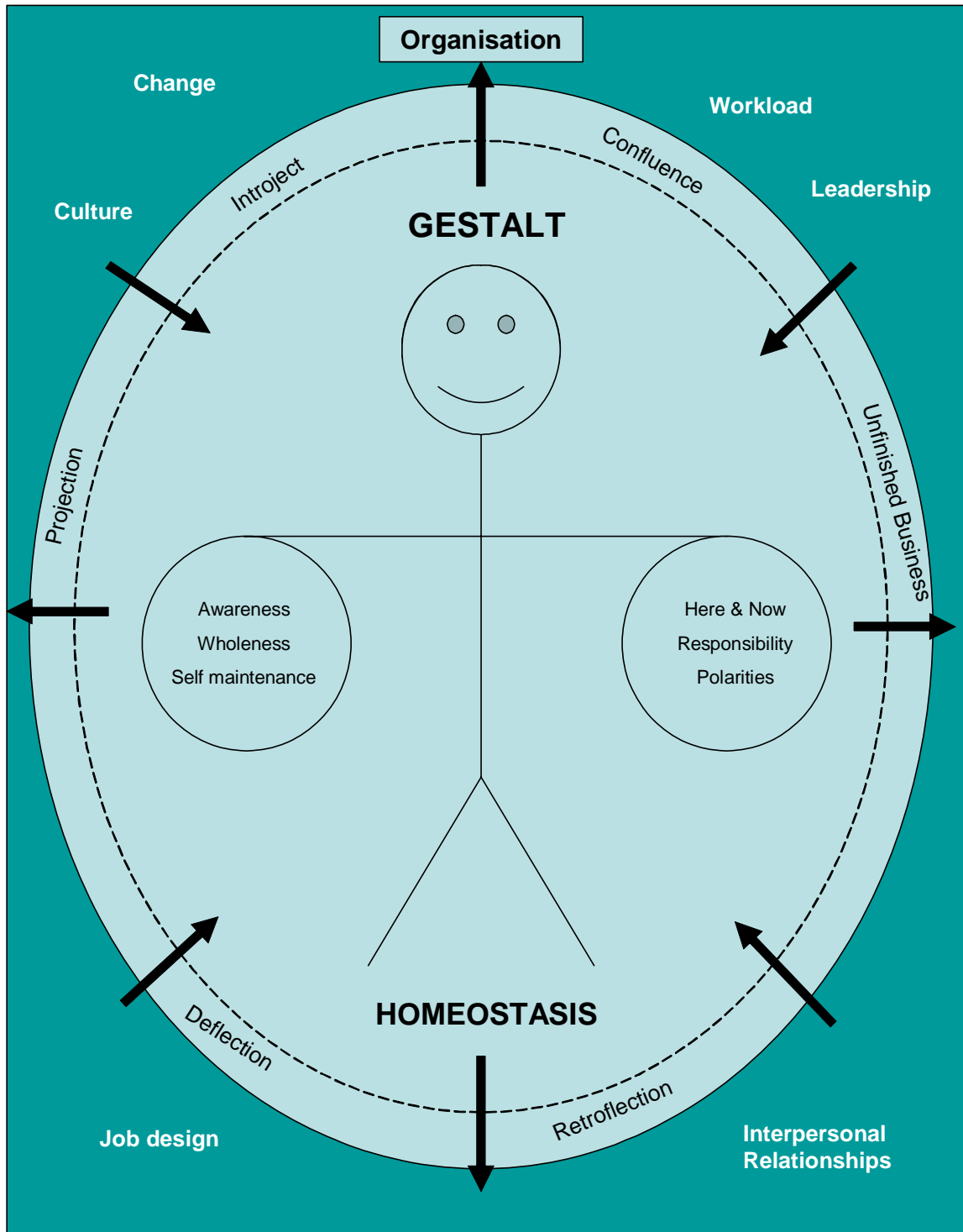
Figure 2.1 Homeostasis in the Gestalt

2.5 CONTACT BOUNDARY DYSFUNCTION AND FRAGMENTATION

2.5.1 Contact Boundaries

It is important to be aware of the individual's ability to make and sustain good contact. Contact is defined by Oaklander (1997:294) as:

> *…the ability to be fully present in a particular situation with all the aspects of the organism – senses, body, emotional expression, intellect - ready and available for use*

Contact boundaries are not fixed and rigid. If the boundaries become rigid they inhibit growth. People cannot explore new behaviour and learn from new experiences if their contact boundaries are fixed and rigid and this is limiting to individuals (Aronstam, 1989:634).

> *Gestalt social workers aim to extend the range and scope of contact between people and environment, including contact between people's inner and outer selves and between client and social worker (Congress, 1995:1119).*

Every organism is in contact with his/her environment at all times, but every individual has boundaries which differentiate the person from his/her environment. According to Dierks (1999:54), this state is called the "boundaried self"and states the following with regard to this boundaried state:

> *… can only happen in the here and now; therefore, we can normally assume that the boundaried self is also an adult self i.e. it is found within individuals who have reached the age of maturity.*

These borders are essential to ensure that the individual does not lose his identity and at the same time, these borders must be open enough to allow exchanges to take place between the individual and the environment (Aronstam, 1989:634).

People must regulate the process of contact and withdrawal to ensure Gestalt formation. Boundaries are necessary to prevent confluence and thus a loss of independence (Aronstam, 1989:635). Thompson and Rudolph (1992:111) go further by stating that the loss of boundaries causes people to incorporate too much of themselves into others or they incorporate too much of the environment into themself, which leads to the fact that they lose contact with themselves. On the other hand, people's boundaries may become so rigid that they start losing contact with resources in the environment. These people isolate themselves and this can restrict growth of their personalities (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:111). Harman and Franklin in Belkin (1985:241) state the following about growth:

> *… growth occurs when a person is willing to make contact with people, objects and situations in the environment.*

 When this contact does not occur there is a disruption in the contact boundary.

Dysfunction involves a lack of awareness which inhibits healthy functioning. If people's needs are not being satisfied, it leads to dysfunctional self regulation and emotional blocking (Greenberg*, et al.,* 1993:40). According to Perls in Aronstam (1989:637) fragmented behaviour is described as follows:

> *…an inability to find and maintain the proper balances between themself and the rest of the world…*

Fragmented people are out of contact with themselves and with their needs. This leads to dependence on other people to find answers for their problems (Yonyef in Aronstam, 1989:637).

People often act in a certain way to survive. Dierks (1999:55) states the following about boundaries:

> *…most of us have not been taught about boundaries, nor have we had good models for adult behaviour…… The boundaried self is one who knows the whole of him/herself in any given moment.*

People often inhibit, block, suppress and limit aspects of themselves (such as the senses, the body, the emotions, the intellect) to try and ensure their own emotional safety. These restrictions are called contact boundary disruptions and cause an interruption in the natural process of self regulation (Oaklander, 1994:144). Contact boundary dysfunctions are explained by taking a closer look at introjects, projections, confluence, retroflection, deflection and resistance.

2.5.2   Introjects

People who have introjects act as they believe other people expect them to act (O'Leary, 1992:39). Introjection is the process whereby people accept information, attitudes and ideas from the environment, without critically evaluating them

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(Aronstam, 1989:638). Introjects can be internalised by people when they are children and often people live according to those introjects when they are adults.

According to Oaklander (1994:145), introjects are messages that individuals hear and incorporate. People believe what they hear about themselves without being able to discriminate whether the information they receive is good or bad. Many of these messages are not accurate and are even hurtful and can disturb a person's development and growth. Negative messages such as "you are stupid," or "you are lazy" destroy people's positive feelings of themselves and create a negative self esteem.

Therefore, it involves the incomplete assimilation of information that is given to people from the environment. As mentioned earlier, people hear the internalised message and they cannot move past that message. They need to be encouraged to let their own personal voice emerge by confronting an introject in the here and now (Congress, 1995:1119). A good example is when children were told that they would never be able to do mathematics. They believed the message and when the opportunity arose for the children, who have become adults, to do a simple calculation they would rather have someone else do it because the inner voice is saying "remember, you cannot do mathematics".

Within the corporate environment people may receive messages about themselves which are not fair and acceptable. Sometimes these messages re-enforce messages that these people received in the past and influence their self esteem negatively. It is important to create an opportunity where greater awareness can be facilitated and where the people are allowed to identify introjects that cause stress in their lives.

2.5.3   Projection

Projection is when people hold the environment responsible for everything that happens in their own lives (Aronstam, 1989:145). At times it is easier for people to blame circumstances or other people for the situation that they are in, rather than take responsibility for it. People project their feelings onto others because it is too difficult or frightening to accept their own feelings. These people would rather say "my boss is always in a bad mood" than "I do not like my boss" (Oaklander, 1994:145).

Congress (1995:1119) is of the opinion that people lose part of their personalities when they project:

> *… individuals who have experienced significant losses of important parts of their personalities by disavowing them and projecting them on others.*

This experience dis-empowers the individual and gives the control to the environment. These people also need to be assisted to reclaim forgotten parts of their personalities. An example would be if a person believes that the boss is angry at him/her, while he/she is actually angry with the boss. He/she may have suppressed feelings of anger towards the boss and, therefore, needs to become aware of those feelings and be empowered to own them. It is important to give employees the opportunity to take ownership of their feelings. In this way they may feel more empowered to regain control of their lives.

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2.5.4 Retroflection

Retroflection is a further disturbance of contact. Congress (1995:1118) states that retroflection can be explained as follows:

> *…retroflection occurs when individuals do to themselves what they would like to do to someone else, or when they do to themselves what they would like others to do to them.*

People develop symptoms that they would like someone else to experience. At times they would like this hurtful behaviour to be directed towards themselves. For example, they will experience stomach problems, headaches and even self mutilisation, that they would like someone else to experience (Oaklander, 1994:144). With retroflective behaviour, love becomes self-love and hate becomes self-hate (which could lead to suicide). These people become their own worst enemies (Aronstam, 1989:638).

People need to become aware of what they are thinking and experiencing before they can make decisions to change their lives. Sometimes people were not nurtured as children and they believe that they cannot make use of the support from others – then they have to be made aware of the fact that they do not live in that non-nurturing environment anymore and that they can reach out to others in their environment and accept nurturing from others (Congress, 1995:1120).

Awareness is very important in this instance. The people's health can be affected negatively if they do not realise that they are transferring a huge amount of negative energy into themselves. Stress related illnesses are often activated because of

physical reactions that people have to negative situations or people who cause stress in their lives.

2.5.5   Confluence

Confluence means that people become part of the environment to the extent that the environment controls their actions. Thompson and Rudolph (1992:111) describe confluence as follows:

> **People may incorporate too much of themselves into others or incorporate so much of the environment into themselves that they lose touch with where they are. Then the environment takes control**.

According to Aronstam (1989:638) people cannot distinguish between their personal boundaries, thus where they begin and where they end and this prevents positive contact with others. Therefore, people who experience confluence are people who always focus on other people's needs instead of attending to their own. People often experience difficulty in identifying their own needs. They would rather maintain the *status quo* in their relationship than acknowledge unhappiness or boredom. Congress (1995:1120) states the following regarding confluence:

> **…confluence occurs when the client pretends that there are no differences between two individuals or systems and emphasises the similarities instead.**

These individuals need to be made aware of the different needs that exist between two partners in a working relationship, friendship or marriage and be encouraged to

distinguish their own personal needs from what is happening in the confluent relationship (Congress, 1995:1120). In this situation, people can be too pleasing. They do not admit any of their own needs and just want the other people's needs to be met.

Within the corporate environment, confluent people are often those who go along with everything that has been said or suggested.

> **For example:**
>
> In a meeting employees will agree with one of the other representatives and then change their minds to agree with someone else, if it seems the more appropriate thing to do. This can be very stressful for these individuals because they are trying to please everybody and do not want anybody to be angry with them. It can also be to the detriment of the group or team as these people may have a valid contribution to make.

2.5.6   Deflection

Deflection means that people move away from environmental contact. Everything around them becomes vague and general (Clarkson, 1989:51). Furthermore, Clarkson (1989:52) states the following about deflection:

> *A person who habitually deflects does not use his/her energy in an effective way in order to get feedback from self, others or the environment.*

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Deflection refers to a situation where people literally break contact with other people. For example, they will break eye contact with other people who are talking to them or they may literally turn away from those people if they are experiencing discomfort in the situation (O'Leary, 1992:43).

This is often a survival mechanism that is used when the situation becomes too uncomfortable or frightening. People usually do not even realise that they are breaking contact and need to be made aware of their behaviour. They also need to determine what makes it important for them to break contact. The researcher is of the opinion that deflection can be utilised in the therapeutic situation. When the situation becomes too threatening, deflection occurs. The social worker can use the deflection as a pause and return to the threatening topic at a later stage.

2.5.7   Resistance

Resistance is a way of surviving in the world. Sometimes resistance is acceptable but often this behaviour is not deemed acceptable by society and people experience rejection because of it. Resistance can be used as an ally by people who feel vulnerable. It is the way in which people take care of themselves. Oaklander (1997:295) says the following about resistance:

> *…resistance surfaces over and over again, and each time it must be honoured…Resistance is also a sign that beyond this place of defence, there is highly significant material to be explored and worked through.*

Resistance does not just occur on one level. There are different layers of resistance that need to be acknowledged. Perls refers to the layers of resistance as neurosis.

He says that people must pass through the five layers of neurosis to reach psychological maturity (Robinson, 1991:5). These layers are referred to as the phoney layer, the phobic layer, the impasse layer, the implosive layer and the explosive layer. According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:112), the five layers form a process through which the person must move to grow towards a better life:

> *…the five layers form a series of counselling stages, or benchmarks, for the counselling process; in fact they could be considered as five steps to a better Gestalt way of life.*

A stress management programme should allow people to experience and move through the layers of resistance. The five layers of resistance can be explained as follows:

- **The Phoney Layer**

The phoney layer is described by Robinson (1991:5) as follows:

> *It is when we react to others is stereotypical and inauthentic ways, playing games and losing ourselves in roles to avoid true intimacy.*

According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:112), *many people find themselves trapped in trying to be what they are not.* The phoney layer is thus when people try and fit into a certain role that they believe they should be in. They experience conflict and ambivalence within themselves but they often do not know how to free themselves from the role that they fulfil.

Practical example:

Corporate employees who attend stress management training keep telling the social worker that they have no need for the training. They often make jokes and do not want to focus on themselves. This can sometimes be distracting to the rest of the group and it gives the impression that these people do not want to stand still and focus on their own feelings and emotions.

- **The Phobic Layer**

In this case, people do not recognise the unacceptable traits of themselves because they want to avoid the emotional pain and fear attached to the process when they take ownership of these traits (Robinson, 1991:5). Awareness is necessary during this stage of the process. With regard to the phobic layer, Thompson and Rudolph (1992:112) state the following:

> *…as people become aware of their phony games, they become aware of their fears that maintain the games. This is often a frightening experience.*

Therefore, during this layer of resistance, people experience fear which inhibits their behaviour. They do not want to let other people know how vulnerable they are in certain areas and often they have not even acknowledged to themselves how vulnerable they feel.

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> **Practical Example:**
>
> Awareness is facilitated during a stress management course and the corporate employees become more and more aware of the games that they are playing to keep themselves from experiencing emotional pain. These people may become quiet or they may become argumentative because they do not feel as in control as they usually feel when they are playing games to survive the situation. The resistance can be experienced when these people decide to leave the training because they feel vulnerable and fear greater awareness.

- **Impasse**

Perls said the following about impasse:

> *The unpleasantness has to be got through, whether it's frustration, or the extreme other case, the situation where you have to face the experience of being dead - the real impasse, the real implosive layer (Belkin, 1995:307).*

This is a point in the therapeutic process when people often feel stuck, which may lead to a sense of deadness or paralysis. They feel they cannot move forward without environmental support (Robinson, 1991:5). It takes courage for individuals to move through this layer to the next one. Thompson and Rudolph (1992:112) explain why people need courage to move through this layer as follows:

> *This is the layer people reach when they shed the environmental support of their games and find they do not know a better way to cope*

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with their fears and dislikes.

Practical Example:

The employees, who have always acted as if they are in complete control of their lives, suddenly start to realise that stress affects them physically and emotionally. They could always hide behind their games and they did not have to face the reality of the effect of the stress factors. Suddenly they experience stress related illnesses such as high blood pressure and they have to make adjustments to their lifestyle. Unfortunately they are afraid to make these adjustments and live accordingly. This can lead to a more passive reaction but people need to make decisions and take action, for them to be able to move through the impasse.

- **Implosive layer**

During the implosive layer the paralysis that was experienced in the previous layer is over and people can try out new ways to cope with their lives. According to Robinson (1991:5), the implosive layer is *when we risk experiencing and going through the deadness.* During this part of the process people become more and more aware of how they limited themselves in the past and at that point of time, they start to experiment with new behaviours (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:112).

> **Practical Example:**
>
> Corporate employees are afraid of trying out new activities as well as different ways of approaching certain life situations. They do not have the phoney games to shield them anymore. They realise that without the phoney games to shield them, they will experience everything and as a result, they feel vulnerable. As the training continues they realise that they find themselves in a safe environment and that other people in the group are trying out new ways to behave in certain situations. They take part in the activities and start taking more and more risks until their behaviour starts to change.

- **Explosive layer**

With regard to the explosive layer, Perls in Belkin (1980:242) states the following:

> *The explosion is the final neurotic layer that occurs when we get to the implosive state. As I see it, this progression is necessary to become authentic.*

Thompson and Rudolph (1992:112) add the following to this definition:

> *If experiments with new behaviours are successful, people can reach the explosive layer, where they find much unused energy that had been tied up in maintaining a phony existence.*

Furthermore, Robinson (1991:18) explains that the explosive layer is the release of energy that people have been holding back by pretending to be something they are not. When they release this energy, they feel alive and authentic.

Practical Example:

During this part of the process the following can happen:

If the corporate employees never made use of support systems in the organisation in the past as they felt that it would be a sign of weakness, or that other employees would think that they are not capable of coping with the pressure, they could start to change their behaviour by making use of the support systems that are available. As soon as these changes result in positive experiences, they may risk more and more. This will create more energy to use productively as well as for fun in and out of the workplace.

In the case of corporate employees, they need to be made aware of these layers of resistance so that they can understand their own process of changing by moving through one layer to another. The researcher is of the opinion that if resistance can be defined as acceptable in people's lives, they will be able to deal with it more successfully. Furthermore, they will be able to identify the meaning of the resistance and they will be able to deal with it as a challenge.

2.5.8   Responsibility

People need to take responsibility for their own lives and for the choices they make (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:113). Responsibility refers to people's ability to respond. Be aware of the fact that some people may not have the inner strength to take responsibility at that point in time, and that they may need to be empowered to

take action (Dierks, 1999:71).

Perls in Thompson and Rudolph (1992:113) refer to the aim of Gestalt therapy as follows:

> *… to help people help themselves to grow up – to mature, take charge of their lives, and become responsible for themselves.*

This means that people must move away from environmental support and move towards self-support.

Glass in Corsini (1984:60) agrees with the abovementioned when he says:

> *Instead of denying, blaming, projecting and displacing responsibility for one's own experience, the individual is encouraged to accept thoughts, feelings and actions as part of the self. Attributing responsibility to scapegoats – parents, childhood traumas, spouse and the like – leaves the individual powerless and dependant.*

When people place the blame for conflicts or unhappiness on others, they are busy projecting their own feeling and ideas on others. This means that they are not taking responsibility for their part in the disagreement or conflict and they do not respect the feelings or needs of other people (Dierks, 1999:64).

Therefore this is one of the most important principles of the Gestalt Theory. People often make choices and when things do not work out as they planned, they blame someone or something else for the outcome. In this way people dis-empower

themselves because they are always placing someone else in control of their lives.

2.5.9 Polarities

Polarities are natural aspects of human functioning. Greenberg, *et al.* (1995:40) suggested the following:

> *…strength and weakness, kindness and cruelty, selflessness and selfishness integrate into a balanced capacity to act adaptively.*

Thus polarities are acceptable in society and all people experience them. However when the polarities start to confront one another, people's healthy adjustment can be affected (Greenberg, *et al.*, 1995:40).

The greater part of a day is taken up by solving conflict between polarities. Everything in life has positive and negative attributes and the individual is constantly trying to balance these polarities. Polarities are conflicting energies that people are confronted with on a daily basis (Sohakian in Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:112).

Dierks (1999:64) refers to the fight or flight reaction that people have because of stress, as polarities. People try and solve the stressful situation by fighting and attacking or by fleeing and withdrawing. These reactions both have advantages and disadvantages and people must try and find a balance between the two polarities.

The researcher agrees with the above mentioned authors that each situation has polarities. In a working situation there are some positive and negative aspects, such as long working hours (negative) but a good salary (positive). The corporate

employees should list the positive and negative aspects of different parts of their lives. In this way the corporate employees are making contact with themselves and they are establishing what the effect of this polarity is having on them. This gives the control back to the corporate employees and they feel empowered by the activity. Each individual has strengths and weaknesses and he/she has a choice whether to allow changes or to prefer that their circumstances stay the same.

Once people realise that there are always polarities, they also realise that they can regain control over their lives by making choices and taking responsibility for those choices. Robinson (1991:5) goes further by stating:

> *By experiencing fully the disowned parts or the opposing polarities within themselves clients reach a greater sense of self acceptance and renewed energy.*

The following model, in Figure 2.2, was created by the researcher and it illustrates how contact boundaries can have an effect on the homeostasis of people.
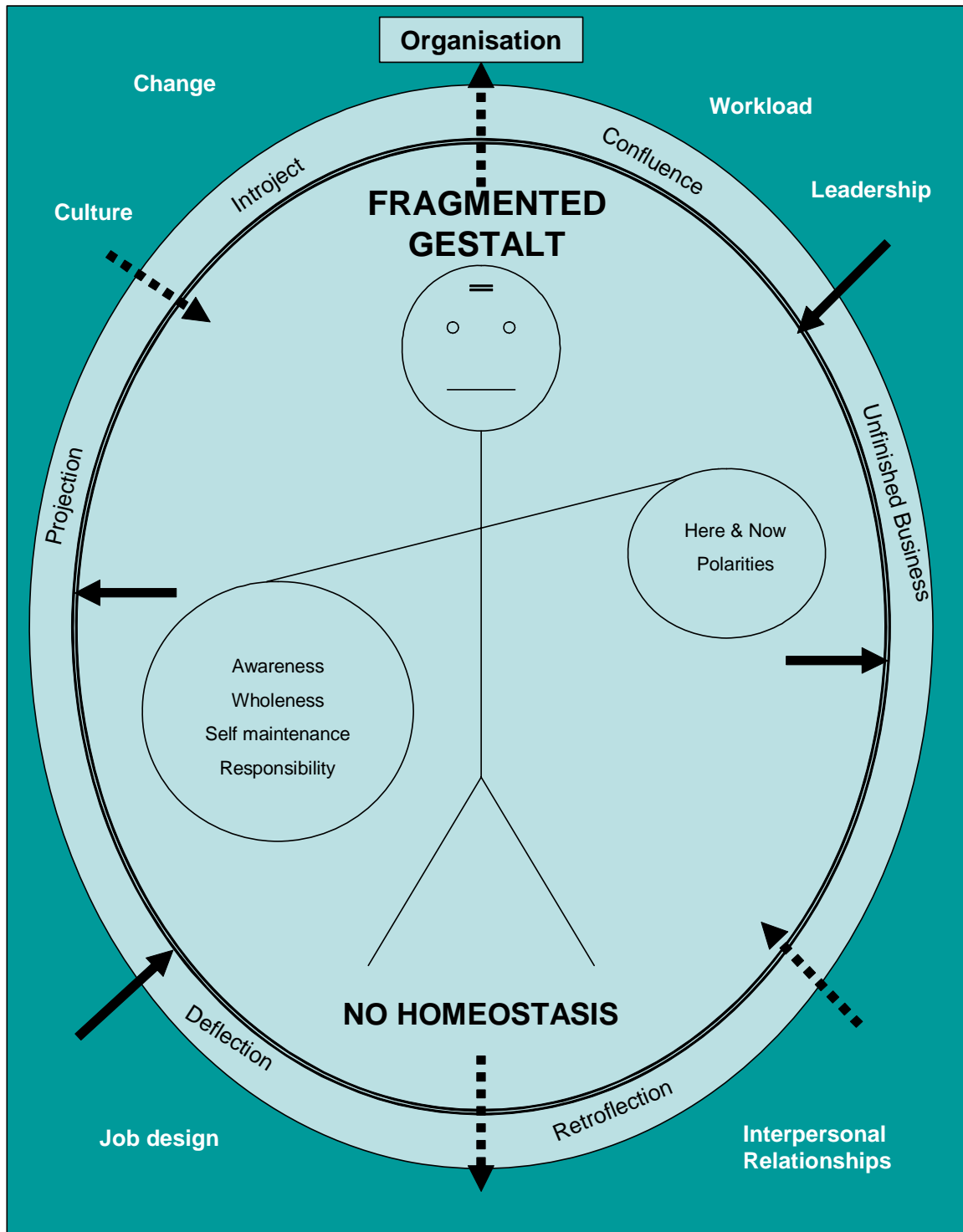
Figure 2.2 Fragmented Gestalt

The Gestalt may be fragmented because of different reasons. Contact boundaries can be too open and as a result people may find it difficult to differentiate where they end as a person and where the rest of the world begins. They cannot make their own decisions and always agree with the decisions that others make for them. If the contact boundaries are very rigid, people do not allow any input from other people. They believe what they are doing is always right and they do not consider others. These reactions can often take place because the individuals are not in contact with themselves and they are not aware of the fact that there are introjects in their lives which have an effect on their functioning, or that they project all their circumstances on others because they do not want to take responsibility for themselves. When this happens in the lives of people, they feel out of balance and they do not experience homeostasis in their lives.

2.6 TECHNIQUES

Gestalt therapy techniques can be used effectively in a stress management programme. Through the use of these techniques, corporate employees are enabled to regain homeostasis, make positive choices and take responsibility for those choices.

2.6.1 I/Thou relationship

Perls in Congress (1995:1119) refers to the I/Thou relationship as follows:

> *The I-Thou relationship is seen as a specific form of contact between two people in which the barrier between self and others is minimised and each person is not aware of their human connection. Much self-*

awareness is necessary for this process to occur.

Therefore, the I/Thou relationship is a relationship in which the social worker respects and accepts the uniqueness of another person.

According to Oaklander (1997:293), the following principles can be used with regard to the I/Thou relationship:

- The social worker and the corporate employee meet each other as two separate and equal individuals.

- The social worker is as authentic as he/she knows how to be.

- The social worker does not use a patronising voice.

- The social worker does not manipulate or judge the corporate employee.

- The social worker does not place expectations on the corporate employee.

- The corporate employee will be respected as he/she is.

- The social worker will attempt to join the corporate employee's rhythm.

- The social worker will be fully present and in contact with the corporate employee.

When making use of the I/Thou relationship when working with the people who have contact dysfunctions, it is important to make use of "I" language. "It" language is changed to "I" language and the people are constantly asked with whom they are making contact. At the same time their awareness is increased by drawing attention to their body sensations. Furthermore, no gossiping is allowed and questions are changed into statements (Robinson, 1991:5). This guideline enables people to stay in the here and now and focus on the present situation in their lives.

Whilst the stress management programme is being presented, a relationship is built

with the corporate employees who take part in this programme. This relationship provides a safe environment for the corporate employees to work towards awareness and to experience homeostasis.

2.6.2   Sensory Contact

Sensory awareness is the "how" of contact. This is a crucial part of the stress management programme as sensory contact promotes awareness and helps people to gain homeostasis (Oaklander, 1988:128). Furthermore, Oaklander's (1997:294) opinion regarding senses is that:

> *… these skills involve touching, looking and seeing, listening and hearing, tasting, smelling, speaking, sound, gesture and language and moving in the environment.*

Sensory contact is a part of all people and it starts as soon as someone is born. Babies make contact with the world around them through their senses (touch, smell, taste, audio and visual). They experience their surroundings through their senses and enjoy touching objects that are unfamiliar to them. They also look around them and notice details in their surroundings that adults are often not aware of. Dierks (1999:58) states the following about people's senses:

> *When we were very little, we did not understand words, so we saved information the only way we had available to us – sights, sounds, smells, taste and touch (our senses).*

The researcher is of the opinion that as people become adults, they often lose

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contact with their environment and with themselves. Sensory awareness promotes awareness and helps people to gain homeostasis (Oaklander, 1988:128). Perls in Robinson (1993:6) states that a person has to *lose your mind and come to your senses.* Senses are central modes to contact with the self, others and the environment. The five essential senses will be discussed as follows:

- **Sight**

Sight has an important function in the lives of people, as it is the main co-ordinating sense. This sense helps people to create an understanding of the world around them. People can relate the visual input with the actual experience (Schoeman, 1996:43; Oaklander, 1988:11).

According to Ludick (1995:79), sight in itself is not a guarantee for good contact with the environment. The quality of the sensory perception determines the quality of the contact.

Therefore sight stimulates a reaction in people. They make an association when they see something that is significant to them at some stage.

> **For Example:**
>
> People often associate a colour with an incident that took place in their lives. If the person wore burgundy to his/her matriculation farewell dance, this colour may trigger memories when he/she is suddenly confronted with the colour. If this was a happy occasion, the feelings that are experienced are positive and if this was a negative occasion, the feelings that the person experiences many years later could be negative.
>
> The use of colour can be very effective in making contact with unfinished business in the person's life.

- **Hearing**

Children can hear while they are still in their mother's wombs. As children grow they learn to hear what they want to hear. People often close their hearing sense to that which is hurtful or unpleasant. As people repress their sense of hearing, they deprive themselves of intensive sensory observation (Schoeman, 1996:43 & 44).

People can hear but they do not necessarily listen. O'Leary (1992:33) states the following about the hearing sense:

> *The listener must think with the individual. Thinking manifests itself in asking more information, but not directing the conversation, nodding, being actively silent, assisting individuals in examining heir own feelings and finding their own answers.*

Corporate employees need to be made aware of the fact that they shut themselves off to some information and thus inhibit their level of experience.

Practical Example:

The corporate employee may have had a negative experience with a teacher when he/she was at school. The teacher tended to speak in a specific tone of voice when communicating with the corporate employee (when he/she was a child). Within the working environment, there may be a colleague or a manager who speaks to the corporate employee with the same tone of voice as the teacher did. This could create such strong reactions in the corporate employee that he/she just blocks the other person out – he/she is listening but does not **hear** what the other person is saying.

- **Smell**

Smell is a sensory experience which is enjoyed by most people. According to Schoeman (1996:45), this sense can be described as follows:

> *The sense of smell is used to gather information about the surroundings, what is happening and to discriminate between pleasant and unpleasant smells.*

The role of smell is often underestimated. Some smells have strong associations with memories from the past.

> **For Example:**
>
> The corporate employee may have had a grandmother whom he/she was very fond of. When he/she goes for an interview for a job, the interviewer may be wearing the same perfume as the perfume that the interviewee's grandmother usually wore. This could put the interviewee at ease and she/he may feel less apprehensive than if the association was not pleasant. The sensory association is with a "safe" person.

- **Taste**

The organ associated with taste is the tongue but the sense of smell usually has an influence on how something tastes to people. All people have a unique sense of taste. What is pleasant and enjoyable to one person may not be pleasant to the next person (Schoeman, 1996:47).

Therefore, sense of taste also brings many memories along with it. As soon as people taste something they have not tasted for a long time, they are moved back in time to the people or the place where they last experienced that particular taste. Awareness is facilitated when people are enabled to make sensory contact.

> **For example:**
>
> Corporate employees may attend a work function where food is served that reminds them of a specific occasion where they had similar food with people they have not seen for a long time. This could immediately stimulate a longing for those people or that situation that forms a part of the memory.

- **Touch**

The skin is the largest organ in the body. The world is explored to a great extent by the sense of touch. People often make contact with others around them and with their environment through their sense of touch (Schoeman, 1996:47).

Once again, touch is an individualised sensory experience. People experience different textures in different ways. Some people enjoy the feeling of wool against their skin while others prefer silk. Some people are very aware of the fact that some materials tend to scratch while others do not even notice this effect. According to the researcher's experience with the training of adults, she has often found different sensory reactions to the play therapy mediums. Some people enjoy the feeling of the clay and the sand on their hands while others want to wash their hands as soon as the activity has been completed. Some people are not always aware of the effect that the tactile experience has on them. As soon as they are made aware of their own reactions, they can link them with some incident in their lives and in the process they can make contact with themselves.

Therefore, different people have different personal boundaries. This boundary

needs to be respected. Some people do not mind making contact with others through touch, but others prefer their own space.

2.6.3   Breathing and Body Posture

- **Breathing**

Breathing is an indication of how comfortable people are or how anxious they may feel. People's breathing, blood circulation and muscle tension have to do with their emotional state (Passons, 1975:120). Comfort and peacefulness are related to slower breathing and heart rate. If people are made aware of their breathing they can identify the situations or feelings that cause the increase in the breathing tempo.

Oaklander (1988:128) states that breathing gives the social worker much information about people. She states the following about breathing:

> *…breathing deeply, can dispel the anxiety and allow the pleasurable feelings to surge through our bodies and give us the feeling of power and support…*

When people are anxious and fearful, their breathing is restricted and they can become even further disconnected from themselves. It is necessary for people to do breathing exercises to regain a feeling of power and not to feel as if they are victims (Oaklander, 1997:297).

During stress management training, people can have the opportunity to do

breathing exercises and they can be informed how this relates to relaxation and stress management. Awareness is enhanced through these activities and people can experience a greater sense of themselves whilst doing these activities.

- **Body Posture**

Body posture is a form of non-verbal communication and every emotion has a body connection. This non-verbal communication starts at an early age. According to Oaklander (1997:297), body posture is often a reaction that develops in people when they are still young. She describes it as follows:

> *Children develop body patterns at an early age, often creating at that time the defects in posture that we usually see more clearly in adolescents and adulthood.*

For example, if the employee's shoulders are hanging he/she may try to convey a message that he/she feels sad, tired or burdened. It is important to confirm with the person that the message that is being conveyed is correctly understood by asking (for example) "Are you tired or frustrated?"

According to Dierks (1999:57), people experience their emotions physically and the social worker must be sensitive to these reactions:

> *When something or someone in the environment does or says something that is perceived as an attack, it is often experienced physically. Most of us feel our stomach turn, our fists/jaw clench or our heart beat faster. Some people experience an anxious feeling in the chest*

area. When this happens it is an indicator that there is a hole in the boundary.

The social worker must be sensitive to the fact that corporate employees can experience emotions that are communicated non-verbally and that people are often not aware of the fact that they are experiencing physical discomfort as a result to their emotions.

2.6.4   Dream-work

Perls in Oaklander (1988:145 -146) states the following about dreams:

…a message from yourself to yourself, to whatever part of you is listening. The dream is possibly the most spontaneous expression of the human being, a piece of art that we chisel out of our lives.

Kovel in Robinson (1991:6) agrees when he states the following:

All elements of the manifest dream stand for parts of the dreamer's self.

When people are sharing their dreams with others, they are offering a part of themselves. With this technique, people share a recent dream with the social worker.

The Gestalt school believes that the events in a dream represent fragmented and denied parts of the personality (Beck, in Magill, 1996:744).

The people are encouraged to share the dream in the present as if they are part of the dream.

During dream-work the focus is on:

- What the person is feeling in the dream?

- What the person is doing in the dream?

- What would the person like to do in the dream?

- What is the person's relationship with the other objects or people in the dream?

- What does the person think the dream is trying to tell him/her?

- How does the dream end?

- How he/she would like the dream to end?

(Compare Oaklander 1988:146 -147 and O'Leary, 1992:77)

Dream-work can be used effectively with the other play therapy mediums. People can be asked to draw their dreams, to play them out in the sand or to create the dreams in the clay. All these activities enhance awareness and allow people to gain control by deciding how the dream ends and what takes place in the dream.

2.6.5   Self Nurturing

Self nurturing refers to the fact that people's self perception is of such a nature that they allow themselves some self nurturing. This can also be linked to homeostasis in people's lives. People need to learn when to say yes and when to say no to other people, as a way to ensure that they do not reach the stage of burn-out. There is a time to work and a time to rest. People need to learn to accept themselves with their positive and negative characteristics and should even be prepared to spoil themselves from time to time (Schoeman, 1996:181). Self nurturing takes place when people are able to integrate the polarities in their lives and live as whole

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human beings.

Corporate employees often find it difficult to do self nurturing because they are so focused on their work. Self nurturing means that they have to be good to themselves, they have to take leave when their leave is due and they have to turn their cellular phones off to ensure a break from work. They have to make time to exercise and do some fun activities that give meaning to their lives. An excellent way of doing some self nurturing is by creating a safe place where people have the sole right to enjoy that space. The safe place can be imaginary or real. According to Ludick (1995:89), people can be guided to a "safe place" where they may feel nurtured or where they can nurture themselves. The researcher combines this activity with visualisation, so that people can make use of their "safe place" anywhere and anytime.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The Gestalt Theory is more than just a theoretical frame of reference. It is a way of life and it can be assimilated into the corporate employee's life. As soon as the corporate employee becomes aware of the factors that are influencing his/her Gestalt negatively, he/she can start taking action and move towards self regulation and self nurturing.

The main purpose of the Gestalt Theory is to create an environment in which people can reach maturity and take control of their lives. People must reach a greater state of awareness which enables them to experience fully in the "here and now" (Perls in Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:113). Gestalt therapy can thus be measured with regard to the people's awareness, the extent to which people take responsibility for their own actions and move away from environmental support towards self-support (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:113).

The Gestalt Theory was developed by Perls and is based on the following concepts:

- A person's awareness should be facilitated in the here and now.

- A person is a whole and no part of the person acts without all the other parts involved.

- Contact is necessary with him/herself and with the environment. Contact boundary disruptions limit the person's experience of his/her world.

- Dysfunctions and fragmentation need to come to the fore so that the person can address them and live to his/her full potential.

- A person is able to have a balanced Gestalt.

The Gestalt Theory focuses on each person's individual process. People are allowed the opportunity to regain their personal control. It is important that corporate employees realise that they are the only ones who can take control of their lives and, therefore, they can manage their own stress levels more effectively. They have to realise that they have to make choices and take responsibility for those choices.

The following chapter focuses on stress and how stressors can affect the lives of the corporate employees.

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 form 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

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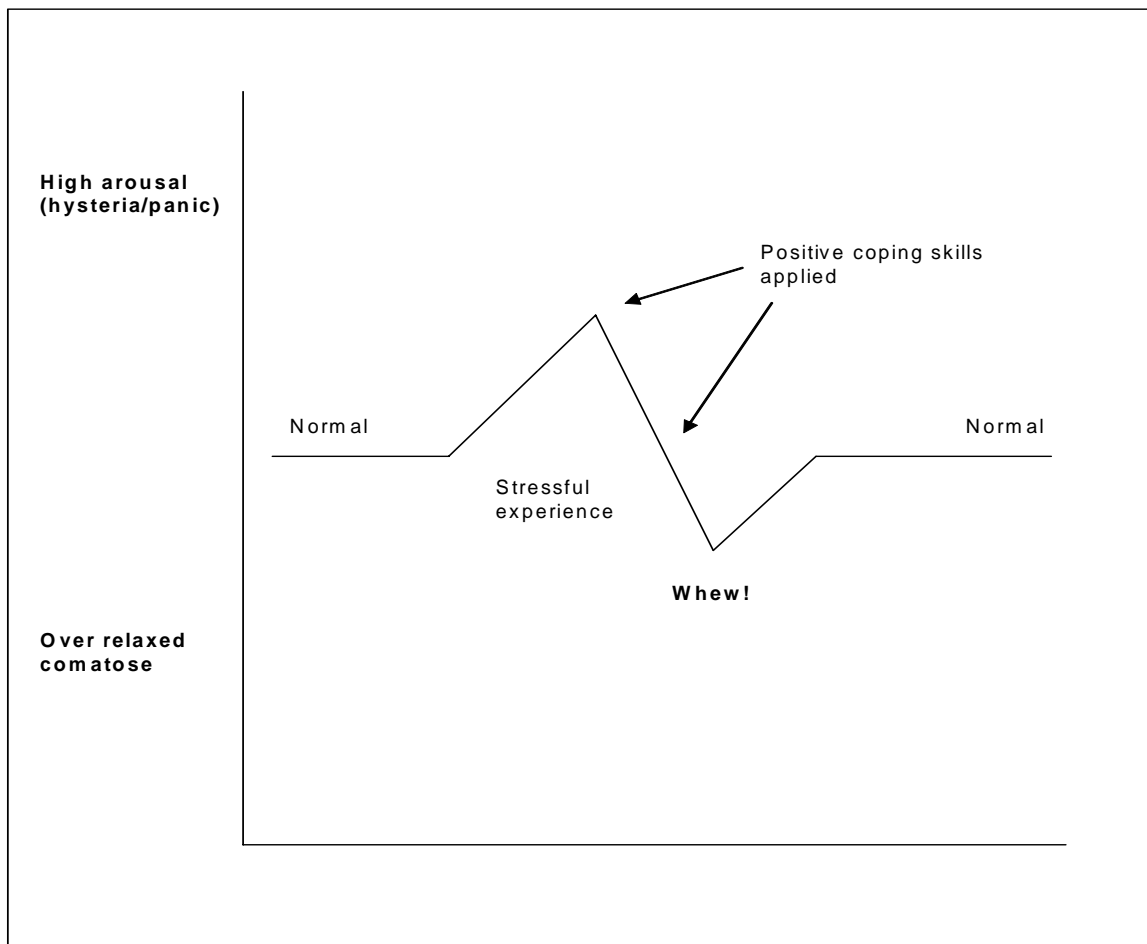
Figure 3.1 The Healthy Pattern (Burns, 2003:39)

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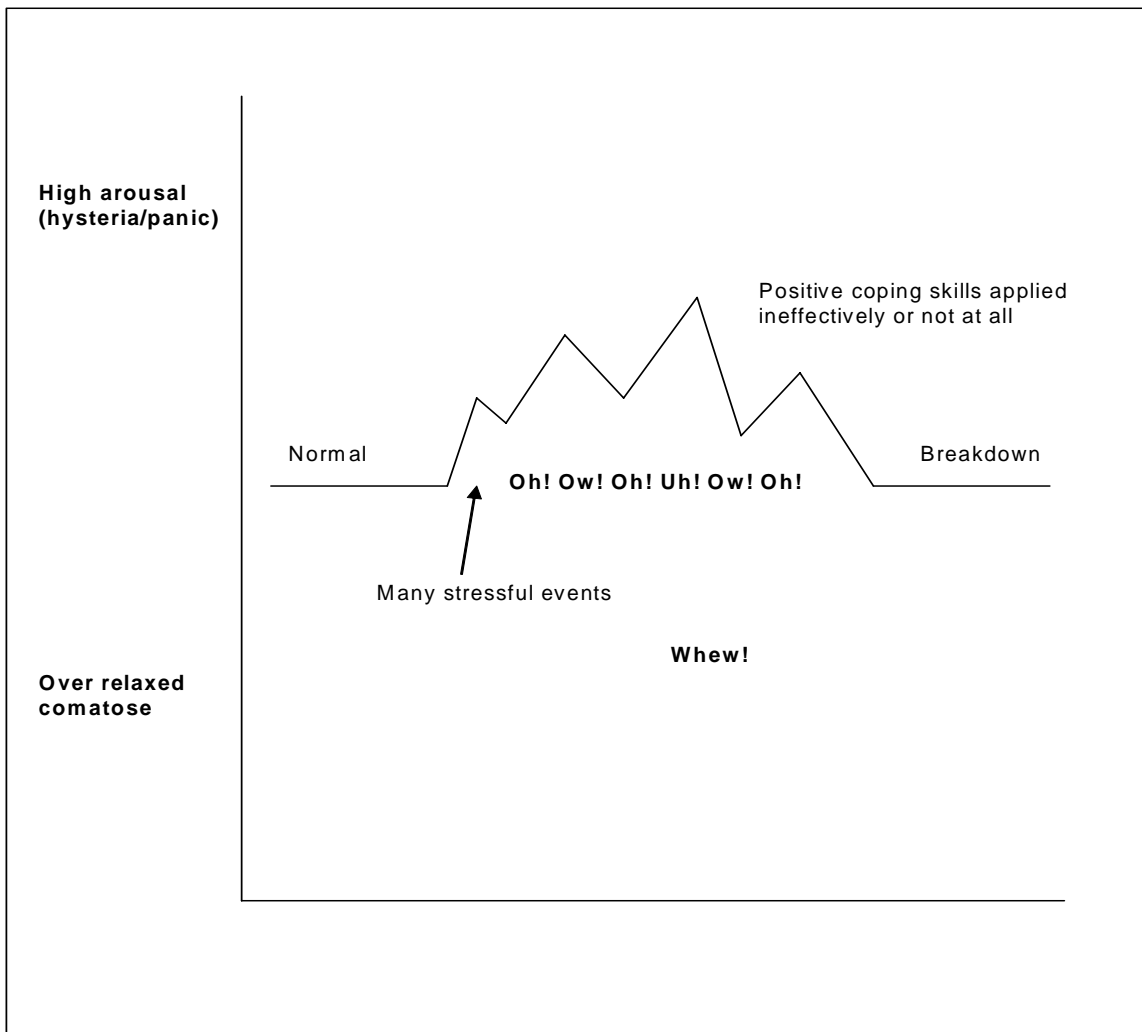
Figure 3.2 The Unhealthy Pattern (Burns, 2003:40)

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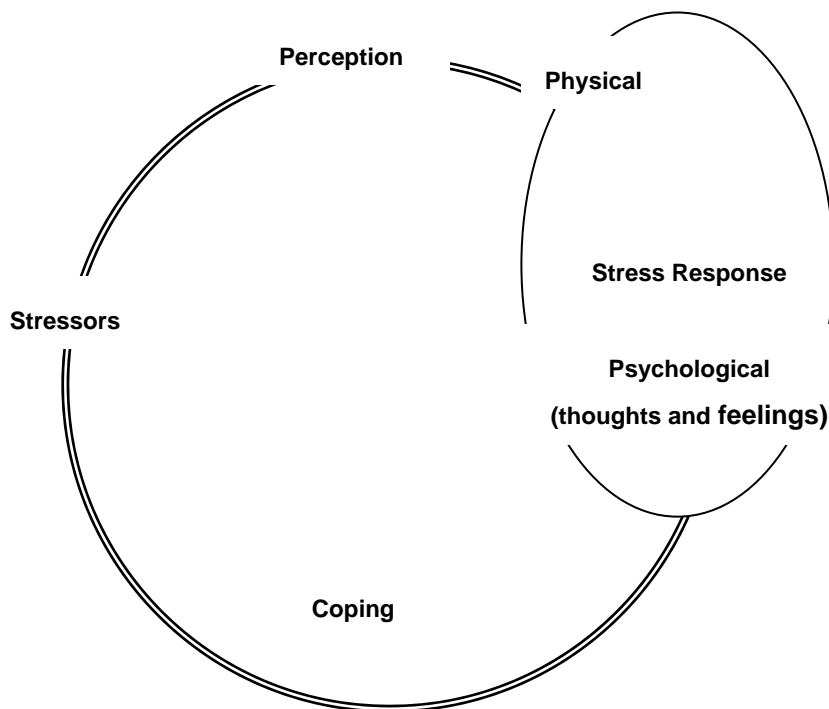
Figure 3.3 The Stress Cycle (Brehm, 1998:5)

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.

Sources of Pressure

Coping Mechanisms

Negative

E f f e c t s

Positive

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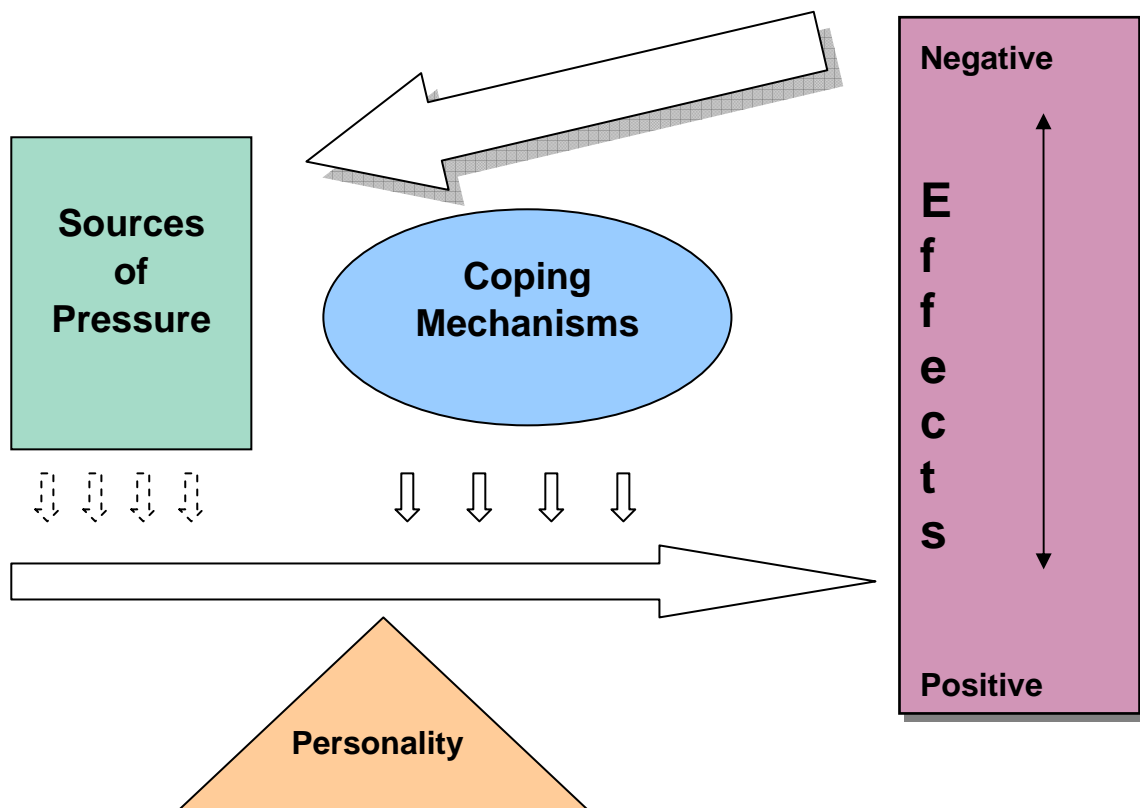
Figure 3.4 The Four Way Model (Williams, 1994:41)

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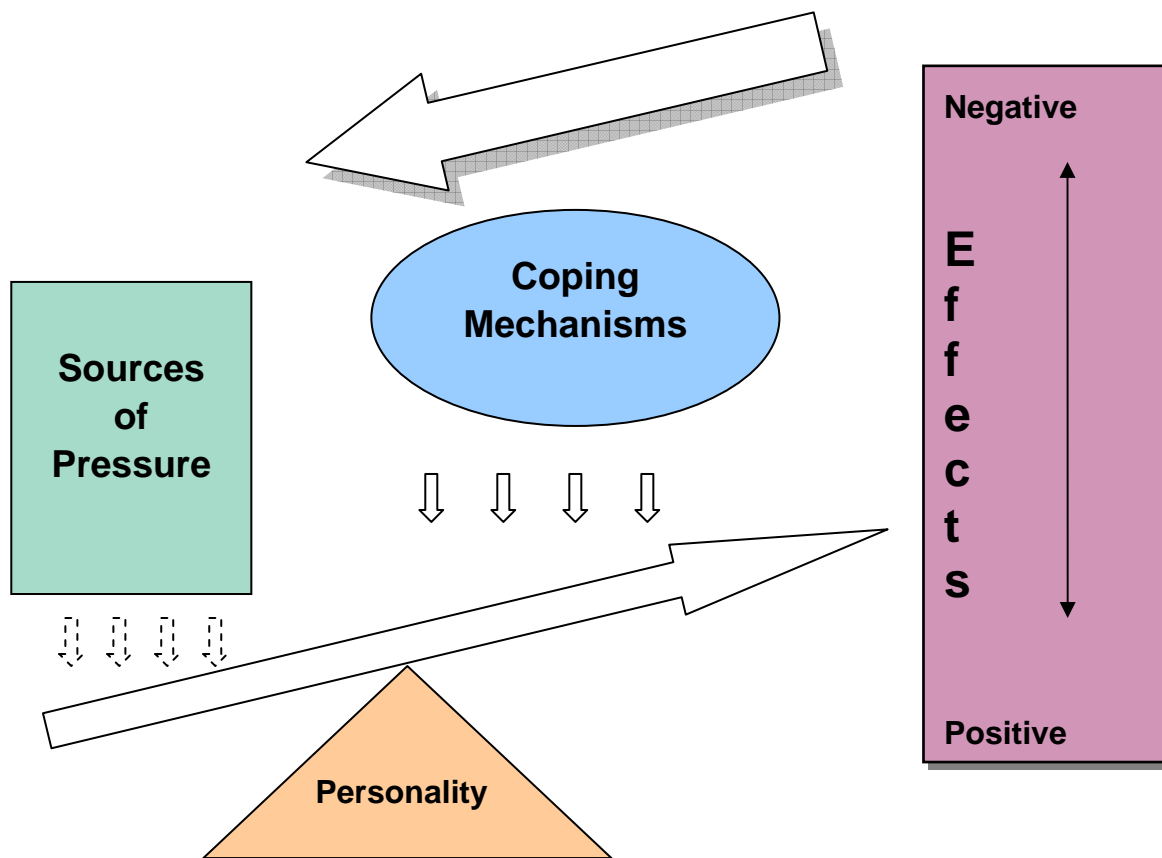
Figure 3.5 The Four Way Model: Out of Balance (Williams, 1994:41)

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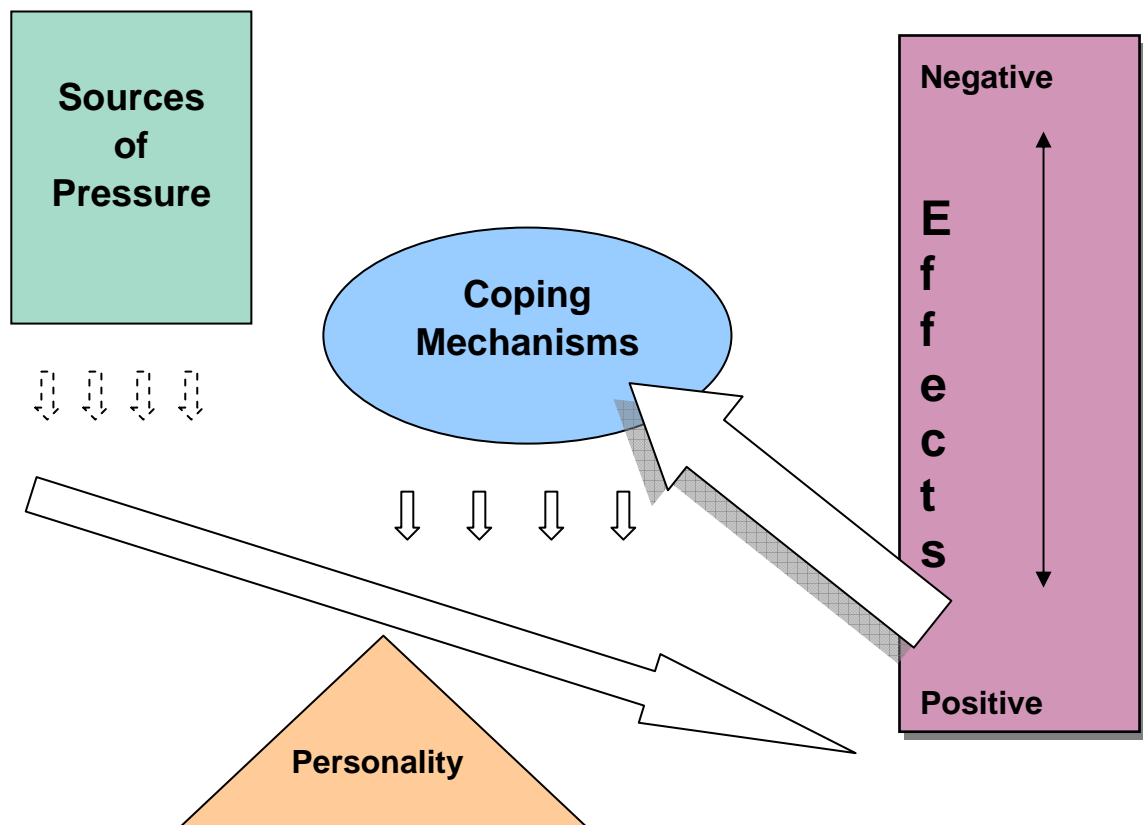
Figure 3.6 The Four Way Model: Coping Mechanisms (Williams, 1994:41)

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:

Normal resistance to a stressor

Alarm Reaction   **Resistance**   **Collapse**
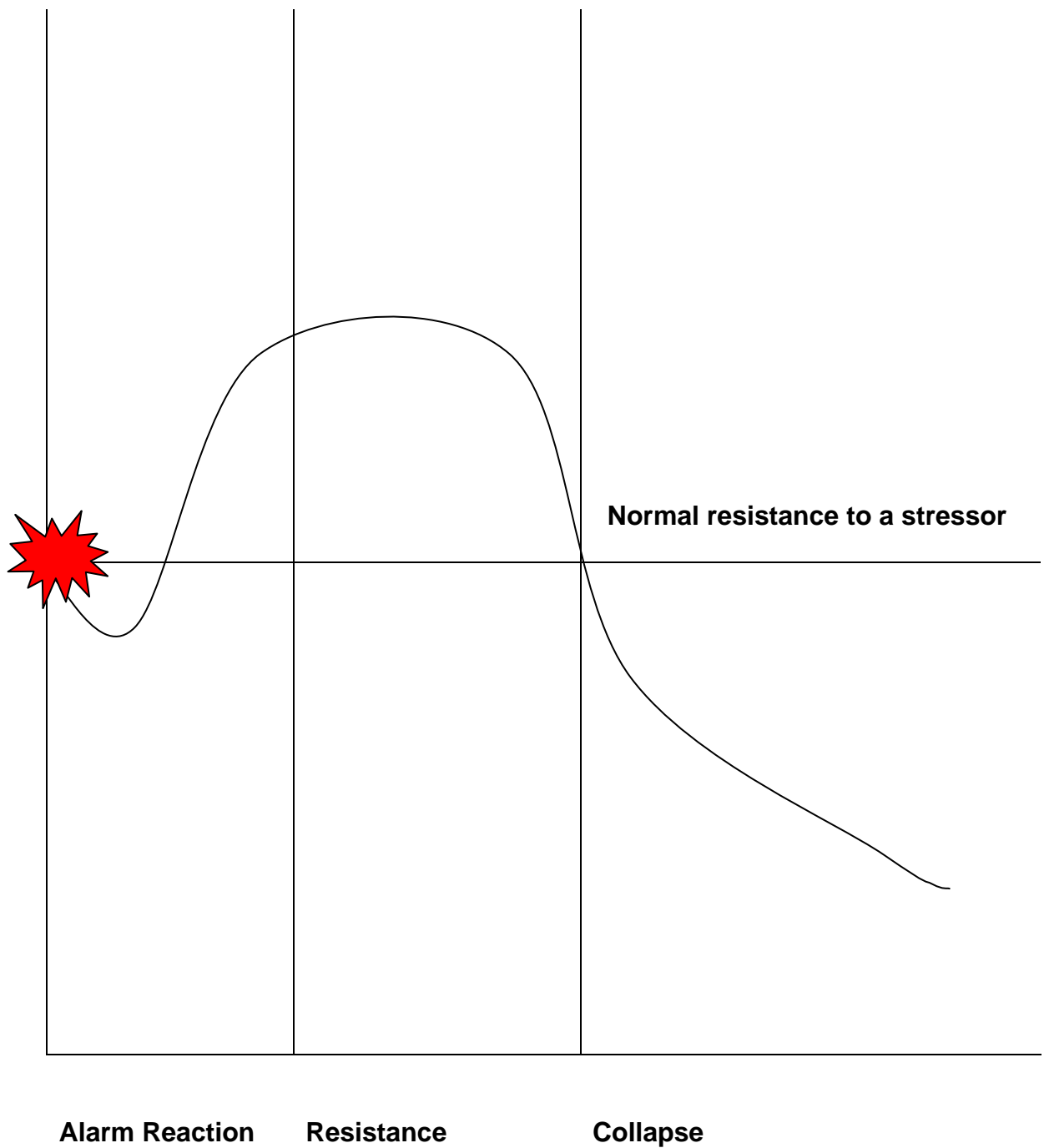
Figure 3.7 General Adaptation Syndrome (Burns, 2003:48; Williams, 1994:34)

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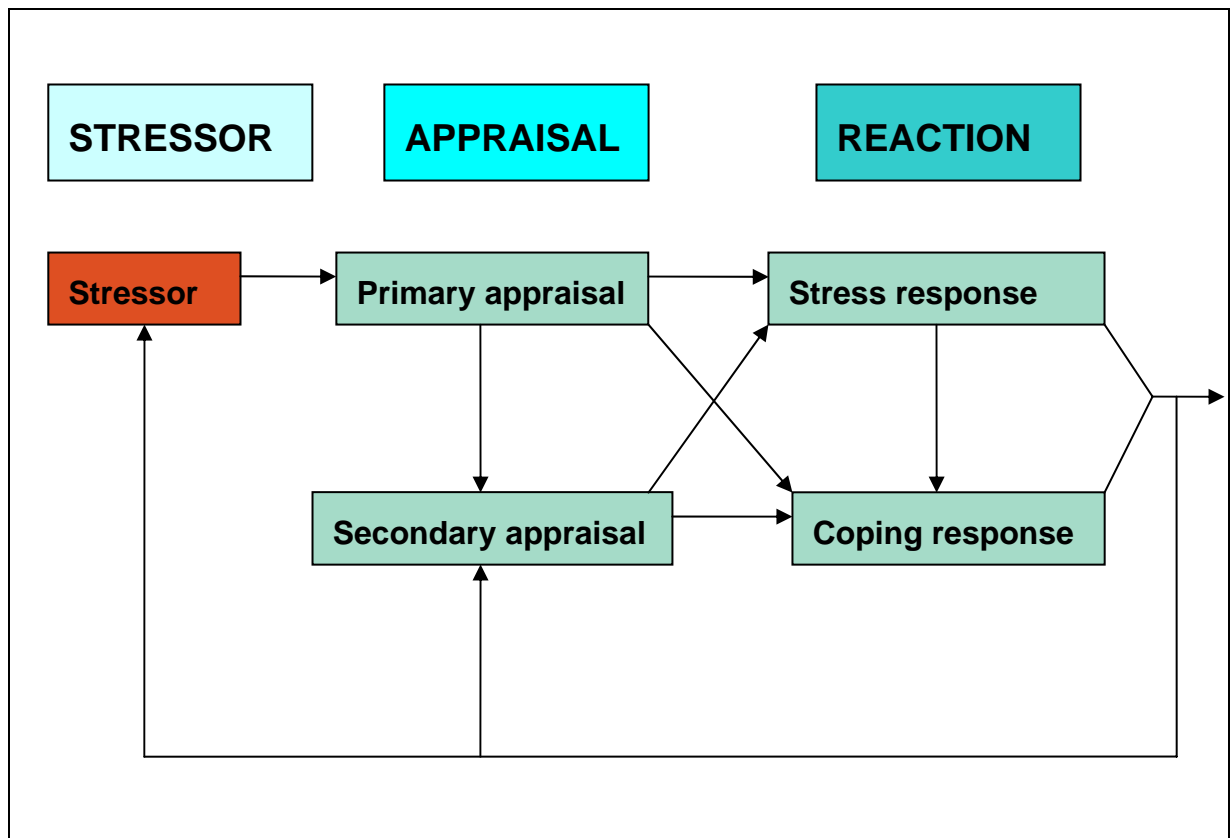
Figure 3.8 Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:5)

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:
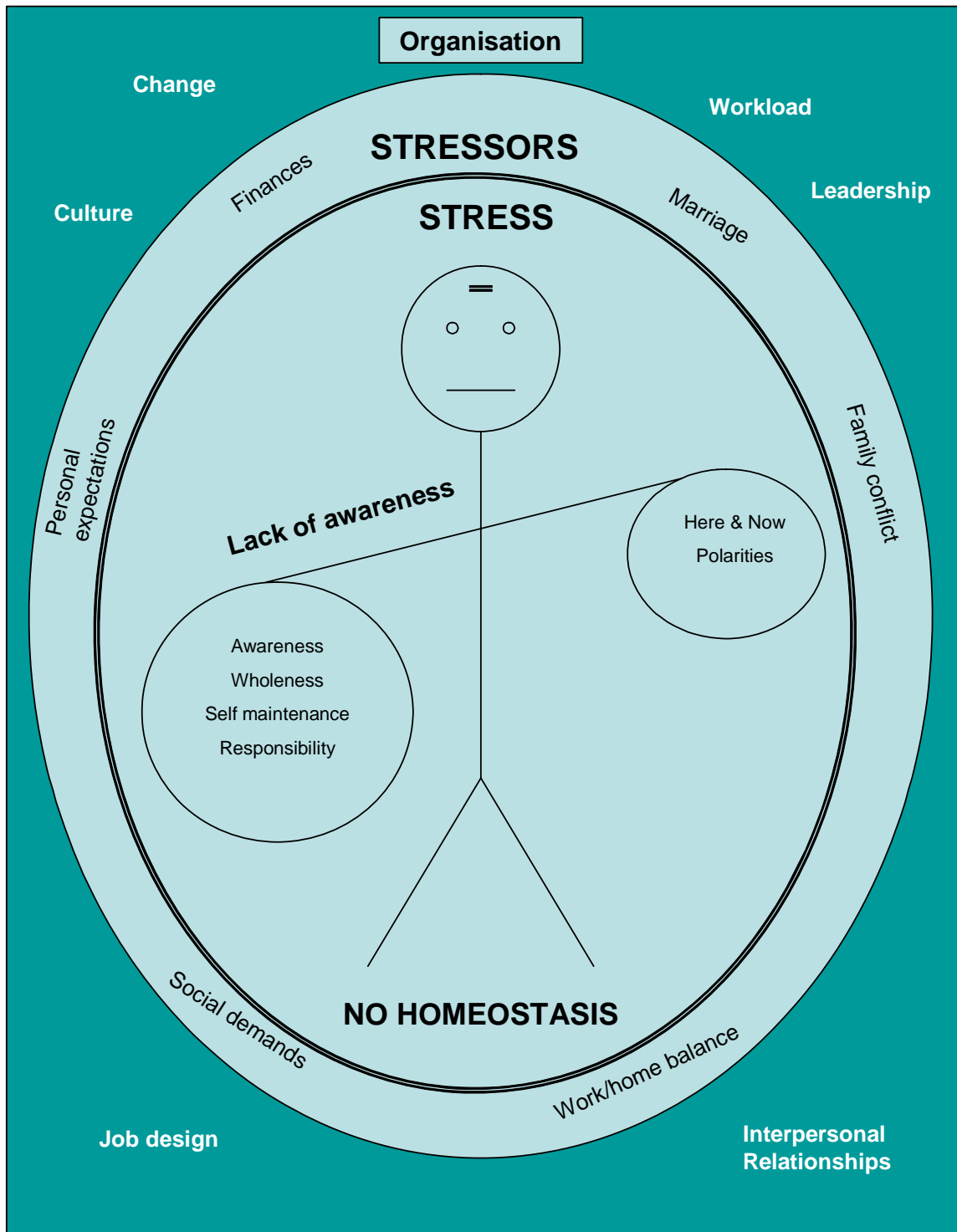
Figure 3.9 Stress: No Homeostasis

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.*

- o *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:*

  - o *Mentally alert; senses are activated for survival vigilance.*

  - o *Breathing rate speeds up; nostril and air passages in lungs open wider to get oxygen in more quickly.*

  - o *Heartbeat speeds up and blood pressure rises.*

  - o *Liver releases sugar, cholesterol and fatty acids into the blood to supply quick energy to the muscles.*

  - o *Sweating increases to help cool the body.*

  - o *Blood clotting ability increases, preparing for possible injury.*

  - o *Muscles of the bladder or bowel openings contract, and non-life supporting activity of the body systems ceases temporarily.*

  - o *Blood is diverted to the muscles and muscle fibres tense ready for action.*

  - o *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

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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:

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Nervous System (NS) │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
              ┌────────────────┴────────────────┐
        ┌───────────┐                    ┌───────────────┐
        │ Central NS│                    │ Peripheral NS │
        └───────────┘                    └───────┬───────┘
                              ┌──────────────────┴──────────────┐
                        ┌───────────┐                    ┌───────────────┐
                        │ Somatic NS│                    │ Autonomic NS) │
                        └───────────┘                    └───────┬───────┘
                                              ┌──────────────────┴──────────┐
                                      ┌───────────────┐            ┌───────────────────┐
                                      │ Sympathetic NS│            │ Parasympathetic NS│
                                      │  (catabolic)  │            │    (anabolic)     │
                                      └───────┬───────┘            └─────────┬─────────┘
                                              └ - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -┘
                                                        Metabolism
```
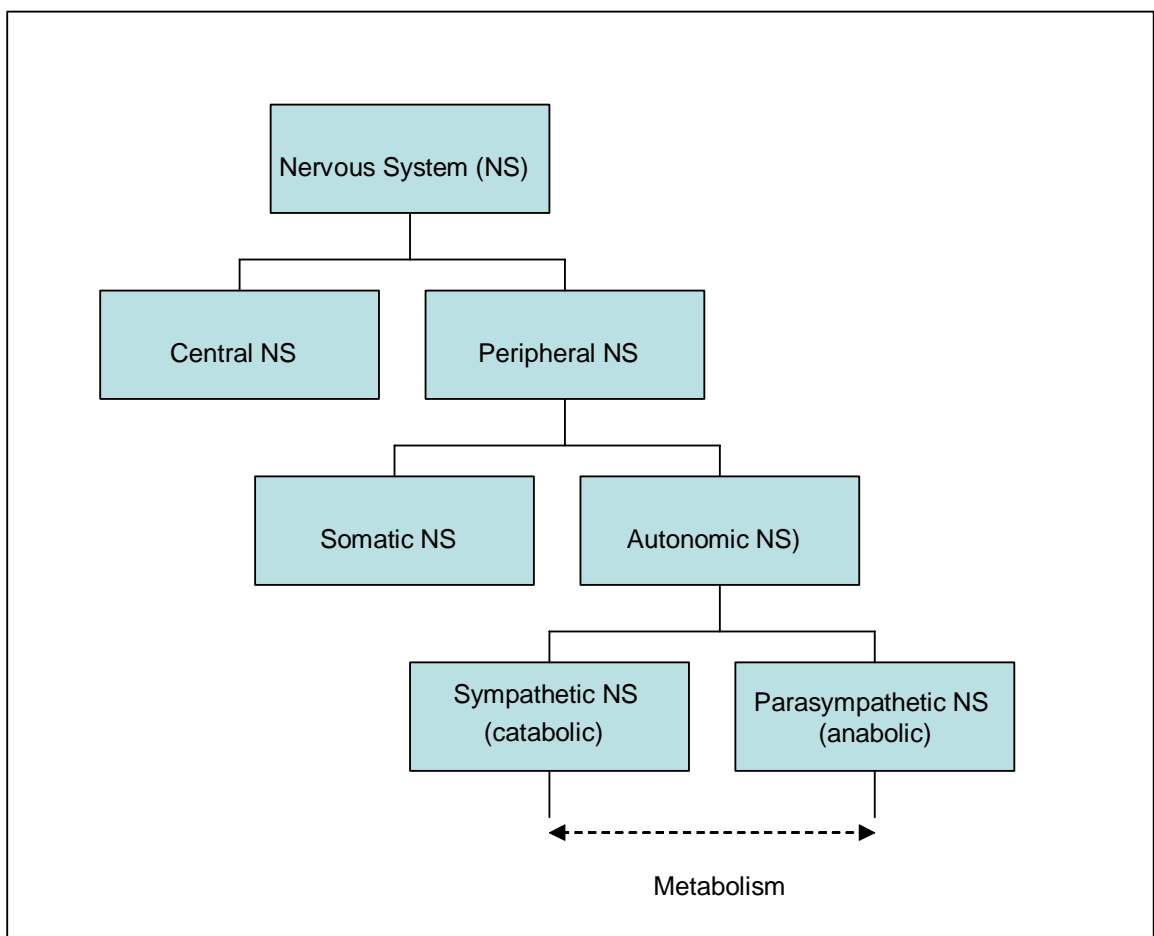
(Compare Gregson & Looker, 2003:42; Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:73)

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

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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.

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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.
    - o Tiredness.
    - o Lethargy.
    - o Breathlessness, bouts of dizziness, light-headedness.
    - o Indigestion, heartburn.
    - o 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).
    - o Bowel disturbance, for example diarrhoea, constipation.
    - o Headaches.

- o Muscle tension, for example, neck pain, back pain.

- o Nervous twitches.

- o Alteration in habits.

- o Increase or decrease in eating.

- o Increased drinking.

- o Loss of sexual drive.

- o Increased smoking.

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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.

o **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 that 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.

o **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.

o **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.

o **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 that 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 wit 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
Monitoring stressors and symptoms • stress diaries • muscle monitoring **Finding resources and attacking stressors** • social skills training • assertiveness training • problem solving skills training **Tolerating stressors** • Cognitive appraisal **Lowering arousal** • Relaxation • Guided imagery • yoga • physical exercise	**Developing coping resources** • social support • time management **Altering stress inducing behaviour patterns** • Type A behaviour pattern **Avoiding stressors through adjustment** • Family/work balance • Career planning

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:

- o A description of the source of the stressor.

- o The person's physical response (muscles, stomach, headaches, jaw clenching etc) to the stressor.

- o What the thoughts and feelings were that the person experienced when he/she was confronted with the stressor?

- o What actions did he or she take to cope with the stressor?

- o The person must evaluate whether his/her coping strategies worked.

- o 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.

Stress response   **Relaxation response**

Heart rate

Blood pressure

Breathing rate

Muscle tension

Sweating

State of mental arousal

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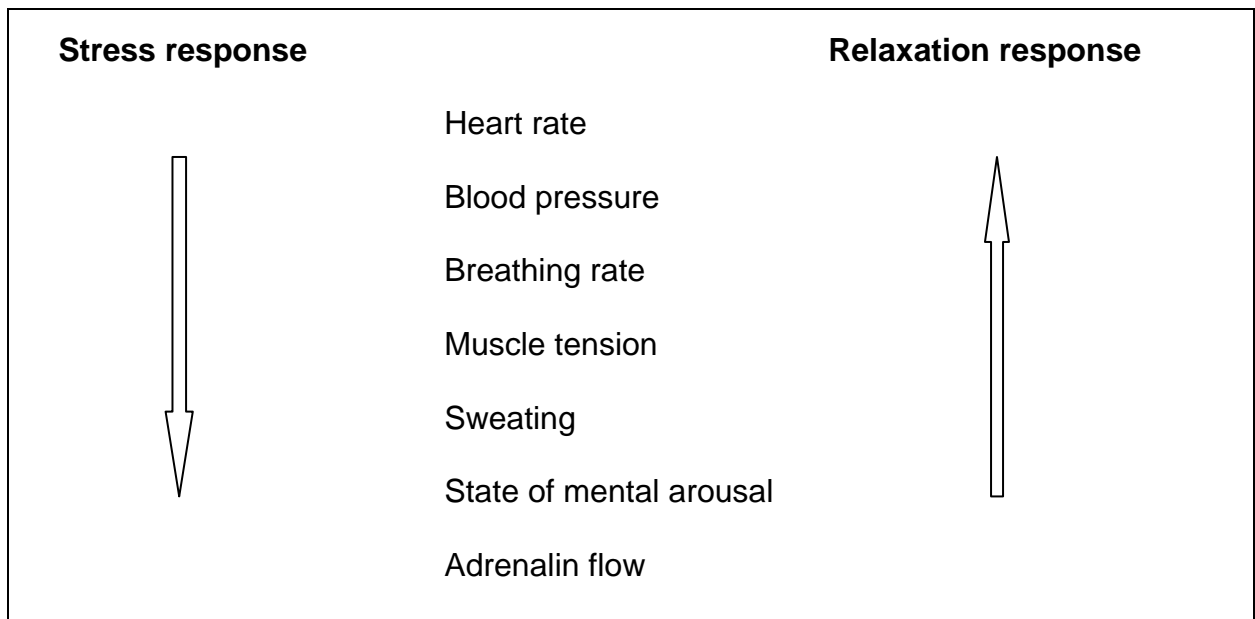
Figure 3.11 The Benefits of Mastering Relaxation (Burns, 2003:103-104)

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.

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- 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**

  o **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).

o **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:

o   Relaxation techniques.

o   Control over own behaviour.

o   Learning to control cognitive stress responses.

o   Learning to anticipate and plan for predictable stress situations.

o   Learning to 'cool it' in stressful situations.

o   Building stress resistance.

o   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:

o   Diet.

o   Caffeine and alcohol consumption.

o   Smoking habits.

o   Fitness and exercise.

o   Body weight.

o   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.

CHAPTER 4

4   THE USE OF PLAY THERAPY MEDIUMS WITH CORPORATE EMPLOYEES

"People play from their earliest months of life and continue to do so in some form or other until they go to the big playground in the sky" Jennings, 1993.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Play therapy mediums can be incorporated into a stress management programme for corporate employees as the mediums can be effective in creating an environment in which people can become more aware of themselves and make sensory contact with themselves (Schoeman, 1996:53). Play is not an activity that adults are usually associated with, but play therapy mediums can be incorporated into the stress management programme to give corporate employees the opportunity to become more aware of the causes of stress in their lives.

Schaefer (1993:1) is of the opinion that play is an activity that is more easily recognised when others do it, than when it is defined. Play is an activity that a person wants to partake in – he/she does not have to be motivated to partake in the activity. There are many different uses for play within the therapeutic process. According to Schaefer (1993:4), play therapy is used in different ways by the different schools of play therapy:

Behavioural play social workers use play for its relaxation properties as

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well as for helping clients' role play more adaptive behaviours. Psychoanalytic play social workers use interpretations to give clients insight into their unconscious conflicts.

Ward-Wimmer (2003:2) states that adults can use play as a way in which they can integrate their physical and mental functions.

…for adults, play continues as an important vehicle because it fosters numerous adaptive behaviours including creativity, role rehearsal and mind/body integration.

In this way play will enable corporate employees to adapt the behaviour that causes stress in their lives and make a decision to take back the control in their lives. The corporate employees will also have an opportunity to relax and de-stress through the use of play therapy mediums.

In this chapter the focus will be on the definition of play, the history and development of play, the value of play and the play therapy mediums that will form part of the stress management programme. Although the objective is for corporate employees to partake in a stress management programme, the researcher will refer to the person making use of the play therapy mediums as the participant or corporate employee.

4.2 DEFINING PLAY

In theory it seems as if there is some difficulty to come to one single definition of play. Landreth in Schaefer (1993:43) concludes that play is often ***easier to recognise and observe than it is to define***. He states that the problem in compiling a definition lies in

the fact that there is not one set of rules or behaviour that includes the different forms of play.

Play has been defined by many authors in different ways. Sapora and Mitchell in Ellis (1973:14) refer to definitions by the following authors:

Lazarus: *Play is an activity which is itself free, aimless, amusing or diverting.*

Dewey: *Activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves.*

Gulick: *What we do because we want to do it.*

Stern: *Play is voluntary self sufficient activity.*

Patrick: *Those human activities which are free and spontaneous and which are pursued for their own sake. Interest in them is self-sustaining, and they are not continued under any internal or external compulsion.*

Rainwater: *Play is a mode of behaviour, … involving pleasurable activity of any kind, not undertaken for the sake of reward beyond itself…*

Pangburn: *Activity carried on for its own sake.*

West (1996:11) defines play as follows:

> *…allows opportunities for physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth and is often pleasurable, spontaneous and creative. Play can reduce frightening and traumatic events, it may relieve anxiety and tension; it can aid relaxation, amusement and enjoyment.*

Apart from this, play can be used as a tool in therapy and allows for a cathartic release of feelings and emotions (West, 1996:11). The cathartic release is one of the reasons that play therapy may be effective as part of a stress management programme. The corporate environment does not allow much space for the ventilation of feelings and this programme will give the participants the opportunity to relax and make contact with issues in their lives and in their working environment.

Play is defined by Gitlin-Weiner, Sandgrund and Schaefer (2000:5) as follows:

> *Play is pleasurable, spontaneous, voluntary, intrinsically motivated, flexible and a natural product of physical and cognitive growth.*

According to Gitlin-Weiner, *et al* (2000:5), play is considered to be different from other behaviour because of the following reasons:

- **It is pursued for its own sake.**

  It is an activity that is performed because it is enjoyable and it is what the person wants to do.

- **Focused on a means rather than on ends.**

  The focus is on the play. It is not what the result of the play is going to be. This is one of the reasons that play therapy is de-stressing. There are no expectations from the employees or the social worker.

- **Directed to exploring objects in order to do something with the objects.**

  The participant could be asked to explore and decide which miniatures will be used in the sand tray. In this way the participant becomes part of the play therapy process.

- **Not considered a serious endeavour because no realistic result is expected.**

  There are no expectations regarding an outcome. The activities are done because the participant wants to do them. He/she should not experience any pressure.

- **Not governed by external rules.**

  While working with any specific medium, there are some limitations in the use thereof, for example the participants should not throw the sand out of the tray onto the floor. But, if the participant plays within these limitations he/she can do whatever they like with that play therapy medium.

- **Characterised by active involvement of the player.**

  The participant has to be involved in the process. It is not successful play therapy if the social worker or social worker is doing all the playing and the participant is not involved.

According to Landreth in Schaefer (1993:43), the following characteristics are inherent to play:

- Intrinsic motivation.

  The participant has the genuine desire to be doing what he/she is doing. The person participates in the play activity out of his/her own free will.

- Attention is given to what the participant is doing (the process of play) and not to the goal that "should" be achieved. Experiences and interactions are spontaneous and are expressions of the self.

- Play behaviour is often make-believe or fantasy.

  The participants pretend that they are other characters and play out their feelings and experiences in a safe environment.

- Play behaviour does not have a definite set of rules. Rules are made as the play continues. The participants set their own boundaries with regard to their self-expression.

- Play allows the freedom to explore new situations, environment and objects.

  Sensory awareness takes place. The participant can take cognisance of his/her environment and experience it, as if for the first time.

- Play leads to full involvement of the participant.

  The whole focus of the participants is on the activities at hand. They forget about everything else and just play for the allotted time.

Ward-Wimmer (2003:8) states the following regarding play:

> *Play, whether with games, puppets, drums, clay, sports, motion, drawing, drama, dolls, sand, or whatever else is available, invited a cascade of positive effects.*

The researcher defines play as an activity in which participants can lose themselves and create some distance between themselves and the pressures of everyday life. They can focus totally on the enjoyable play activity at hand. They can relax whilst experiencing the drawings or the clay at the same time.

As previously mentioned, this chapter will focus on the play therapy mediums that can be included in a stress management programme for corporate employees. However, some attention also needs to be given to the history and development of play.

4.3 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

Human beings have played since the beginning of time. Lowenfeld in Gitlin-Weiner, *et al.* (2000:1) refers to the fact that archaeological diggings show that every civilisation has had toys that were used for play. Play has always been an activity which was associated with children. It is something that children do before they become adults and are confronted with the real world Cohen (1993:16) states the following about play:

> *Victorian society and industry needed to define play and leisure as rare, abnormal activities that were the opposite of that normal activity, work. Thus there were periods in history that it was unacceptable for children and/or adults to play. Everybody had to be busy with work.*

Play was not always considered to be a child's activity. Aristotle believed that improvisations of religious ways became the basis for the comedies that Athens was famous for and he linked play to adult behaviour. Cohen (1993:18) mentions that in the past, play was closely related to adult behaviour:

…such improvisations suggest that play was not something that only children did but it might have important connections with very adult activities, such as ritual, prayer and drama.

Play was not a subject that ancient authors such as Plato wrote about. It was something that may have been mentioned but sources indicate that children and adults in ancient Greece and Rome played many of the same games (Cohen, 1993:18). Furthermore, there was some importance given to the observing of play from as early as the 18th century. Play was a part of life, but it took a long time before people realised that play could be used as a tool in therapy.

Social workers did not always use play in therapy. Play was often seen as unimportant and just a part of growing up. It was not until the end of the 19th century that play was recognised as having some importance in the therapeutic process.

In Gitlin-Weiner, *et al* (2000:2-5), the movement from play towards the use of play in therapy is highlighted as follows:

1896:   Play was seen as the evidence of progress within a race.

1899:   Play was seen as instinctive behaviour that people have, to train for future roles.

1903:   Froebel emphasised the symbolic components of play in his book, The Education of man.

1909:   Freud has a case referred to as "little Hans" and in this case he realises the need for therapy in the child's life but he employs the child's parents to implement the actions. This was the first published case of a psychological approach to working with a child (compare

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Landreth, 1991:26).

1946 – 1966	Play is incorporated into the therapeutic process more and more by researchers such as Anna Freud and Melanie Klein.
1939:	Margaret Lowenfeld starts the development of her "Miniature World Technique", where the sand tray is used in therapy.
1950 – 1969:	Erikson formulated and published work on child analysis. This was a guideline for using play in therapy.
1940 – 1960:	Play therapy movement became very active.
1952:	Piaget' theory of cognitive development and specifically the impact of symbolic thinking on fantasy and make believe, influenced the use of play in therapy.
1964:	Virginia Axline wrote the book: "Dibs, in search of self", which is actually a case study on the use of play therapy with a child in need.
1960 – 1980:	Different researchers and social workers' such as Ginott, Moustakas and Pellar made contributions to the application of play therapy and this was central to the understanding of the treatment of the child.

During this period of time the movement was always toward the use of play therapy with children. It was only later that social workers found that play can be used as effectively with adults (refer par 4.5).

4.4 THE VALUE OF PLAY THERAPY:

According to Schaefer (1993:6-11), the following factors are an indication of the value of play within the therapeutic process:

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- **Overcoming resistance**

Play establishes rapport and an alliance with the participants because it is interesting and enjoyable. Many times participants attend therapy or training because they have been asked to do so. Therefore, it is necessary to build a rapport with those participants before starting with any serious "work".

- **Communication**

Play is a form of communication that is primarily non-verbal and constitutes a non-verbal language as well as verbal language. Play expresses thoughts and feelings on conscious and unconscious levels. Therefore, communication takes place on two levels, the conscious level as well as on the unconscious level. Play provides a window into the inner world of a participant.

- **Mastery**

Play helps the participant to acquire skills that are necessary to be competent in the world. It creates a sense of power and control. Repetition in play allows the opportunity to master the task. Because play is characterised by the qualities of novelty, variability and challenge, people stay interested and they want to repeat the task.

- **Creative thinking**

Through play the participant's problem solving skills are improved and play promotes creative thinking. Play allows for experimentation with new options

without the fear of negative consequences.

- **Catharsis**

Through play, participants have the opportunity to release their tension and find comfort in the play process. Feelings of anger, guilt or anxiety can be released by the participant is a safe environment.

- **Role play**

The participant is given the opportunity to try out new roles until he/she is comfortable in the role. Thus, there is a feeling of empowerment. Role play helps the participants to step out of themselves and view themselves form another person's point of view. Furthermore, they develop empathy for other because they have to "step into someone else's shoes" for a while.

- **Fantasy**

In a fantasy, the participants have the opportunity to change the world into exactly what and how they want it to be. They enlarge the world by fantasizing about it and they feel in control. Therefore, they develop feelings of mastery over their environment.

- **Metaphoric teaching**

Participants are given the opportunity to change the myths they live by, by identifying with the characters in a story. A sense of "I am not the only one in the world with this problem" is created and as a result the participants feel less

isolated.

The author Ward-Wimmer (2003:4) highlights the advantages of play for all who are involved as follows:

> *Play can increase our self esteem. It invites access to states of well-being and calm as well as silliness and joy. When relaxed in play, we often have an increased capacity for empathy and intimacy. Play is affirming.*

4.5 PLAY AS AN ADULT ACTIVITY

Play comes naturally to children, but adults tend to enjoy play just as much or even more than children when they have the opportunity. When adults play, they have the opportunity to relax and be less competitive than in the "real" world. According to Landreth (1991:36), adult play therapy is not as popular as play therapy with children, but there is an increased interest in the use of play therapy with adults.

According to Cohen (1993:16), play can be used with people in a modern society to relax, in the following way:

> *…we have learned that we live in a stress society. To avoid stress, ulcers and heart attacks, it is necessary to relax. We have learned to play with ourselves.*

Landreth (1991:36) agrees and states that play activities create awareness in adults that cannot be accomplished by mere verbalisation, because the adult becomes absorbed in the play activity. Furthermore, because of life experiences, it is often difficult for adults to

play. They have often forgotten the play process and they need to relearn how to play. In this regard, Ward-Wimmer (2003:5) states the following:

> *We are, generally, a nation of adults who must relearn the art of playfulness. Actually, most folks are quite willing. They just need permission.*

Play therapy mediums can be included in a stress management programme to give participants the opportunity to play because when people start working, they play less and they become serious about work. According to Ward-Wimmer (2003:5), play can be used to reduce stress in adults.

> *Business leaders are discovering the power of play to refresh, nurture and reduce stress. Organisational development professionals often work with staff in playful ways to invite the most genuine, rather than narrow, cognitive responses.*

One of the main goals of a stress management programme is for employees to become more aware of their own process, to become more connected to themselves and to identify the causes of stress in their lives. If this awareness increases they can start changing some of their negative lifestyle habits that lead to stress. The play therapy mediums are sensory mediums and these mediums will be able to enhance the employee's awareness of self and thus the awareness of what causes stress in life.

According to Schaefer (1993:592), some of the advantages for the use of play therapy with adults are as follows:

- *Play can help them regain their 'child self'.*

- *Play therapy can help adults to connect with their affective side.*

- *Play therapy can help adults to get into touch with creative aspects.*

- *Play therapy can also help highly stressed adults become more relaxed.*

- *It can provide catharsis for these clients.*

- *It can help adults to manage boredom and depression.*

The relationship between play and adulthood is emphasized further by Schiller in Cohen (1993:23-24) where he states that reality takes away a persons ability to play if reality is tough. If employees have to focus on feeding, clothing and housing themselves and their families, it becomes difficult to find the time or the motivation to play. Furthermore, Schiller states that play makes people whole and unserious, and that **through play, reality loses its seriousness.**

A stress management programme will offer employees the opportunity to take a break from the stressors in their lives and to relax through play. According to Cohen (1993:169) it is becoming more and more acceptable for adults to play. This is a difficult thought for many researchers to accept as it was always stated that the reason children play, is to prepare them for adult life and reality. He states the following:

> *One mark of the so-called post modern adults is their willingness to play games and sometimes exactly the same games as children.*

The researcher is of the opinion adults will enjoy play during training sessions. The break with reality will give them an opportunity to relax and to become aware of the causes of stress in their lives.

This is one of the reasons that many corporate organisations are incorporating a sense of fun and play in the workplace. Team building activities give corporate employees the opportunity to relax while they play. Lundin, Paul and Christensen (2000:63-66) have made play part of a workplace philosophy. The whole idea is that business is serious but people can still have fun while they are working. The benefits of fun in the workplace are numerous:

- **More business is done while having fun.**

   The authors explain that people can still have fun even if they are serious about doing business. The quality of the work has to stay the same but employees can reflect a positive and helpful attitude. When having fun while working, the turnover becomes lower, employees enjoy their work, they feel as if they are in a winning team and they have pride in their work.

- **Morale improves, which leads to a low staff turnover.**

   Play at work is a fun-filled way to function. It energises people and they can put their energy into creativity if they choose to have a positive attitude. Employees want to stay in an environment were they are having fun.

- **Colleagues become friends with the other players on the team.**

   When employees are having fun, they are happy and when they are happy, they treat others well. They want to be part of a team of people who have a positive attitude and they can enjoy their time together and become more than team players, they become friends.

- **Employees have pride in what they do.**

  Employees look for creative ways to engage their customers because it is important to them to render the best service they can.

According to Lundin, Paul, Christensen and Strand (2002:5), play can be part of work in the following way:

> *…work made fun gets done, especially when we choose to do serious tasks in a light-hearted, spontaneous way. Play is not just an activity, it is a state of mind that brings new energy to the tasks at hand and sparks creative solutions.*

Play comes naturally to people of all ages but employees tend to get caught up in the corporate pressures and they seem to forget how to play. The corporate environment is starting to encourage "play" in the workplace because it improves morale and creates cohesion within the work environment.

The following play therapy mediums can form part of a stress management programme and will be discussed in more detail:

- **Creative mediums**
  - Drawings (scribble, theme-drawings, finger-paints, body image).
  - Clay.
  - Sand.

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- **Dramatised play**

    o Fantasy.

    o Metaphors.

- **Relaxation play**

    o The use of music.

    o Muscle relaxation.

    o Breathing exercises.

4.6 DIFFERENT PLAY THERAPY MEDIUMS

There are different types of play therapy mediums that can be used in therapy or in a training programme. Some participants enjoy certain activities more that others and some social workers are more comfortable with the use of certain play therapy mediums. This is an individualised reaction to the play therapy mediums and the social worker should be aware of this and allow space for it.

There are numerous forms/types of play. Porter (1983:216) lists the following types of play:

- Creative play

- Dramatised play

- Biblio therapy.

However, Kottman & Schaefer (1993:591) refer to other forms of play such as assessment play and relaxation play, and suggests that play therapy with adults can be divided into the following categories:

- Physical play: any activities that are essentially action oriented.

- Manipulative play: when the emphasis in play is controlling and manipulating

the environment.

- Symbolic play: this involves fantasy and art therapy.

- Games: where rules and conversation are included such as with board games.

Creative play, dramatised play (or symbolic play) and relaxation play will be discussed in detail as these are the forms of play that can be used in a stress management programme. Sensory play will not be discussed separately as it is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Sensory awareness enhances the process where the participants can make contact with themselves and realise the effect of stress on their lives (Schoeman, 1996:53).

4.6.1   Creative Play

Creative play usually involves some form of art or handwork and it is an opportunity for emotional expression (Van der Merwe, 1996:139). The author Catanach (1993:28) agrees that creative play allows for self expression. Creative play is important for creating awareness and making contact with the "self". During creative play the participants will have the opportunity to focus on positive and negative aspects of their lives or current situations, therefore, the polarities will be brought to the fore and thereafter integration of those polarities can take place.

4.6.1.1   Sand Play

The sand tray technique was initially created by Magaret Lowenfeld. She referred to it as the "Miniature World Technique". With this technique she attempted to structure play. Children were instructed to build a series of scenes in the sand tray with an assortment of objects. Lowenfeld interpreted the different "world scenes" in terms of criteria regarding the content, themes, changes, process and space as follows:

> *It (the sand tray) is an apparatus… which will give a child power to express his ideas and feelings; it is independent of knowledge and skill; it is capable of representation of thought simultaneously in several places at once; it allows representation of movement and yet (is) sufficiently circumscribed to make a complete, whole… (it) combines elements of touch and sensation, as well as sight, and (it is) entirely free from a necessary relation to reality (Lowenfeld in Gitlin-Weiner, et al: 2000:4).*

The sand is a tactile medium that helps participants to make use of their senses to create greater self awareness. Most people enjoy the feeling of sand between their fingers. Sand play adds a tactile dimension to play and this increases the participant's sensory awareness (Carey, 1990:198).

Sand play can work effectively with adults as well as with children. Mitchell and Friedman (2003: 195) state the following regarding sand play:

> *Sand play therapy gives adult clients the opportunity to portray, rather than verbalise feelings and experiences that are often difficult to express in words. Therapists and clients alike have found that the sand play scenes, created with sand, water and miniatures in a shallow box, serve as a window into the unconscious that contributes a surprising, new vantage point from which to nurture and experience healing and transformation.*

The researcher has experienced that children as well as adults enjoy working with the sand. Oaklander (1988:166) states that people spontaneously start playing in the

sand tray without motivation. The sand tray gives the person a sense of control because it is so much smaller that the real world. The value of the sand tray is as follows:

- Sand is tactile, yet provides a total kinaesthetic involvement (sensory awareness).

- Sand play allows the person to be in total control of the activity and to experience a sense of his/her own inner power.

- Sand play encourages verbalisation in those cases where poor verbal skills exist (Oaklander, 1988:164).

- Fears and fantasies that are usually suppressed can be projected into the sand (West, 1996:75).

- The person can metaphorically play out a traumatic event in the sand, whilst distancing him/herself from the event (Jennings, 1993:15).

- Awareness is facilitated;

- An opportunity to ventilate feelings is given (McMahon, 1992:63).

- When playing with sand the innocent, unsophisticated, and unconscious elements of the psyche are allowed to emerge (Mitchell & Friedman, 2003: 195).

According to Oaklander (1988:169), many Jungian social workers use the sand tray technique with adults and states that the sand tray has no age limit. If a person has experienced an emotional trauma he often finds it difficult to verbalise feelings. There is often an inconsistency between feelings and thoughts. The sand tray helps participants who have difficulty in expressing themselves to ventilate more freely. They metaphorically play out the traumatic event that was experienced and because the situation is reconstructed on a smaller scale, the participants feel empowered. After verbalisation of emotions, participants start to work on a solution to the situation

and can play that out in the sand tray. Carey (1990:193) states that the participants are in control of the sand tray and, therefore, they experience a sense of their own power.

According to West (1996:75), a sand tray should be created by the participants about whatever they want to create and that the social worker should not interfere or interpret the "picture". On the other hand, Oaklander in Jennings (1993:18) describes how she guides children during play therapy with the sand tray, as follows:

> *…goal is to help the child become aware of herself and her existence in the world. Each social worker will find his own style in achieving that delicate balance between directing and guiding the session on the one hand, and going with and following the child's lead on the other.*

The sand tray will evoke the same awareness with adults as with children, but the social worker has to feel comfortable using the sand tray technique. If he/she is not comfortable, the participants will sense it and they will not feel comfortable doing the sand tray technique, either. Furthermore, if there are time constraints, it is easier if the participants are given a theme to work according to in the sand tray.

When using the sand tray, different objects can be used metaphorically. These objects can come from nature or the objects can be miniature characters which are sold commercially (this will be discussed in more detail later). The natural objects enhance the sensory experience of the participants. Each of the participants can choose the objects that they are going to use from nature. This will empower the participants and give them a sense of control.

- **The use of the sand tray**

The sand tray is all about the participants creating their own miniature world in the sand. The following is needed to use the sand tray successfully:

o A sand tray – approximately 50cm on each side.

o Miniature figures such as little soldiers, animals, farmers, play house, castle, cars, babies etc. with which the person can create his/her own scene in the sand (Oaklander, 1988:166-167; West, 1992:75).

Working with the sand tray differs from person to person and from social worker to social worker. Oaklander (1988:169) follows the following process:

o Allow the participants to choose objects that they can use to build a sand scene.

o Tell them to build a scene in the sand. If they have difficulty with this, tell them to close their eyes and picture a happy/sad (stressful or not) situation in their minds and then create that picture in the sand.

o Ask them to tell you a story about the scene created in the sand.

o Motivate them to tell the story in the here and now (Gestalt).

o Let them conduct a dialogue between the objects in the sand tray.

o Let them say what is going to happen in the sand scene in the future (the researcher is of the opinion that participants can be asked how they would like the scene to play out in future, which creates an opportunity for closure of unfinished business).

o The social worker can decide to what extent he/she wants to be involved in the sand scene.

According to Ley and Howze (1993:333), it is effective to make use of photos that can be taken while the participants are working in the sand tray as well as after the sand tray has been completed. The photos should be pasted onto wooden blocks and laminated so that they can be placed in an upright position in the sand tray. The participants can be asked to bring photos along or the photos that were taken by the social worker can be used, and the pasting of the photos onto the wooden blocks can form part of the sand tray session.

West (1996:75) states that the social worker should not get involved in the sand scene and that he/she can gain much more information about the participants by letting the process flow. The researcher agrees with West, but when there is a time constraint it is sensible to have a more directive approach and to guide the participants through the therapeutic process. Furthermore, any handy material can be used in the sand scene. The participants often make use of natural materials such as sticks, stones and leaves, which are found in the surrounding area. In this way the participants are involved in the whole process and it creates awareness when they have to look for the natural substances they are going to use. It is also a sensory experience when they have to look, touch, smell and listen to the sounds in the surroundings.

As mentioned before, there are different roles that the social worker can take on in working with the sand scene. He/she can be actively involved or he/she can let the process play out at its own pace. According to Gill (1991:27), sand play is a window through which the researcher can look into the participants' world.

The social worker must guide the participants to greater self awareness. He/she must be focused on the participants' processes: How do they go about creating the sand

scene? How do they select the sand miniatures? How do they go about creating the scene? What are their individual styles? Are they organised or disorganised when creating the sand scene (Carey, 1990:197)? All of these aspects give the social worker some information regarding the participants, which enables the social worker to give feedback to them. According to Jennings (1993:18), the social worker must be intent on the non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, posture, facial expressions and breathing that the employees convey whilst building the sand scene. This gives the social worker some information regarding the participants' processes.

Sand play is a medium that works effectively with people of all ages. Most people can identify with sand play and can form associations that facilitate greater self awareness. Sand play gives the employees the opportunity to address difficult situations in their lives through creative, imaginary and symbolic play. It is a fun experience that is not "normal" for adults, but it is an experience that brings back memories and which can help adults to make contact with themselves and address the issues in their foreground.

4.6.1.2 Clay

Clay is a medium that people of all ages and from all backgrounds can relate to. People who grew up in rural areas often had to make their toys from clay or mud because there were no other toys available, so they usually enjoy working with the clay. Children in cities seldom play with clay in an informal setting such as a riverbank or farmyard and, therefore, they enjoy the clay work because it is often a new experience to them. According to Jennings (1993:90), clay is a sensory medium that the participants can feel, smell and even taste. It can be used to ***develop or express touch sensation, but also to activate other senses and to provide the context for imaginative play.***

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Furthermore, clay work stimulates sensory experiences and absorbs and/or re-directs the discharge of aggression. The use of clay with people in therapy can be traced back to the work of Lowenfeld. He made use of clay in therapy as a means of developing self-awareness, self image and self concept. His focus was on the relationship to self and the relationship to others. Oaklander (1988:67) refers to clay as one of her favourite mediums. She mentions the following as advantages of the use of clay:

- *It leaves a person feeling good and relaxed.*

- *It is flexible and malleable.*

- *It affords opportunity for flow between itself and the user unequalled by any other material.*

- *It is easy to become one with the clay.*

- *It offers both tactile and kinaesthetic experience (opportunity for sensory experience).*

- *It brings people closer to their feelings.*

- *The sensuousness of the clay often gives them a bridge between their senses and their feelings.*

- *Anger can be ventilated through clay in numerous ways.*

- *Those who are insecure and fearful can feel a sense of control and mastery through clay.*

- *It is appealing to every age.*

Winship and Haigh (1998:81) suggest another advantage of clay which is the fact that it can be used effectively as a group activity. The group can work together to create a sculpture and a discussion can follow from there.

Furthermore, West (1996:89) mentions that clay allows for messy and sophisticated, symbolic play depending on what the participants want to do with it:

- ***It allows for three-dimensional work.***

- ***It is flexible and can be moulded and changed.***

- ***It sometimes has more reality that painting a drawing.***

- ***People can change their minds as they go along and thus change their creation.***

Clay gives the participants the opportunity to master their own creations. During the stress management programme the employees can have the opportunity to create their stressors in the clay, take control and ventilate anger by hitting the clay, throwing it or breaking it. The use of the clay as play therapy medium will facilitate this process (Schoeman, 1996:51). Therefore, this will be empowering for the participants as they will feel that they can control the stressful situation, which in real life seems beyond their control.

It is sometimes necessary to introduce clay in a cautious manner. The medium may generate some resistance. Simple demonstrations of the pliable qualities of clay are enough to generate curiosity and very often the person takes up the clay of his own accord. The researcher has experienced that some people are not comfortable with the sensation of the clay on their hands. They often work with the clay by using only their fingertips and as soon as the activity is completed, they go and wash their hands. The researcher has never found that a participant refuses to take part in the clay activity. Usually clay is one of the most enjoyable activities for the participants.

- **The use of clay**

According to Schoeman (1996:51), it is important to allow an opportunity for the participants to experience the clay, otherwise it is difficult for them to create something from it. The process that is used by Oaklander (1988:69–71) is as follows:

o   The participants breathe in deeply and breathe out.

o   While their eyes are closed they become aware of the temperature of the clay.

o   They breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly.

o   They breathe in and feel the air move through their arms, out through their fingertips and into the clay. This is repeated a few times.

o   They open their eyes and experience the texture of the clay (smell, feel and taste).

o   They kneed the clay, punch it, make holes in the clay and throw the clay repeatedly as hard as they can (this gives them permission to do whatever they like with the clay when and after they have completed their creation).

o   With their eyes open or closed, they can create something out of the clay.

o   They give the creation a voice and describe the creation's life or circumstances.

o   This is then related back to the participant's own life.

Therefore, this process can also be done as part of relaxation therapy because of the focus on the breathing and the awareness that is created through this.

According to West (1996:89), the process can be very simple and easy:

o   The participants can be invited to handle the clay, noting what it feels like

and its texture.

o   This is a tactile experience and therefore awareness is created and the participants can make associations from the sensory experience with the clay.

o   How do you feel while you are working with the clay?

o   The participants are given the opportunity to make contact with their feelings. The clay is the ideal medium whereby the employees can ventilate these feelings.

o   Use the clay to model a theme.

o   The participants are invited to make a model out of the clay, guided by one of the following themes:

   ❖   Their family: the participants can portray their whole family or they can focus on an incident that occurred in their family.

   ❖   Television characters: People often identify with television characters. The participants may be invited to portray a situation through television characters.

   ❖   Animals: Participants often have animals take on the personalities of family members and much information is gained when the animals are related to the different family members.

   ❖   Monsters: Participants often experience certain situations in their lives as monsters. They have the opportunity to create these monsters in the clay and destroy them, which is an empowering activity.

   ❖   Feelings: Participants can create a sculpture in the clay that portrays their feelings and a conversation about those feelings can be formulated.

Clay is an easy medium to use as it is not bound by culture or race. It is a projection technique that can be used effectively with any participant, from any social standing and it allows for an experience at a very deep level. According to Winship and Haigh (1998:71), clay can be used to form an object from the images in the participant's mind. They continue to say that clay can be a facilitator for effective communication, especially in times when verbal communication is difficult. In this article the author also states that clay can be used metaphorically and even a simple pot can assume a functional, aesthetic role. The researcher agrees with this statement and adds that participants often project their feelings onto the object that they have created and, without realising it, assume the role of the clay object.

4.6.1.3   Drawings

Drawing is one of the mediums used most often by social workers. Oaklander (1988:177) suggests the following about drawings:

> *…drawings are like dreams, they tend to make accurate statements about what is going on in one's life at the moment.*

Piaget and Inhelder in West (1996:83) state the following:

> *…drawings and play have a special place in linking the internal and external domains.*

Therefore, greater self awareness is established through drawings. Participants may realise that drawings are an extension of themselves. This is a popular medium with participants of all ages. According to West (1996:65), *art is a wonderful and satisfying form of self-expression*. Thompson and Rudolph (1992) agree that

drawings are often used in Gestalt to verbalise emotions. When emotions are verbalised the participants can start to regain balance in their lives.

There are many different types of drawings that can be used in play therapy, for example participants can be asked to create drawings with a certain theme, or to make a scribble or to create a body image drawing. With all the different types of drawings, different creative mediums such as crayons, pastels, paint or finger paint can be utilised. This medium allows the participants to make choices and with the making of these small choices, they can move towards taking responsibility for their lives.

- **Drawing according to a theme:**

    Participants can be invited to create drawings according to certain themes (Oaklander, 1988:64 & 65). The following are examples of themes that they can be asked to draw:

    o   What you do when you are angry?

    o   A scary place?

    o   A place that makes you happy?

    o   Where you wish you could be – an ideal place?

    o   Feelings: good or bad?

    o   The best part of yourself?

    o   Worst part of yourself?

    o   Three images of yourself?

    Some attention needs to be given to the interpretation of drawings. West (1996:70) emphasises that interpretation and analysis by the social worker is

not necessary and states that it can be very irresponsible to make interpretations of drawings of participants that partake in the activity. Occasionally it may be appropriate to ask the creator of the drawing what is happening in the drawing and why, or invite them to tell the picture's story. The researcher is of the opinion that the participating employee can be asked about the drawing. The participants are entitled to answer the questions to the extent that they feel comfortable. The importance here is that the social worker does not make an interpretation without it being confirmed by the participants who created the drawings.

Most of the mediums in play therapy can be used as metaphors. According to Frey in Schaefer (1993:221), participants can be asked to draw the following:

> *…draw his pain as it is right now, how the pain would look when it is 'all better', and what will help the first picture to change into the second picture.*

Synder (1997:2) state that people are invited to create a drawing with finger paint of anything that can be related to their lives:

> *Finger paints and paper are made available with the directions of "paint a picture of something important to you, or of a dream, or of your family doing something together."*

Rosen in Synder (1997:3) states the following regarding the use of art in therapy:

…the archetypical conflict tormenting the patient's soul is made visible in image form, so the patient can confront it and decide what to do with the part of the psyche to which it refers.

Metaphors are interwoven into the therapeutic process and all the different mediums can be used as metaphors for the participants' circumstances. They have the opportunity to live out the conflicts that they are experiencing through the creative mediums.

The following working model was created by Oaklander (1988:53) to guide the social worker and the client to interpret the projection:

- Have the participant share the experience of the drawing with you.

- Have the participant share the actual drawing with you, describing the picture in his/her own words.

- Motivate the participant to describe different parts of his/her drawing on a deeper level.

- Ask the participant to describe the drawing as if it were him/her, using the word "I".

- Choose specific themes in the drawing for the participant to identify with.

- Ask the participant questions to help the process along (What are you doing? Is there someone with you?).

- Focus the participant's attention and sharpen his/her awareness by emphasising and exaggerating a part or parts of the picture.

- Ask the participant to have a dialogue between two parts of the picture.

- Encourage the participant to focus on the colours that were used.

- Take note of the participant's tone of voice, body posture, facial and body expression, breathing and silences.

- Help the participant to own the picture.

- Link the drawing to the participant's own life situations.

- Focus on the missing parts and empty spaces in the picture.

- Stay with the participant's foreground.

The social worker can ask the participant to give the drawing a name or a theme and create a story about the drawing. The above mentioned model is an important guideline to keep in mind, but in the researcher's experience it is very difficult to use all 14 steps during therapy with a person. The social worker should use the steps that are appropriate at that moment in time.

The following aspects are important when working with drawings:

- **Be sensitive to parts that are missing from the drawing**.

    Ask the creator of the drawing about missing parts, for example if he/she has drawn a self portrait but the figure does not have hands, ask him/her about the fact that there are no hands. Do not make an interpretation without enquiring.

- **What is inferred and/or represented in the drawing?**

    Find out from the participant what it is that the drawing would like to say to the world. What is the drawing about?

- **Be prepared to find the unexpected and the unwelcome.**

    Do not be surprised if the picture relates to a sad or violent incident in the

participant's life. This is unfinished business that has come to the fore by means of the drawing.

- **Colours are important and can convey a message of their own.**

  The social worker can ask simple questions about the colours that were used, for example: "I see you have used much yellow in your picture; how do you feel when you see yellow?"

Drawings should not be evaluated aesthetically. It is important that the participants have the freedom to express themselves according to whatever needs experienced and that the drawing is not criticised. The drawing has to be seen as valuable (West, 1996:84).

- **Drawing a scribble**

  This technique can be used at any stage of the therapeutic process. The technique can be used as an ice breaker, as an activity when the participants are anxious or just as a fun activity. With this technique there is no pressure on the employees to perform. The following steps are emphasised by Hartley-Lowe (1997:122) as important when doing this activity with a group:
  - Ask the participants if they would be willing to play a drawing game.
  - The participants receive a large sheet of paper and each of them can choose a coloured crayon to draw his/her scribble.
  - Ask the participants to make a quick scribble on the paper, in relays, so the first person starts the scribble and the next continues the scribble.
  - Each participant has a turn to add something small, as the objective is for

completed.

o Once the picture is completed the social worker can decide if he/she wants to facilitate a discussion regarding the drawing, or if she/he wants to give positive feed-back to the participants for participating.

According to Kramer in Oaklander (1988:37) the scribble is a very unthreatening technique to help people express something about their inner self. The following steps are suggested by Oaklander (1988:37-38) when making use of the scribble:

o Make a drawing in the air, using your whole body.

o Draw these movements, with eyes closed, on a large sheet of paper.

o Examine the scribble from all sides and complete the picture if necessary.

o Tell a story about the picture.

The researcher would also ask the participating employees to give the drawing a "name" and they can tell the group how this picture relates to their lives.

- **Body image drawing**

This technique is used by many social workers in different ways. It helps people to make contact with themselves. Turner (1997:108) refers to the technique as "outline drawings". She has the drawings (the outlines of males and females) available before the clients arrive for therapy and they can get an opportunity to fill in the missing parts and/or feelings that they are experiencing. She makes use of the drawings as metaphors, the clients see the drawings as someone else but they project their own feelings and experiences onto the drawing (Turner, 1997:108).

Employees will enjoy being involved with the drawing of the outline of the picture. They can be asked to lie on a big sheet of paper, on the floor and the outline of one of their bodies is drawn on the paper by` one of the other employees. After this, the employees can draw their own feelings and experiences on the paper. This makes the activity more personal.

Drawing is a medium which is enjoyable to participants. In a stress management programme, relaxation is one of the goals that need to be accomplished. Relaxation play offers the participant the opportunity to de-stress.

4.6.2   Relaxation Play

There are different types of relaxation play which are experienced by many people as relaxing. It is, however, important to remember that individuals react differently to different relaxation activities. Some activities have a positive effect on some participants while others may experience more stress and anxiety. Play is experienced by many people as a form of recuperating from the effects of the work that they do and also part of the process of restoring the body of the person after hard work. Lazarus is of the opinion that ongoing responding may have a negative influence on the person and the negative effect is best eliminated by play (Ellis, 1973:33). The person can find release in play and forget about or learn to cope better with reality.

There are different types of relaxation play and the following will be discussed in more detail: relaxation with music, muscle relaxation and breathing exercises.

- **Music**

The use of music in therapy is becoming common practice to many social workers. According to Carmichael (2002:223) Bender and Woltman recorded their use of music as an adjunct to play therapy in 1941. Music has been used for many years in play therapy because it is a soothing medium and the use thereof can be as enjoyable for the social worker as for the participants. Music can create a relaxed atmosphere for therapy and it can also be used as an ice breaker, which can prompt discussions (Van der Merwe, 1996:78). Huizinga (1994:25) states that music relaxes a person in body and in mind:

> *This occurs whether they are taking part in the musical activity, or merely lying on the floor and listening to the music.*

Music can be used:

o   To create a relaxed climate.

o   To help with communication and expression.

o   To reduce tension.

o   To bring an element of fun to the activity.

o   As a support system.

o   In combination with the muscle relaxation exercise.

(Van der Merwe, 1996:78)

It is important to take note of the fact that no person is too sick or too disabled to react to music. It has an effect on all people to a lesser or greater extent. The use of music in therapy is not focused on the verbal ability of the client – it is non-verbal and words are not necessary (Carmichael, 2000:224). According to

Huizinga (1994:24) this aspect of music can be used positively during the stress management training. The music could be part of the experience and there should be no added pressure on the individual to express him/herself. Huizinga (1994: 24) continues by saying that people move to the sound of the music and this may have an effect on their stress levels:

> *The advantages in rhythmic movement are that, in addition to the pleasure derived, stress and anxiety are dealt with.*

Research has shown that there is a relationship between breathing and music. Listening to music causes changes in respiration and can induce inner calm and peace.

The researcher is of the opinion that music can be used as part of an ice breaker in a stress management programme. It can be used to set the mood for the rest of the training and can be used throughout the programme whilst activities take place and specifically during the fantasies and visualisation exercises.

- **Muscle Relaxation**

The participants can learn to relax different muscle groups in their bodies until they systematically relax their whole body. The participant's awareness of tension in his/her body is heightened. Their attention is focused on one group of muscles at a time. They have to contract those muscles and keep them tense for approximately five to ten seconds and then relax totally. The muscle groups are contracted one by one to ensure that the whole body relaxes (Van der

Merwe, 1996:78).

Muscle relaxation is often followed by guided imagery. The advantages of guided imagery are that participants gain a sense of mastery over their bodies and their feelings and they are allowed to use their imagination to create hypothetical life situations and try out alternative solutions (O'Connor, 1997:6-7). During this activity the participants can be encouraged to lie down or sit as comfortably as possible and the muscle relaxation is completed systematically.

Muscle relaxation techniques can be used as part of a fantasy or a visualisation activity. The activity can start off with the muscle relaxation, continue into the visualisation and finish with focusing on breathing and relaxing.

- **Breathing**

Breathing patterns often reveal emotions. People who are anxious breathe faster and talk as they breathe in, but people who are depressed sigh regularly and talk as they breathe out (Looker & Gregson, 2003:131). According to Schoeman (1996:54), *an important part of relaxation is breath flow.* A person can be helped to do breathing exercises which provides more oxygen and enables better control over his/her body (Schoeman, 1996:54). The following procedure is suggested by Looker and Gregson (2003:132):

- *Lie on the floor on your back.*

- *Support your head on a pillow.*

- *Bend your knees, keeping your feet flat on the floor.*

- *Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen.*

- *Breathe slowly through your nose.*

- *Keep your mouth closed.*

- *Take slow gentle deep breaths.*

- *As you inhale push your abdomen out against your hand – feel your abdomen expand and your hand rise.*

- *Hold for two seconds and the exhale slowly through your nose.*

- *Feel your stomach deflate and your hand fall.*

- *Repeat four times.*

This relaxation method may create physical awareness within a person. Whilst doing the breathing, he/she may become aware of the movement of their abdomen and other muscles in their bodies.

4.6.2.1   Dramatised Play

Dramatised play allows the participants the opportunity to give life to their feelings, wishes and ideas through fantasy, imagery and metaphors.

According to Van der Merwe (1996:128), the advantages of dramatised play are:

- *That the participants can ventilate intense emotions and relive situations that are troubling.*

- *The participants are in control of the situation – and this can be very empowering.*

- *Communication is simplified.*

- *Behavioural change can take place as the participants identify solutions for their situations.*

The focus of the following section will be on the role of fantasy, imagery and metaphors.

- **Fantasy and Imagery**

The word fantasy is derived from the Latin word *phantasticus.* It incorporates different kinds of mental images such as fairy tales, fables, metaphors, symbolic and creative play and extensions of the person's imagination. Fantasy creates a world away from reality (Schoeman, 1996:85). According to Marvasti (1997:35), ***tales and story telling for the purpose of learning and healing is an ancient phenomenon.*** Fantasy and imagery are linked to each other. Singer (1998:83) mentions the following in this regard:

> ***…images appear to be associated with the right hemisphere of the brain and its function which include visual and auditory imagery, spatial representation, pure melodic thought, fantasy and emotional components of ongoing thought.***

Fantasy can be used in co-ordination with music and relaxation exercises. The fantasy can be told by the social worker or it can be started by one person in the group and each person in the group has an opportunity to add onto the fantasy.

An important function of the fantasy is to allow the person to become aware of feelings, attitudes and opinions of others. This creates an atmosphere of understanding. The participants can consider alternative solutions to the problems at hand (Schoeman, 1996:85). It is a way for the participants to

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realise that they are not the only people who experience that situation and that there are alternative solutions to the problem.

- **Metaphor**

The play therapy mediums are all metaphors for feelings or experiences in peoples' lives and therefore, the metaphor forms an integral part of play therapy. Haarhoff (1998:86) describes a metaphor as follows:

> *A metaphor is a condensed image, a concentrated form, a shortened simile, a simile implied as fact. Instead of saying A is like B we say A is B or we call A, B.*

A metaphor has the effect of allowing the reader to think of an ordinary object in a different way. It broadens the reader's outlook (Haarhoff, 1998:86) and it communicates with the person through images. These images often simplify understanding. According to Bowman (1995:206), metaphors are valuable therapeutic tools for working with adults and children because they help explain experiences that are not easily described.

The metaphor is often used as part of a fantasy. Schoeman (1996:87-89) highlights the different functions of the metaphor as follows:

- **Emphatic understanding**

It is often easier to accept a difficult situation when you know you are not the only one that has been through such an experience. Adults and children often find it comforting to hear about people with circumstances similar to their own.

- **Coping with fear**

Many people are ashamed of expressing their feelings of fear. Fantasies can be threatening to these people, especially if it brings them too near to the reality of their own situation. A fantasy can help the person to become aware of his fear and to release his feelings of pain.

- **Consolation of the ego**

A metaphor is a way to help people gain control over their lives. As soon as they see how the character in the story is coping with his/her problems, they can relate to it and adapt their behaviour accordingly.

- **Concretising solutions**

Sometimes the fear or problem that the person is experiencing is not concrete. It helps if the person can visualise the fear or problem, then he/she can start working on solutions to solve the problem.

> *Metaphors can build the bridge to make situations that are full of fear and emotion, more concrete (Schoeman, 1996:90)*

Marvasti (1997:36) states that stories can be used to suggest new possibilities and to get the client's total attention. Most people, young and old, enjoy a good story. If the story has a therapeutic component it will not be lost on the listener.

- **Examples stimulate new behaviour**

People learn from the example that has been set in the fantasy. Their behaviour can be modelled according to that of the characters in the story.

- **Giving hope**

The stories create hope and optimism when the person is exposed to the happy endings (Marvasti, 1997:36).

This is especially true when the people listening to the story can generalise aspects of the story to their lives. If they are in more or less the same situation as is portrayed in the story, the happy ending will give them some hope.

According to Haarhoff (1998:87), a person should not complicate the metaphor too much. The image has to become real to the person to whom it is being related, otherwise it loses the impact that was hoped for. The listener should not have to "work out" the metaphor, it should *be like a splash of cold water in the face.*

The metaphors in a story form should include the following aspects:

- A hero – who has the same conflicts and weaknesses as the listener.
- An opportunity for catharsis – the character in the story must ventilate emotions at some stage, with which the listener can identify.
- A positive and a successful ending – because this brings hope (Compare Marvasti, 1997:37; Schoeman, 1996:90).

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The use of clay, sand and drawings are metaphoric expressions of what the participants are experiencing. Metaphors are used every day in many different ways and people do not even realise that they are making use of metaphors. These metaphors describe the experiences that people have and they create images in their minds while they are listening to someone or explaining an aspect to someone. Metaphors are useful in play therapy as people often forget much of the information given to them, but they remember the picture that was created by the metaphor.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Play therapy mediums can be used over a broad spectrum. The mediums are effective with children as well as with adults and are enjoyed by both children and adults. Adults often do not have the time or they forget how enjoyable "play" can be. A stress management programme which includes play therapy mediums, can allow adults the opportunity to play.

The focus of this chapter was on the different play therapy mediums and how they can be used with adults. Some attention was given to defining play therapy and the therapeutic use thereof. Play was always seen as part of growing up and as a model for adult life. Historically it became obvious that adults do play. Society expects adult fun to be on a sport or religious level.

If a stress management programme includes play therapy mediums such as drawings, sand tray, clay, metaphors and fantasy, the adults will have the opportunity to make contact with themselves and self awareness will be enhanced.

The following chapter will focus on organisational behaviour and how the corporate employee's stress levels may be affected by his/her job.

CHAPTER 5

5   ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The corporate organisation is the environment in which employees function. There are certain factors which are true to the corporate environment which cause or contribute to stress in the lives of employees. It is necessary to be aware of these factors because they can have an effect on the functioning of employees.

Organisations have existed since the beginning of time. People have joined forces to accomplish their goals in families, tribes, political units and gangs (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994:725). During the 1950's and 1960's, organisational behaviour became a field of research. The study of organisational behaviour emerged from different streams of thinking and writing. Tosi, Rizzo and Carroll (1994:9) explain it as follows:

> *Pscychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and other scientists studied worker and management problems from a behavioural perspective before 1960, and managers were concerned with human problems before then.*

The purpose of this field of research (organisational behaviour) is to enhance the understanding of the people within the organisation towards one another, and this may lead to improved productivity, customer satisfaction and improved general management within the organisation (Gibson, *et al.,* 1994:6).

There are many factors within the organisation which could cause stress in the lives of employees. Many companies see their employees as their competitive advantage and this places a high demand on the employees. According to Buzan in Bloisi (2003:121),

Stress is one of the main damaging effects to any company and its bottom line. When people are stressed, a business disintegrates by definition.

There are many different aspects within the work situation that can cause stress among the employees. Some of these stressors are role interaction, over and under stimulation, decision making, organisational processes and individual attributes (Fincham & Rhodes, 1999:43-52). Stress may lead to less productive individuals, more absenteeism and stress related illnesses. Corporate employees form an essential part of the success of an organisation and if stress is inhibiting their functioning, it could have a detrimental effect on the organisation. The organisation expects employees to perform and adapt to the changing environment within the organisation and this causes stress in the life of the employees and has an effect on productivity, at a cost to the organisation.

There are many different factors that employees have to contend with in the organisational environment such as change within the organisation, expectation of growth, globalisation, diversity within the workforce and technological changes (Tosi, *et al.*, 1994:4-7). These are some of the aspects which could cause stress for employees within the organisation. Employees have the capacity to adapt and change, but there are risks involved when this is expected constantly. According to Fincham and Rhodes (1999:40), ongoing stress experienced by employees in the work place may have a negative effect on their health and general functioning. They explain it as follows:

> *…the person, who constantly struggles to master a turbulent environment or a demanding task, faces an increased risk of peptic ulcers, mental illness, hypertension and coronary heart disease.*

These are all stress related illnesses that may be experienced by corporate employees within the changing organisational environment. The researcher would like to draw the reader's attention to the model in figure 5.1 that shows how the corporate employee's homeostasis could be affected by the stressors within the organisational environment:
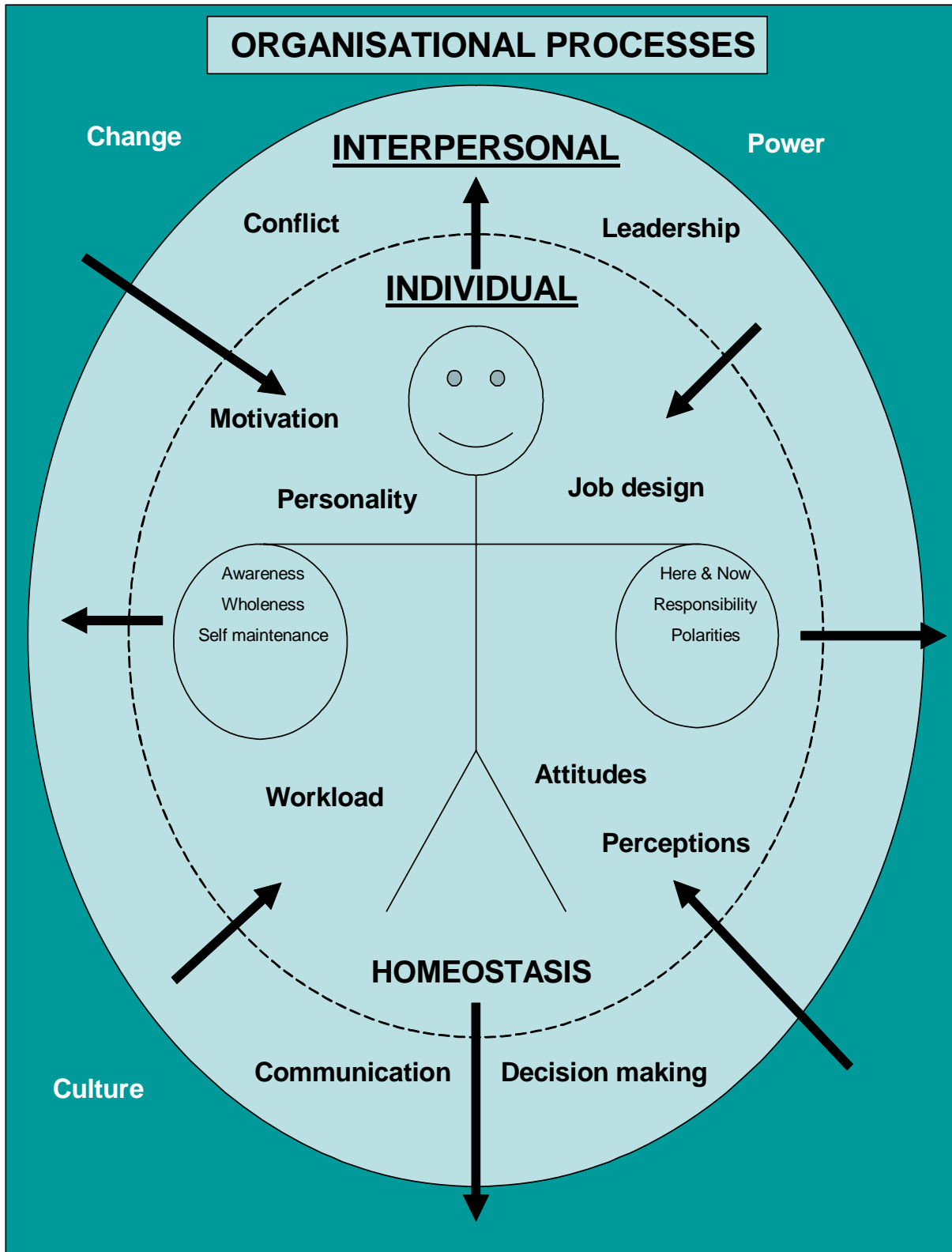
Figure 5.1 The Employee in the Organisation

Employees have individual factors such as personality, perception, attitudes and motivation that can have an effect on how they behave within the organisation. These factors also have an effect on their ability to cope with stressors in their lives. These employees do not stand on their own but they stand in relation to other employees within the working environment. At times there could be barriers in communication with others or there is conflict between employees. These factors could be experienced by the employees as stressful and they have to learn how to cope with these inevitable occurrences. Furthermore, employees are functioning within the larger environment of the organisation and within this environment there are processes (such as change) that occur on an ongoing basis. Employees have to make adjustments to ensure that they can function optimally within the organisational environment.

Organisational behaviour is important for this study because it enlightens the reader with regard to employee behaviour within their working environment. It places the study within the organisational context. This is the environment in which employees may experience stress and this is also the environment in which their stress needs to be addressed.

This chapter focuses on defining organisational behaviour, the individual within the organisation, interpersonal behaviour within the organisation and organisational processes.

5.2   THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

5.2.1   What is an Organisation?

According to Buchanan and Huczynski in Campbell (1997:3), organisations can be defined as follows:

Organisations are social arrangements for the controlled performance of collective goals.

Furthermore, Campbell (1997:3) explains that the following characteristics describe organisations effectively:

- *They all contain people.*

- *The people in the organisation perform a role and their continued membership of the organisation is dependent upon such a performance.*

- *The organisation has a collective goal to which all members subscribe.*

- *All the roles together, help the organisation achieve its collective goal.*

- *The roles are divided so that members of the organisation perform different tasks according to their expertise, interest or specialism.*

- *There is clearly defined hierarchy of authority so that each member of the organisation is aware of where he/she "fits in".*

- *The limits or borders of an organisation are usually clearly defined,*

and thus there is usually no doubt whether a particular person is "inside" or "outside" of the organisation.

5.2.2   Defining Organisational Behaviour

There are many different definitions for organisational behaviour. According to Senior (1997:4), an organisation is a group of people working together to achieve the same goal Organisational behaviour is defined by Daft and Noe (2001:4) as follows:

The actions and interactions of individuals and groups in organisations.

All the employees in the organisation contribute to the accomplishing of the goals of the organisation. The employees within the organisation interact with one another and have an influence on the behaviour of others. Furthermore, behaviour may be advanced or inhibited by the values, structure, policies and goals of the organisation. All of these factors form part of organisational behaviour (Daft & Noe, 2001:4).

Gibson, *et al* (2000:5) describe organisational behaviour as follows:

…the field of study that draws on theory, methods and principles from various disciplines to learn about individual perceptions, values, learning capacities and actions while working in groups and within the total organisation; analysing the external environment's effect on the organisation and it's human resources, missions, objectives and strategies.

Human behaviour influences the effectiveness of the organisation. Organisations are

made up of people and each person is unique. To be effective, the organisation must see each person as unique and different and embrace that diversity to contribute to the success of the organisation (Gibson, *et al* 2000:5). Individual performance can be seen as the basis of organisational performance and to be able to manage processes within the organisation effectively, it is important to understand the individual within the organisation.

5.3 BEHAVIOUR WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

The employee's behaviour within the organisation is influenced by certain variables that should be taken into consideration when observing at the person holistically. The individual behaviour framework shows how the environment influences the individual, which influences the behaviour of the person and the outcomes of his/her performance and interaction (Gibson, *et al*, 2000:92).

The environment	The individual	Behaviours	Outcomes
Work • Job design • Org structure • Policies and rules • Leadership • Rewards and sanctions • Resources **Non-work** • Family • Economics • Leisure and hobbies	Abilities and skills Family background Personality Perception Attitudes Attributions Learning capacity Age **Race** **Sex** **Experience**	Problem-solving Thinking process Communication • Talking • Listening Observations Movement	**Performance** • Long term • Short term Personal development Relations with others Satisfaction

Table 5.1 Individual Behaviour Framework (Gibson, *et al*, 2000:92).

Table 5.1 shows that the environment and the individual (employee) influence each other to a great extent, and in turn, that has an effect on the productivity, personal development, relationships and satisfaction experienced by employees. The behaviour of employees has consequences and the results of their actions serve as feedback to other employees and the organisation (Gibson, *et al.*, 2000:92).

Employees are expected to perform a certain job and for them to be able to perform well, they need to have the skills for the job. The organisation has the responsibility to train and educate employees within the working environment (Gibson, *et al.,*2000:93). A lack of

skills was identified as one of the causal factors for stress by Karasek (Schaap, 2002:3.17). The demands that are made on employees in correlation to their skills create stress in the lives of employees (Schaap, 2002:3.17). When trying to understand organisational behaviour, it is important to take the following three aspects into consideration: individual behaviour in the organisation, interpersonal behaviour in the organisation and organisational processes (Senior, 1997:4).

5.4 INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR

The organisation is made up of many different employees. Employees have unique characteristics that influence their behaviour within the organisation. These characteristics often play a role in the ability of corporate employees to manage the effects of stress on their lives. Some of the characteristics that have an effect on individual behaviour include personality, attitudes, perception and motivation.

5.4.1 Personality

Personality is reflected in the manner in which a person acts and interacts in different situations. Daft and Marcic (2001:361) define personality as follows:

> *The set of characteristics supporting a relatively stable pattern of behaviour in response to ideas, objects, or people in the environment.*

Therefore, it is behaviour from a certain employee that occurs consistently and repetitively in different circumstances.

According to Gibson, *et al* (1994:124), personality can be described as follows:

- *A stable set of characteristics and tendencies that determine commonalities and differences in people's behaviour.*

- *Personality is an organised whole; otherwise the individual would have no meaning.*

- *Personality appears to be organised into patterns that are to some degree observable and measurable.*

- *Although personality has a biological basis, its specific development is also a product of social and cultural environments.*

- *Personality has superficial aspects (such as attitude towards being a team leader) and a deeper core (such as sentiments about authority).*

- *Personality involves both common and unique characteristics. Each person is different from every other person in some respects, while being similar to persons in other respects.*

Behaviour is usually personality and situation driven, but personality is usually consistent. Personality will determine the way employees behave, as well as the type of situations that employees will get involved in. For example, shy employees, would rather avoid a situation where they are the centre of attraction (Tosi *et al*., 1994:115). This could lead to stress in the lives of employees that have to perform tasks (such as presentations) in front of large groups of people, if they are not comfortable with talking in front of people. A job usually has a set of expectations and it is likely that employees will be placed in a situation where they have to perform a task as part of their job-description with which they are not comfortable. This may lead to stress in the lives of employees.

Furthermore, there are certain personality types that can be linked to stress related

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behaviour. Type A and Type B personality types have been identified and they react to stress differently because of characteristics in their personalities (See par 3.6.1).

5.4.2   Personality Traits

Personality traits are the "parts" that make up the personality. They are usually relatively stable characteristics that people refer to as another person's personality. For example: A has an aggressive personality or B has a kind personality. These attributes differ from person to person and often play a role in the manner in which stress affects the lives of employees.

According to Daft and Marcic (2001:361), research has identified five main personality traits (called the Big Five) which incorporate many other traits. These five traits are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience and are described as follows:

- ***Extroversion***

  The degree to which a person is sociable, talkative, assertive and comfortable with interpersonal relationships.

- ***Agreeableness***

  The degree to which a person is able to get along with others by being good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, understanding, and trusting.

- ***Conscientiousness***

  The degree to which a person is focused on a few goals, thus behaving in ways that are responsible, dependable, persistent and achievement oriented.

- *Emotional stability*

   The degree to which a person is calm, enthusiastic and secure, rather that tense, nervous, depressed, moody, or insecure.

- *Openess to experience*

   The degree to which a person has a broad range of interests and is imaginative, creative, artistically sensitive, and willing to consider new ideas (Daft and Marcic, 2001:361).

Some of the other personality traits which are emphasised in the literature will be discussed in brief.

- **Locus of control**

Employees can have an internal or an external locus of control. If employees believe that they can influence events that take place in their lives, they tend to have an internal locus of control. If employees believe that everything that takes place in their lives is beyond their control, they have an external locus of control (Fincham & Rhodes, 1999:80).

Employees who have an internal locus of control are less likely to conform to pressure and do not change their attitudes easily. Employees with an external locus of control enjoy structured jobs more than unstructured jobs. They prefer participation in job-related decision-making than non-participation. Each employee's locus of control may vary according to the situation and past experiences (Gibson *et al.*, 2000:113).

Locus of control may relate to introjects that the employees have and that has

an influence on their way of approaching the tasks that they have to do within the working environment.

Practical Example:

Employees may have experienced a very strict upbringing, where they were not allowed to make any decisions before they had permission from their parents. They started to believe that they cannot do anything without the involvement of an authority figure. As adults and employees, they may feel that they cannot do anything without an authority figure's approval and after the job is done they want recognition before they are prepared to take another risk. This could inhibit creativity and their productivity could be affected because of it.

- **Self efficacy**

Self efficacy is another personality trait that may play a role in the ability of employees to manage stress. According to Gibson *et.al.*, (2000:114), self efficacy can be defined as follows:

> *Self efficacy is the belief that one can perform adequately in a situation.*

Employees usually evaluate their ability according to past accomplishments, performance of others and emotional states. This has an influence on the perception, motivation and performance of employees (Gibson, *et al.*, 2000:114-115). Drummond (2000:65) is of the opinion that self efficacy can motivate a

person.

Self-efficacy theories of motivation predict that: performance depends upon self-belief.

Self-esteem of employees lies close to their self-efficacy. If they have low self-esteem, they do not think highly of themselves and they may doubt their ability to do the task that they have been asked to do.

- **Authoritarian Personality**

This personality trait is based upon prejudice and is usually very judgemental. Employees with authoritarian personalities are usually experienced as punitive and rigid and others usually feel that they are trying to demean or control them. These employees usually believe that the strong should lead and the weak should follow (Tosi, *et al.*, 1994:119).

Employees with authoritarian personality traits often cause stress in the lives of other employees. They are usually not very flexible and they want to assert themselves in every situation and often it is to the detriment of the employees working together with them.

- **Bureaucratic Personality**

According to Gordon in Tosi, *et al.* (1994:119) the beliefs and values of employees could dispose them toward a preference for rules and regulations. Those with a strong bureaucratic personality identify well with the organisation

and often adapt well to military organisations.

- **Machiavellianism**

Machiavellianism is named after Machiavelli (who wrote "the Prince" in the 16th century) and this attribute refers to employees who manipulate others for personal gain. They have a rational and pragmatic approach to work situations and usually create emotional distance between themselves and their subordinates (Bloisi, 2003:156).

This could lead to the employees feeling de-personalised, as if they are objects that are being used for the personal gain of another individual. If corporate employees start to realise that they are being manipulated, it could create uncertainty and misplaced loyalty which could have a negative effect on the employees' work performance.

- **Dogmatism**

Employees high in dogmatism often see the world as threatening and they are often rigid and closed in their way of thinking. They cling to their own beliefs and are not prepared to consider another person's point of view (Bloisi, 2003:156).

This personality trait may make it difficult for corporate employees to cope within the changing environment of the organisation. If they have to make adjustments to their way of thinking on a frequent basis, it could become very stressful.

- **Self esteem**

Self esteem is the way in which people regard their own value or worth. Bloisi (2003:157) explains how self esteem in the working environment can have an effect on the employee's functioning:

People with high self-esteem tend to like themselves, have high expectations for success, and feel confident they can achieve their goals. Those with low self-esteem lack confidence and look to others for praise and re-enforcement. In doing so they tend to avoid conflict and conform to expected norms.

When people with low self esteem do find themselves in confronting situations, they usually experience these situations as very traumatic and upsetting.

Confrontations in the workplace are unavoidable. It could be very stressful for employees with low self-esteem when they are involved in confrontations. If the employees are upset by a confrontation it could have an effect on the employees' performance.

- **Self monitoring**

Self monitoring means that these individuals are sensitive to the situation and adapt and make changes to meet the expectations and needs that occur. These corporate employees change their personalities to satisfy the audience. Furthermore, they are usually more flexible in working with different types of people (Bloisi, 2004:157).

- **Hardiness**

Commitment, control and challenge form a 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 & Gramling, 1998:41; Brehm, 1998:74). Furthermore, they have *a sense of commitment to themselves, their work, families and other important values* (Brehm, 1998:74).

The above mentioned personality traits all have an influence on the employees' abilities to cope with stress. Certain personality factors have an effect on the employees' ability to cope with stressors in the working environment. Therefore, some employees experience some situations as stressful and others employees do not experience the same situation as stressful.

5.5 ATTITUDES

The employees' attitudes are portrayed in the positive or negative way in which they approach a challenge. Employees can be enthusiastic to tackle a problem or they can complain about what needs to be done. These are ways in which employees portray their attitude. Attitude is defined by Daft and Noe (2001:110) as follows:

An evaluation that predisposes a person to act in a certain way and includes a cognitive, affective and behavioural component.

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5.5.1 Attitude Components

As mentioned in the definition, attitudes are considered to have three components. The cognitive component which includes the beliefs, opinions and information employees have about the object of the attitude, the affective component which includes employees' emotions or feelings about the object of the attitude and the behavioural component, which includes employees' intentions to behave towards the object of the attitude in a specific way (Daft & Marcic, 2001:357).

5.5.2 Job Satisfaction

The attitude of employees towards their jobs and the organisation they are working for may influence productivity and job satisfaction. There is a negative correlation between job satisfaction, absenteeism and turnover (Bloisi, 2003:151). Job satisfaction is described as a positive attitude towards the job. Job satisfaction is linked to the amount of control employees have over their work. This is not always easy to establish but usually employees who have job satisfaction feel positive about their work and other employees find it enjoyable to work with them (Daft & Marcic, 2001:358).

5.6 PERCEPTION

Perception has an impact on the job satisfaction of employees and their ability to manage stress within the working environment. Bloisi (2003:126) defines perception as follows:

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Perception is the selection, organisation and interpretation of sensory data. The critically important process helps people define their world and provide clues for guiding their behaviour.

Perception has to do with the sensory awareness of the employees. The sensory awareness leads to self awareness <u>and</u> awareness of the employees' surroundings.

Practical example:

If the employees' perception is that they may be retrenched (they feel threatened and uncertain), it may cause their Gestalt to move out of balance and these employees will not experience equilibrium. This could have a negative effect on their performance and on their stress levels because they can not stop thinking about the possibility of losing their jobs.

Perception defines what an employee sees as reality. Employees believe that what they see is real and this influences their behaviour. Employees give their own meaning to the stimuli perceived, so the way the situation is seen is often more important than the situation itself.

Perception has a direct impact on the stress that employees experience because stress is often the result of the balance of the perceived stressor or demand and the perceived ability to cope with that demand. According to Looker and Gregson (2003:25), the perception of the individual leads to the stress response:

… a mismatch between perceived demands and the perceived ability to cope. It is the balance between how we view demands and how we think

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we can cope with those demands that determines whether we feel no stress, distressed or eustressed.

5.7 DECISION MAKING

The problem-solving and decision-making processes often go hand in hand. This process can cause a great amount of stress for the employees because most decisions have positive and negative outcomes and the employees' have to decide whether the positive outcomes will outweigh the negative outcomes.

Bloisi (2003:478) defines problem-solving and decision-making respectively, as follows:

> *Problem-solving is the process of eliminating the discrepancy between actual and desired outcomes. Decision-making is selecting the best solution from among feasible alternatives.*

According to Daft and Noe (2001:337), problem-solving is incorporated into and forms part of the decision-making process.

> *Decision-making is the process of identifying problems and opportunities, then resolving them.*

Figure 5.2 illustrates the decision-making process and is explained as follows:

> 1. *The decision maker establishes the scope of the decision situation (problem or opportunity) and the goal of the decision.*
> 2. *The decision maker gathers information about the alternative*

solutions, including their costs and probable outcomes.

3. *The decision maker establishes criteria for selecting an alternative, weighting the importance of each criterion.*

4. *The decision maker compares the alternatives in terms of the criteria to be used and selects the one that is optimal.*

5. *The decision maker implements the decision and evaluates the results, gaining knowledge to apply to future decisions.*

The goal of this model is to reach the best possible decision and solution for the problem.
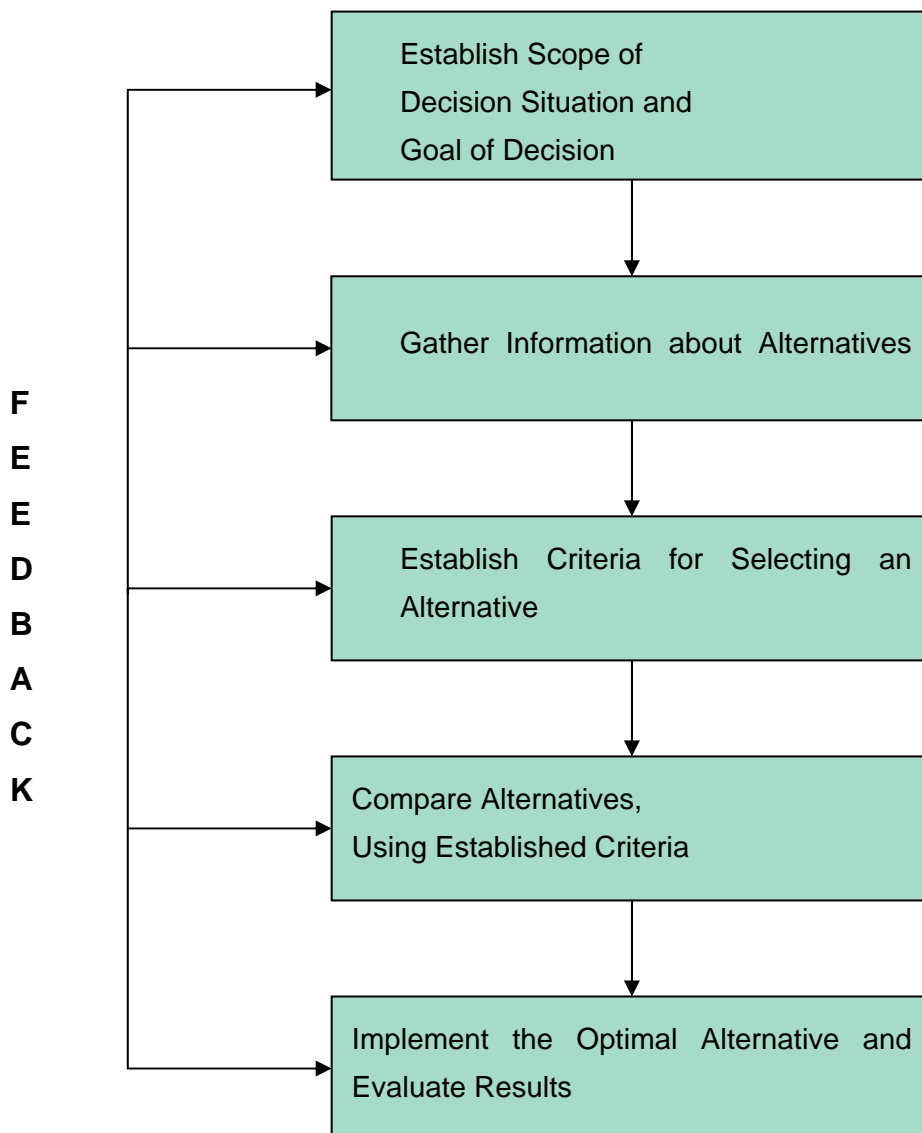
Figure 5.2 The Rational Model of Decision Making (Daft and Noe, 2001:337).

The use of a structured process when making decisions may alleviate the stress that the employees are experiencing. A model (such as above) will enable employees to gain perspective and look at all the alternatives that can be utilised in decision-making and problem-solving.

5.8 MOTIVATION

Corporate employees have to be motivated to continue working within the organisational environment. Different people have different sources of motivation. According to Drummond (2000:62), the word motivation comes from the Latin word *mouvre* which means to *move,* and when studying motivation it is important to ascertain what makes people "move".

Motivation is one of the most important aspects within an organisation because it is the reason for employees to do their work and to do it in the most productive way. Motivation is defined by Daft and Marcic (2001:410) as follows:

> ***Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that arouse enthusiasm, desire, purpose and persistence to pursue a certain course of action.***

Motivation is an essential characteristic, because positively motivated employees strive to find the best way to perform their jobs. Motivated employees are interested in rendering high quality service and are more likely to be productive than non-motivated employees. The motivated employees usually want to come to work and do their share (Gibson, *et al.*, 1994:145).

5.8.1   Why do people work?

What is the motivation for working? What energises employees to get up and go to work? What are the motivational triggers that drive employees to be productive? These are the questions that can be asked when looking at the driving force behind working. There are certain motivational factors that have been identified and will be discussed according to Maslow's needs hierarchy, McCleland's learned needs theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

- **Maslow's Needs Hierarchy**

Maslow suggested that the five basic needs of a human being form a hierarchy. The five needs are basic physiological needs, the need for safety and security, the need for social acceptance, self esteem needs, and actualization needs. These needs are split into a higher and lower order needs as indicated in figure 5.3.

The lower order needs are classified as priority. For example, if people are hungry the thought of food preoccupies their thinking but as soon as they have received food their thoughts move to a higher level need and they will start thinking about their safety. Maslow is of the opinion that people are motivated by unsatisfied needs and every need should be fulfilled to a great extent before the person can move up the hierarchy to the next need (Linstead, Fulop & Lilley, 2004:284).

Maslow's lower order needs correlate with factors such as working conditions, supervision, relations with co-workers, salary, company policy and administration, whereas the factors corresponding to Maslow's higher order needs would be the work itself, responsibility, recognition for work, advancement and achievement (Adler, 1997:162).

Within the organisation corporate employees could experience a lack of motivation because their lower order needs are not met.
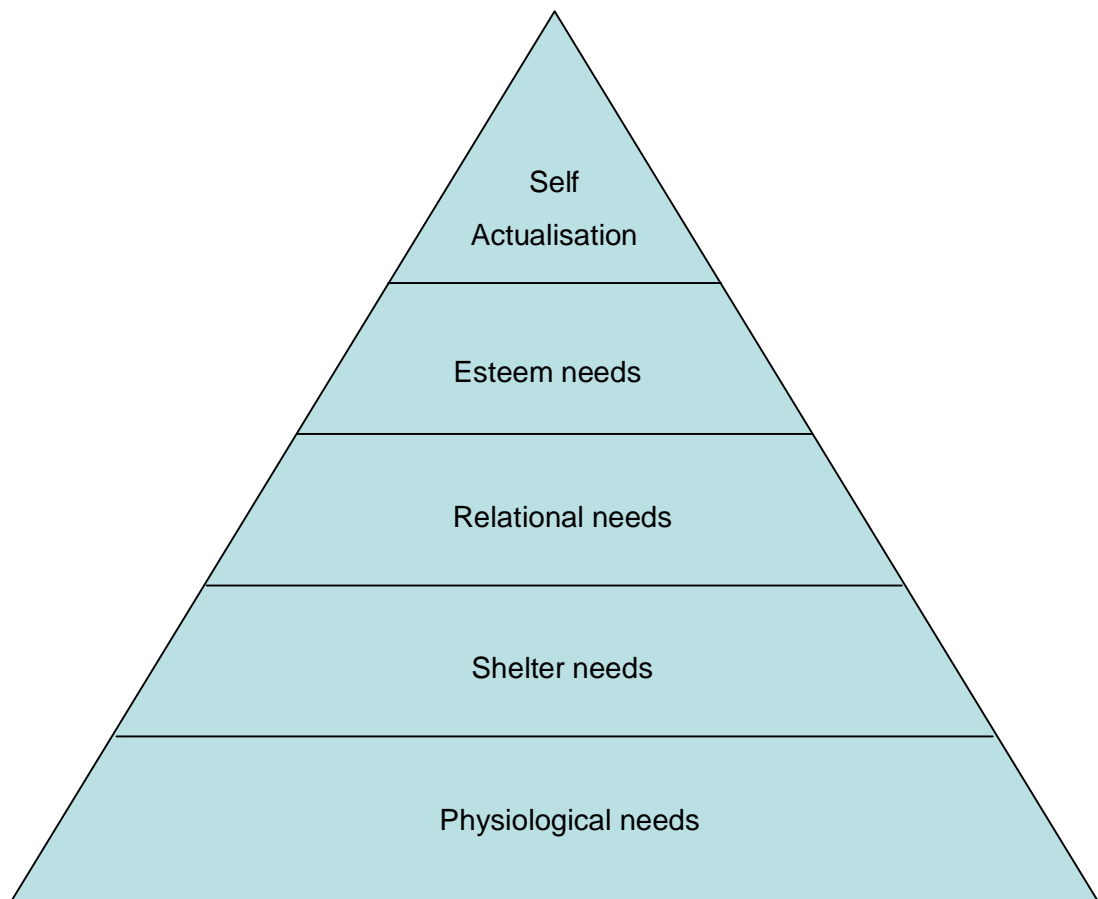
Figure 5.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (Campbell, 1997:193)

> **Practical example**:
>
> If the employees are concerned about pay-cuts and retrenchments, they will lack motivation to focus on the higher order needs such as the need to take responsibility for their work and to be productive. The employees need to know that their lower order needs (salaries and job security) are being taken care of before they can focus on the higher order needs such as job performance.

- **Herzberg's Two Factor Theory:**

Herzberg's two factor theory is essentially concerned with work motivation (Drummond, 2000:64). According to Herzberg, there is a set of external (extrinsic) and a set of internal (intrinsic) factors. The extrinsic factors include salary, job security, working conditions and status. The intrinsic factors include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, the work itself and the possibility of growth. When the intrinsic factors are present they build strong levels of motivation, which result in higher productivity (Gibson, *et.al*., 2000: 134).

The satisfaction of employees lies in two assumptions about people, which are **the need to avoid pain and the need to grow**. A good environment or work context prevents dissatisfaction and enables growth towards self actualisation. Herzberg proposed that job enrichment will increase the motivation of the employees regarding their jobs. Job enrichment would increase the autonomy and the responsibility of the employees (Linstead, *et al*, 2004:285).

Therefore, within the corporate environment, employees will be less motivated if their environment and working conditions are not favourable. They will be more motivated if there is room for growth and advancement within the organisation.

Employees are often prepared to endure one of the factors, if the other factor is in place.

Practical example:

If the employees do not have the greatest working environment (confined space in an old building) but there is opportunity for growth within the organisation, the employees may be prepared to endure their circumstances. The other alternative is also possible, where the working conditions of the employees are excellent, but there is not much room for growth. In this case the employees could decide that the job is still worth it, and stay motivated, because the benefits of the working conditions fulfil their current needs.

- **McClleland's Three Motives**

McClelland identified three motives that drive people which are the need for **achievement, power and affiliation** (Adler, 1997:160). McClelland did not agree with the view that a person has an hierarchy of needs. He was of the opinion that needs varied based on the importance that individuals attached to it.

- **Need for achievement**

  The corporate employees with a high need to achieve will react positively to challenges, while those with a lower need to achieve will look for less challenging and stimulating positions. People who do not have a need to achieve will avoid failure and risk taking (Linstead, *et al.,* 2004:287).

- **Need for Power**

  According to Linstead, *et al.,* (2004:286) effective managers have a higher need for power than affiliation. It is less important for them to be liked than to exercise power.

- **Need for Affiliation**

  McClelland is of the opinion that affiliation is less important within the working environment than the need for power. The need for affiliation is generally not associated with successful corporate employees.

Therefore, all the factors mentioned above could have an effect on the motivation of employees. If employees are not motivated, it may be possible that there is some aspect of the working environment which could be contributing to their general dissatisfaction. If employees are not motivated, their productivity may become lower and because their full concentration is not with the work, it could lead to more mistakes in their work. These factors could have an effect on the stress levels of the employees.

5.9 INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

There are many aspects related to interpersonal behaviour that can cause stress or relieve stress in the life of the corporate employee. Some of these aspects are communication, conflict and leadership.

5.9.1 Communication

An organisation can have a culture of good communication. This means that communication within the organisation is important to that organisation. The organisation encourages new employees to participate, information is disseminated through regular meeting and there are opportunities for the employees to make suggestions regarding the organisational functioning (Tosi, *et.al.*, 1994:367).

According to Bloisi (2003:308), communication is of utmost importance within the organisational environment. E says the following regarding communication:

> *Communication is a crucial aspect of any situation where two or more people interact to accomplish an objective.*

5.9.2 Defining Communication

Communication is defined by Bloisi (2003:308) as follows:

> *Communication begins when one person sends a message to another with the intent of evoking a response. Effective communication occurs when the receiver interprets the message exactly as the sender intended.*

Efficient communication uses less time and fewer resources.

The communication process is shown visually in figure 5.4.
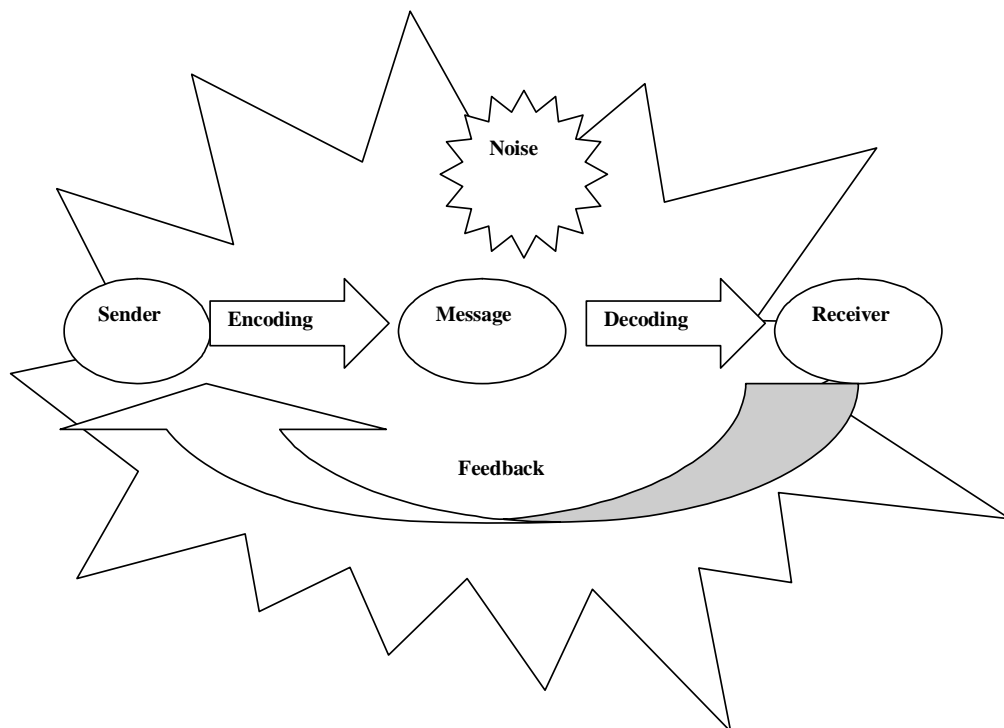
Figure 5.4 The Communication Process (Daft & Noe, 2001:306)

The first component in the communication process is the **sender** who **encodes** (selecting words or symbols to form the message) an idea, request or emotion and represents the idea through a **message**. The communication process continues when someone **receives** and **decodes** (translating the symbols of a message to understand its meaning) the message. After that, the receiver may give **feedback** to the sender of the message (Compare Daft & Noe, 2001:306).

Communication is not always simple. There are inhibiting or facilitating factors that have an effect on the outcome of the communication. These factors are explained by Tosi, *et al.*, (1994:371) as follows:

There are a number of factors which inhibit or facilitate the effectiveness of communication. Some are individual characteristics of senders or receivers, such as emotional and perceptual limitations. Others include the forms of communication used, the characteristics of the organisation and the unique and episodic characteristics surrounding the communication interaction itself.

5.9.3 Formal Communication Channels

Within the organisation there are formal communication channels that have been created to ensure that the tasks that need to be done are accomplished. These channels of communication flow in different directions, namely upward communication, downward communication and horizontal communication.

- **Downward communication**

Communication takes place from those individuals in the higher levels of the hierarchy towards those employees on the lower levels. This communication can take the form of job instructions, official memos, policy statements, procedures and manuals (Gibson, *et al.*, 2000:404).

The problem with downward communication is that it is often inadequate and inaccurate. The corporate employees often feel that they are not informed enough and that they do not know what is going on in the organisation (Gibson, *et al.*, 1994:581).

The employees have to rely on their supervisors and managers to convey information downward. The managers often use language that is used by head office staff and the employees do not understand the content of the information (Bloisi, 2003:315).

This can cause uncertainty in the lives of the employees. They do not understand the information that has been given to them and they cannot be as committed to the objective because they do not understand the reasons for the decision.

- **Upward communication**

Upward communication means that the employees have to communicate with their superiors in some way or another. This type of communication provides the managers with information regarding the functioning or progress of a certain task. Employees can also give suggestions through to top management by making use of this process (Bloisi, 2003:315).

Effective upward communication is difficult in larger organisations. It is often experienced as the least effective form of communication as managers often do not respond to messages sent to them from lower level employees, especially if the message content is not what the manager would like it to be (Gibson, *et al.,* 2000:405).

Corporate employees do not feel as if they are a part of the organisation and they do not feel involved in the organisation if they do not get the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.

- **Horizontal communication**

According to Daft (2000:580), horizontal communication can be defined as follows:

> *Horizontal communication is the lateral or diagonal exchange of messages among peers or co-workers… The purpose of horizontal communication is not only to inform but also to request support and co-ordinate activities.*

Horizontal communication occurs when employees who are on the same level within the organisation communicate with each other to ensure that an objective is achieved. It could be the production manager and sales manager from the same organisation who need to communicate with each other to ensure that the activities that are done by the different departments, are co-ordinated.

Figure 5.5 highlights the formal communication channels within an organisation:
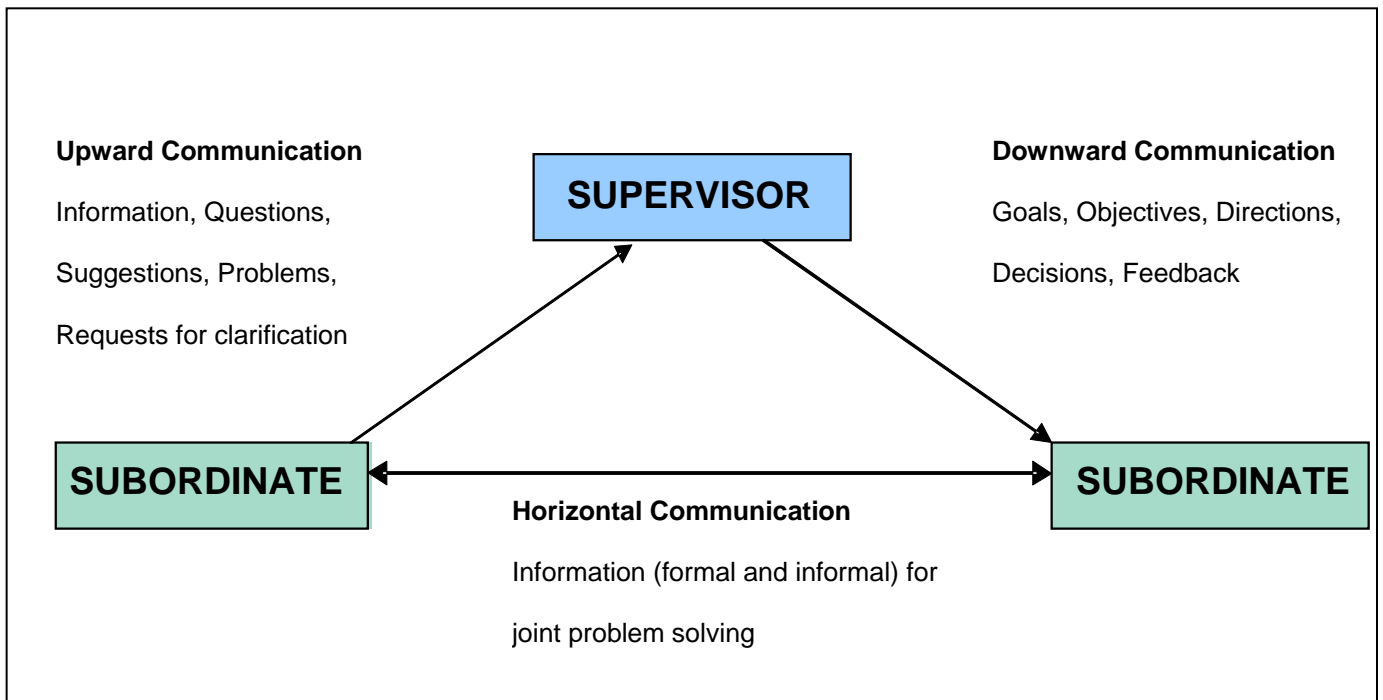
Figure 5.5 Directions of Communication within Organisations (Daft, 2000:581)

5.9.4 Barriers to Communication

Communication or the lack thereof can cause uncertainty in the life of corporate employees and this can contribute to higher stress levels.

Practical example:

If there is a lack of communication and employees suspect that retrenchments are going to take place and they are uncertain how the retrenchment will affect them, it could lead to anxiety and concern regarding their job security, finances and family security. If the stress levels of employees rise because of such factors, they cannot give their full attention to their work and this could lead to less productive employees.

There are certain barriers that contribute to the breakdown in communication within the organisation:

- **Frame of reference**

  Communication is perceived differently by two individuals because of their *past experiences and their current expectations*. Employees interpret a message according to their frame of reference or their individual perceptions (Bloisi, 2003:318).

- **Semantics**

  Semantics are the meaning and the use of words. Semantics become problematic when two people attribute different meanings to the same words. This often happens when people from different cultures are trying to communicate (Bloisi, 2003:319).

- **Value judgements**

  Value judgements have an effect when the receiver evaluates the *worth* of the senders' message. When the receiver does not judge the sender's message as worthwhile to listen to, the sender realises this through a verbal or non-verbal message which he/she conveys to the sender (Bloisi, 2003:319). This could lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions.

- **Selective listening**

The receiver blocks out the part of the message that he/she does not want to hear. The receiver may block out the information or change the information according to pre-conceived ideas (Bloisi, 2003:319).

- **Filtering**

According to Bloisi (2003:320), filtering can be defined as follows:

> *Filtering is selective listening in reverse: in fact, we may call it "selective sending".*

The senders filter the message when they convey it to their colleagues. Only certain parts of the information are shared with the listeners.

Practical example:

When subordinates do not want their managers to know about the negative aspects of a project, they will not give all the information to the manager. Only the positive aspects of the project will be conveyed.

Filtering can cause stress in the lives of employees. If they need to hide information from their managers and colleagues and if the information is revealed, they will have to take responsibility for their actions.

- **Distrust**

  If there is distrust with either the receiver or the sender, one or more of the communication barriers are likely to occur. Both parties will be wary of each other and the full message will not be communicated (Bloisi, 2003:320).

The barriers as discussed above prevent effective communication between employees. If the communication is not effective, it can contribute to the stress levels of the employees. Interpersonal conflict often goes hand in hand with ineffective communication.

5.10 INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Conflict within the organisation is an important aspect of organisational behaviour. Conflict is inevitable, but not all conflict is harmful. According to Appleby (1994:167) conflict can be defined as follows:

> *… any personal divergence of interests between groups or individuals, conflict is behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of goals of other persons.*

5.10.1 What are the Causes of Conflict?

Conflict within organisations can be latent or it can manifest between employees expressing their different aims or aspirations. Personal factors may contribute to the conflict between individuals and the employees may experience tension within the organisation and this may lead to conflict. According to Linstead, *et al.* (2004:395),

some of the factors that cause tension are:

- *Scarcity of financial resources produces conflict over budgets.*

- *Differentiation of tasks and roles places people in win-lose situations.*

- *Hierarchical relations create conflicts around control and the reaction to control.*

- *Status differences create barriers to communication or feelings of inequity and resentment.*

- *Patterns of interdependence may make one group dependent on another where priorities are not shared.*

- *Scheduling priorities may be at variance.*

- *Roles and objectives may be in conflict.*

- *Elements of a person's role may be internally inconsistent (for example discipline and counselling).*

Furthermore, conflict can occur when goal incompatibility is apparent. Goal incompatibility implies three different factors, namely mutually exclusive goals, lack of resources and different time orientations:

- **Mutually exclusive goals** usually bring about win-lose competition. The one side is threatened by the other side's objectives.

- **A lack of resources:** Most organisations have a specific budget, staff and logistics. When different employees want a share of the resources it could lead to conflict.

- **Different time orientations:** Time orientations differ as the different departments' goals differ. Production crews may need regular feedback

while sales teams may work on a weekly or monthly feedback system. This could lead to conflict between the departments because they do not understand the different goals (Bloisi, 2003:436).

There are many different reasons for conflict within the organisation. Tosi *et al.*, (1994:440) categorise the causes for conflict in terms of individual characteristics such as values, attitudes, beliefs, needs, personality, perceptions and judgements in terms of situational forces such as the degree of interaction between employees, the need for consensus between employees, status differences, communication and responsibility and lastly, organisational structure such as specialisation, differentiation, task interdependence, goals, scarce resources, more that one authority figure, policies and rewards.

Conflict is a reality within the organisation. Some employees thrive on conflict and others turn away from it. In general, it is agreed that conflict usually causes stress and tension.

5.10.2 Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Employees approach conflict differently because of their different frames of reference. Their personality, background and situational factors play a role in how they will approach conflict.

According to Thomas in Senior (1997:173), there are five ways of handling conflict.

- **Competing**

Competing leads to a win/lose scenario. This implies that the conflict will be resolved but the result will only be acceptable to one of the parties. This can be detrimental to the relationship as the losers will have negative feelings because they lost.

- **Collaborating**

This approach to conflict usually leads to the satisfaction of both parties. A high quality solution is gained from participation from both sides and this leads to a win/win situation.

- **Compromising**

Compromising means the needs of both parties are partially satisfied. Both parties have to establish what their resources are like and a trade has to take place with regard to those resources. Trust can be problematic.

- **Avoiding**

Avoiding the conflict leads to a no-win situation. The problem is not being confronted. This approach can lead to frustration because the one party may feel the other party does not see their problem as important.

- **Accommodating**

    This approach leads to a win/lose situation. It means that the one party must accept that the other party has a better solution to the problem than what they have. With this approach a good relationship between parties can be maintained.

Employees may become resentful of one another, if they feel that their solution is always put aside. This can be frustrating and lead to stress. Different methods for handling conflict could be used in different situations and there is not one specific method that works at all times.

5.10.3 Methods for managing conflict

Conflict is not always harmful. It is often inevitable within the corporate environment and according to Appleby (1994:168), it can even have positive effects such as:

- *Bringing hidden issues to the surface.*

- *Increasing cohesion of a group when directed at an external agent.*

- *Encouraging creativity and innovation.*

- *Enhancing communication and making change more acceptable.*

Conflict must not be suppressed, it must be managed as there are negative effects that could come about because of conflict. Gibson, *et al.*, (2000:226) refer to this as dysfunctional conflict. This is when conflict becomes harmful and it has a negative impact on performance of individuals and groups in the organisation.

According to Linstead, *et al.*, (2004:403) there are three main strategies that can be used to address conflict within the organisation:

- *By changing perceptions and attitudes.*

  o *The use of symbolism and management of meaning; redefining interests, developing a new superordinate goal or new patterns of rivalry or internal competition.*

  o *Changing understandings of interdependencies and relationships.*

  o *Influencing feelings, stereotypes and processes of enactments.*

- *By changing behaviours.*

  o *Manipulating patterns of reward and punishment.*

  o *Training individuals to recognise and deal with conflict resolution, improving bargaining, negotiating and team building skills.*

  o *Changing interpersonal dynamics.*

- *By changing structures*

  o *Redesigning roles and interdependencies.*

  o *Creating rules that set new frameworks for conflict resolution and arbitration.*

  o *By introducing third parties as mediators or process consultants.*

  o *By creating integrating roles or new interface mechanisms.*

  o *By establishing consultative groups and other warning systems.*

Conflict management strategies are highlighted by Appleby (1997:168) in terms of certain actions such as restructuring within the departments, role clarification, rearrangement of tasks and work locations, incentive and reward policies, training of staff in conflict management and resolution skills, focus on the values and styles of the organisation and lastly, encourage participative and supportive style of leadership which will enhance co-operation and commitment from employees.

The following practical example is an indication of how conflict between employees could cause stress and tension within the corporate environment.

Practical example:

If employees are in conflict with their manager, the employees are concerned about the outcome of the conflict. The employees may feel at risk if they are confrontative with their manager or they may feel that conflict with the manager could have an effect on their possibilities for promotion or salary increases. This concern may lead to stress related symptoms such as headaches or sleeplessness, which could result in a decrease in the performance of the employees.

Each organisation should have a conflict management strategy. The leader of the organisation can play an important role regarding the well-being of the employees, and can make use of effective conflict management strategies to enable employees to resolve their conflicts. The employee assistance/wellness programme within the organisation could also play an important role in educating employees regarding effective conflict management styles.

5.11 LEADERSHIP

Leaders can play a role in the working circumstances of employees. According to Linstead, *et al.*, (2003:345), leaders are in a position to take care of the well being of their employees.

> *Leaders have to have the emotional capacity to endure uncertainty, frustration and pain and understand fears, stresses and sacrifices, yet the poise and steadiness to instil confidence.*

Leaders influence employees and employees often follow the example that the leaders set.

5.11.1 Defining Leadership

Leadership is a concept that has been researched for many years. What is it that makes a person a leader? Why do people follow a leader? These questions and many others have intrigued the minds of researchers from all walks of life. Leaders have existed in all cultures throughout history. There are symbols for "leader" that have existed from as early as 5000 years ago (Adler, 1997:154).

What is a leader? Bloisi (2003:568) describes a leader as follows:

> *A leader creates a vision and goals and influences others to share that vision and work towards those gaols.*

5.11.2 Traits of Leadership

It has been said that there is "one best way" to lead. This idea is not about *how* to lead but more about what leaders should be like. This theory has to do with the traits of a leader, for example physical and personality characteristics, skills and abilities, and social factors. These traits are indicative of a successful leader (Senior, 1997:192).

The following leadership traits are listed by Linstead, Fulop and Lilly (2004:328):

- ***Drive***
  - ***High desire for achieving.***
  - ***Ambition to get ahead in work and career.***
  - ***High level of energy.***
  - ***Tenacity or persistence in the right things.***
  - ***Initiative to change things and make things happen.***
- ***Self confidence***
  - ***Needed to withstand setbacks, persevere through hard times and lead others in new direction.***
  - ***The ability to take hard decisions and stand by them.***
  - ***Managing the perceptions of others on self-confidence and commanding their respect.***
  - ***Emotionally stable.***
- ***Leadership motivation***
  - ***The desire to lead.***
  - ***The willingness to assume responsibility.***
  - ***The seeking of power as a means to achieve desired goals***

rather than as an end in itself.

- *Honesty and integrity*

  o *The correspondence between word and deed.*

  o *Being trustworthy.*

  o *The foundation to attract and retain followers through gaining their trust.*

- *Cognitive ability*

  o *Above average intelligence to analyse situations accurately, solve problems effectively and make suitable decisions.*

  o *Not necessarily a genius.*

  o *Managing the perceptions of others on intelligence.*

- *Knowledge of the business*

  o *Able to gather and assimilate extensive information about company and industry.*

  o *Necessary for developing suitable visions, strategies and business plans.*

According to Fincham and Rhodes (1999:214), an effective leader is also conscientious, an extrovert, has an openness to experience new things, is agreeable and humble. These leaders usually score low on neuroticism and are emotionally stable.

Not all great leaders have all of the above mentioned traits and the expression of these traits differs from situation to situation. With these traits taken into consideration, there are different leadership styles that occur. These leadership styles can contribute to the frustrations of the employees or they can make the working circumstances of the employees more enjoyable.

5.11.3 Leadership Styles

The following leadership styles will be discussed shortly: the authoritarian leader, the democratic leader, the narcissistic leader, the charismatic leader, the job-centered leader and the employee centered leader.

- **The authoritarian leader**

Authoritarian leaders get other people to do the work and they give them very little room for their own decisions. The employees usually fear the authoritarian leaders because they often threaten them and they make use of their authority and personality to influence them (Appleby, 1994:190).

- **The democratic leader**

Democratic leaders want to persuade the employees regarding a decision or situation, but they encourage the involvement of the employees in decision-making (Appleby, 1994:190). They share and encourage input from colleagues and subordinates (Senior, 1997:195).

- **The narcissistic leader**

Narcissm is explained by Linstead, *et al.,* (2004:348) as follows:

> *The narcissist, as a result of experiences in childhood, is driven by an anxiety, an inner feeling of lack of self-worth. This anxiety*

> *develops as a form of self absorption or self obsession which can appear as the opposite of this as arrogance, over-confidence, disdain or contempt for others and a ruthless determination to stop at nothing to get what they want. Narcissists learn three basic lessons:*
>
> 1. *They must be more that they are.*
> 2. *Their value as people is dependant upon the image they project.*
> 3. *Other people are objects who must be manipulated to get the validation that narcissists need.*

This type of leader creates problems within the organisation. The narcissist considers loyalty to employees and caring for customers as a sign of weakness (Linstead *et al*, 2004:348).

This type of leader can become a "bully" within the organisation. Steinman (in conversation, 2004) agrees with the researcher that this type of leader often works towards self gain and does not consider who gets hurt in the process. The employees who work with narcissistic leaders experience much stress because of the leader's behaviour.

- **The charismatic leader**

Charismatic leaders have a quality that is true to themselves. It is not a trait that can be acquired through training; it is a unique part of the charismatic leader. According to Gibson, *et al*. (1994:453) Weber suggested that some leaders are just different to others.

> *…some leaders have a gift of exceptional qualities – a charisma – that enables them to motivate followers to achieve outstanding performance.*

Charismatic leadership is linked with concepts such as vision and ethics, heroism, the ability to inspire, articulation ability, affection from followers, dominating personality and the need for influence (Gibson, *et a*l. 1994:455-456).

- **Leaders with concern for the task**

These leaders emphasise high levels of productivity. Task objectives and goals are the first priority (Senior, 1997:195). They are task oriented and the employees that surround them come second to the task.

- **Leaders with concern for people**

These leaders are concerned about the employees as people: their needs, interests, problems and personal development are considered (Senior, 1997:195). In this case the employee comes first and the task plays a secondary role.

There are many different leadership styles that employees have to adjust to. The leadership style that the employees' superior may have, may affect them in such a way that they are motivated or de-motivated about work. It may lead to stress in the lives of the employees or it can initiate a working environment where employees feel comfortable and safe.

5.12 ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

Within each organisation there are certain processes that have an effect on the employees within the organisation. Many core factors could affect the employees but according to Fincham and Rhodes (1999:379), there are three organisational processes that need to be recognised, namely change within the organisation, organisational culture and power and politics within the organisation.

5.12.1 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture has become an essential factor when organisational behaviour is being studied. The organisational culture gives the researcher an idea of "how" the organisation does things.

5.12.1.1 Defining Organisational Culture

As with many other concepts, there are many different definitions for organisational culture. The following definitions endeavour to give the reader a greater understanding of what organisational culture is.

- *Culture is "how things are done around here." It is what is typical of the organisation, the habits, prevailing attitudes and grown-up pattern of accepted and expected behaviour (Drennan, in Linstead et al., 2004:98).*

- *Culture can be defined as the set of key values, beliefs, understandings, and norms shared by members of an organisation (Daft and Marcic, 2001:59).*

- *Culture is therefore:*

a. *Something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group.*

b. *Something that the older members of the group try to pass on to the younger members.*

c. *Something (as in the case of morals, laws and customs) that shapes behaviour, or…structures one's perception of the world (Adler, 1997:15).*

Therefore, the organisational culture is interwoven into all the activities that take place within the organisation. The culture defines activities. It tolerates some activities and punishes unacceptable activities.

According to Fincham and Rhodes (1999:419), some of the basic attributes of culture are as follows:

- **Culture is symbolic**

Culture is difficult to define in terms of objects. Culture is symbolic, which refers to a sign, an event, an object or a person within the organisation. Often when people have to explain what the organisation that they are working for is like, they tell a story and make use of the mentioned symbols to describe their organisation.

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- **Culture is unifying**

  Culture refers to a process which binds the employees of an organisation together. Corporate culture reinforces the strengths and goals that create a common responsibility and drive within the organisation.

- **Culture is holistic**

  Everything within the organisation forms part of the culture. It refers to the essence of the organisation and it encompasses what is expected of the individuals in the organisation and how people deal with each other in the organisation. The holistic character of the organisation is usually expressed by means of undefined rules. The employees have to know the "rules of the game" within the organisation.

5.12.1.2 The Sources of Culture

According to Drennan in Linstead, et.al. (2004:99) the following twelve essential factors shape the culture within an organisation:

- The influence of a dominant leader.

- Company history and tradition.

- Technology, products and services.

- The industry and its competition.

- Customers.

- Company expectations.

- Information and control systems.

- Legislation and company environment.

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- Procedures and policies.

- Rewards systems and measurement.

- Organisation and resources.

- Goals, values and beliefs.

Every organisation has a cultural context. The culture within the organisation can benefit or inhibit the well-being of the corporate employee.

5.12.1.3   The Culture Gap

Culture gaps are relevant in mergers and acquisitions. According to Daft and Marcic (2001:66), the cultural gap can be defined as follows:

> *The difference between desired cultural norms and values and actual norms and values is called the culture gap.*

Many mergers and acquisitions are not as successful as hoped for, because the companies can integrate the financial systems and production technologies, but they are unable to integrate the unwritten values and norms. These unwritten norms and values are part of what creates the culture of the organisation and cannot just be carried over automatically (Daft & Marcic, 2001:66).

This culture gap could be a cause for stress in the lives of the employees.

Practical example

If the employees are working for organisation A, which is merging with a bigger, stronger organisation B, the employees will have to make adjustments to the new working environment. They will have to adjust to the changes in the work, but also to the difference in organisational culture. The way things were done in the past may not be acceptable in the future.

5.12.2 Organisational Change

Change is inevitable within a changing environment. In the current day and age organisations need to be dynamic and change with the needs within the environment to ensure that they keep their place in the global market. Senior (1997:7) refers to change as follows:

> *The forces which operate to bring about change in organisations can be thought of as winds which are many and varied – from small summer breezes which merely disturb a few papers to mighty howling gales which cause devastation to structures and operations causing constant re-orientation of purpose and re- building.*

This constant re-orientation and re-building within the organisation places demands on corporate employees to make adjustments in terms of their work on a regular basis. Corporate employees may experience higher stress levels because they have to adhere to changing demands all the time.

5.12.3 Change can be Difficult

Within the highly globalised and competitive market, the ability to change is something organisations pride themselves in. Often change is a pleasant idea but the actual implementation thereof is difficult within the organisation. According to Fincham and Rhodes (1999:398), change is not as simple as it seems:

… to begin with change can be enormously difficult to get going in the organisation.

They also state that there are some obstacles or "blocks" such as emotional and cultural "blocks" in the change process that make the process even more difficult.

- **Emotional block**

Emotional blocks can occur when people feel threatened by change and they fear the uncertainty of the future. People do not always see change as an improvement to what they already have. This may lead to avoidance behaviour and evasiveness. They often have an impaired ability to evaluate their circumstances (Fincham & Rhodes, 1999:398).

This situation can cause much stress in the lives of corporate employees, because they do not perceive the change as necessary and they do not always believe that they have the ability to cope with the approaching change. This could lead to uncertainty and anxiety which could result in

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stress related symptoms such as headaches, exhaustion and a lack of motivation.

- **Cultural block**

The culture of corporate employees may be hostile to change because they are loyal to the establishment. They do not like the fact that change is being shown in a humoristic way and making light of the change is frowned upon and is often seen as frivolous (Fincham & Rhodes, 1999:398). The change is affecting their lives, so they do not want it to go by as something unimportant.

In South Africa, this aspect needs to be taken into consideration. With the diverse cultures and languages in this country (and thus every South African organisation), it is possible that misunderstandings can occur because one group of people is not aware of the principles that form part of the cultural background of another group of people.

5.12.4 Change is a Social Process

Change is often seen by the leaders of the organisation as an event, but because there are human beings involved, it should actually be seen as a process. Change does not take place in a moment. It takes place over time and with many different role players involved (Fincham & Rhodes, 1999:401).

5.12.4.1   Managing to Change

If the organisation wants change to come about in a positive manner, they cannot be idealistic about how fast it will happen and how everybody will buy into the idea of change. According to Ficham and Rhodes (1999:404), *change means changing people not things*. The following aspects have to be taken into consideration:

- **Investing in people**

    The corporate employees need to receive a message that the organisation values them. Ficham and Rhodes (1999:404) state that investment in employees is an opportunity for the organisation to expose the employees to the organisation's culture. They describe it as follows:

    > *In depth and long term skills improvement is an opportunity for an organisation to convey its culture and develop feelings of commitment.*

- **Strong leadership**

    Strong organisational leadership is essential in creating a vision for the corporate employees that they feel they can commit to. The organisation needs leaders at all levels who can nurture this vision and motivate the employees to change.

- **Acceptance of change**

For corporate employees to accept the change that is taking place, they must experience a degree of ownership. This means that the corporate employees have to play an active part in the process. There must be some form of communication whereby the employees are able to make their ideas known to management. If they notice that some of their ideas are being implemented, they feel more involved in the process.

- **Information**

Information relieves some of the uncertainty that the corporate employees are experiencing. Ficham and Rhodes (1999:404) explain this as follows:

People will only accept change if they feel well informed about its progress and how they are likely to be affected….Openness and a willingness to share information are a valuable means of securing change, and firms are well advised to think in terms of establishing, whether formally or informally, an agreed information policy in advance of any upcoming change.

5.12.5 Organisational Power

There are certain factors within the corporate environment that influence the well-being of the corporate employees. One of these factors, as part of the organisational process, is not always an obvious factor, but it can have a negative or positive influence on the well-being of the corporate employee.

What is power within the organisation? Drummond (2000:123) describes power as follows:

A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would not otherwise do.

It seems that power is therefore the actual ability to influence others in a desired direction. An individual, group or social unit has power if it controls information, knowledge or resources desired by another individual, group or social unit (Daft, 2000:504).

Power influences behaviour and changes the course of events within an organisation. People who have the power have the ability to make a decision regarding the lives and functioning of other employees. They are usually the people who decide in which department employees work or do not work, whether employees receive the resources that they need to do their job or not and whether corporate employees are promoted or not. Many decisions lie with the people who have the power and these decisions can affect the lives of the corporate employees and therefore, these decisions can cause stress or lessen stress in the lives of the employees.

5.12.5.1   Empowerment

Daft (2000:556) states that the only way organisations can survive is if they empower their employees and more specifically, the middle managers. According to this author employees need the following four elements to enable

them to act more freely and accomplish their jobs:

- ***Employees receive information about company performance.***

- ***Employees have knowledge and skills to contribute to company goals.***

- ***Employees have the power to make substantive decisions.***

- ***Employees are rewarded based on company performance.***

If employees are empowered to do their jobs effectively, it has a positive effect on their self esteem and they feel more in control of their work demands.

5.13 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Organisations have come to realise that it is possible to address the number and intensity of stressors through the implementation of employee wellness programmes. An increasing number of organisations have implemented employee wellness programmes to, among others, address the stress that employees are experiencing within the organisation (Tosi *et al.*, 1994:294). Employee wellness programmes are effective in reducing work stress and they cost the organisation much less than frequent turnover and absenteeism of employees (Tosi, *et al.*, 1994:294).

Drummond (2000:219) states that employee wellness programmes are a way in which organisations can address stress directly. Stress management programmes can be pro-active or re-active and these programmes can improve the general health and well-being of the employees within the organisation.

Social workers can play a prominent role within organisations with regard to the general

well-being of the employees. Social workers can become involved with formal employee wellness programmes within the organisations or they can become involved in the training department where they could focus on soft skills such as communications skills training, conflict management training, assertiveness training and stress management. The social worker can make a positive contribution within the corporate environment.

5.14 CONCLUSION

The organisation is the environment in which the corporate employee has to function on a daily basis. Organisations differ from one another. Some organisations allow for involvement from employees and some organisations have a rigid and formal way of functioning. Some working environments are more positive for the corporate employee to function in than others.

Corporate employees must adjust to the organisational environment in which they find themselves and they have to function optimally in relation to other employees. This behaviour of employees takes place whilst there are ongoing organisational processes within the organisation. Employees behave in a certain way because they are unique individuals, they behave in certain ways because they stand in relation to others and they behave in certain ways because they cannot separate themselves from the larger organisational process.

All these factors have an effect on organisational behaviour. Within the mentioned organisational environment, the employee is expected to adjust and to perform and this could lead to stress in the lives of some of the employees. Employees need to be made aware of the fact that these factors can cause stress in their lives and what they can do to address these sources of stress in their lives pro-actively.

CHAPTER 6

6 EMPIRICAL PROCEDURES AND FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate employees have to function and perform in an environment where stressful situations occur regularly. Within the working environment aspects such as change, corporate culture, deadlines and interpersonal problems with colleagues can cause stress in the lives of corporate employees. Apart from the stress that employees experience within the working environment, they also function within other systems such as their families and social groups, where certain demands are also made on them. Therefore, corporate employees may experience stress in the working environment and/or in other areas of their lives that can have an effect on their health and their work.

The research has been conducted within the corporate environment. A stress management programme was presented to corporate employees to establish whether it would have an effect on their stress levels and whether play therapy mediums can be used successfully with corporate employees during a training programme, to reduce their stress levels and to improve their awareness of the causes of stress in their lives and their reactions to stressors in their environment. The research was divided into two phases, namely phase one which was the qualitative research and phase two, which was the quantitative research.

This chapter will reflect briefly on the aim and objectives of the study, the pilot study, the

hypothesis, the research approach, type of research and the research design. Thereafter, the information gained from the qualitative study which was done by means of semi-structured interviews that were held with all the participants, will be discussed. The information gained from the quantitative part of the study, which consisted of a pre- and a post-test, will then be discussed in detail.

6.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

To understand the research findings, it is essential that the aim and the objectives of the study are revisited.

6.2.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was stated as follows:

To use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of and to manage their stress levels.

The findings that were gained from the pre and post-test indicate that this aim was achieved. The pre-test indicated that the stress levels of the corporate employees were very high. The stress management programme was presented to the corporate employees and play therapy mediums were used successfully throughout the programme. Thereafter, a post-test was conducted and it indicated that there was a positive change in the stress levels of the employees. The empirical results indicate a significant difference between the pre and the post-test findings.

6.2.2   Objectives

- To conduct a literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees.

- To design a stress management programme using play therapy mediums to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.

- To implement a stress management programme that will enable employees to manage their stress levels more effectively.

- To evaluate a stress management programme for corporate employees.

- To formulate conclusions and recommendations which will be based on the empirical findings obtained from the study.

6.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was formulated as follows:

Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees have a positive effect on their stress levels?

6.4 HYPOTHESIS

The following hypotheses were compiled, guided by the expectations regarding the outcome of the research study:

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Will be aware of what stress is.

- Will become aware of the effect of stress on their lives.

- Will become aware of what causes stress in their lives.

- Will be able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release.

- Will be able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives.

- Will be able to take responsibility for their lifestyle.

- Will be able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives.

- Will be able to compile a, personal stress management programme.

- Will be more productive and motivated employees to the benefit if the organisation.

6.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative and quantitative research methods were used during the research study. According to Schurinck in De Vos (1998:241-243) the following applies to the quantitative and qualitative approaches:

> *…the main aim of the quantitative approach is to measure the social world objectively, to test the hypothesis and to predict and control human behaviour. The qualitative approach is more interpretive and holistic in nature with its main aim to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life situations.*

Figure 6.1 illustrates the Research Approach that was used in the study.
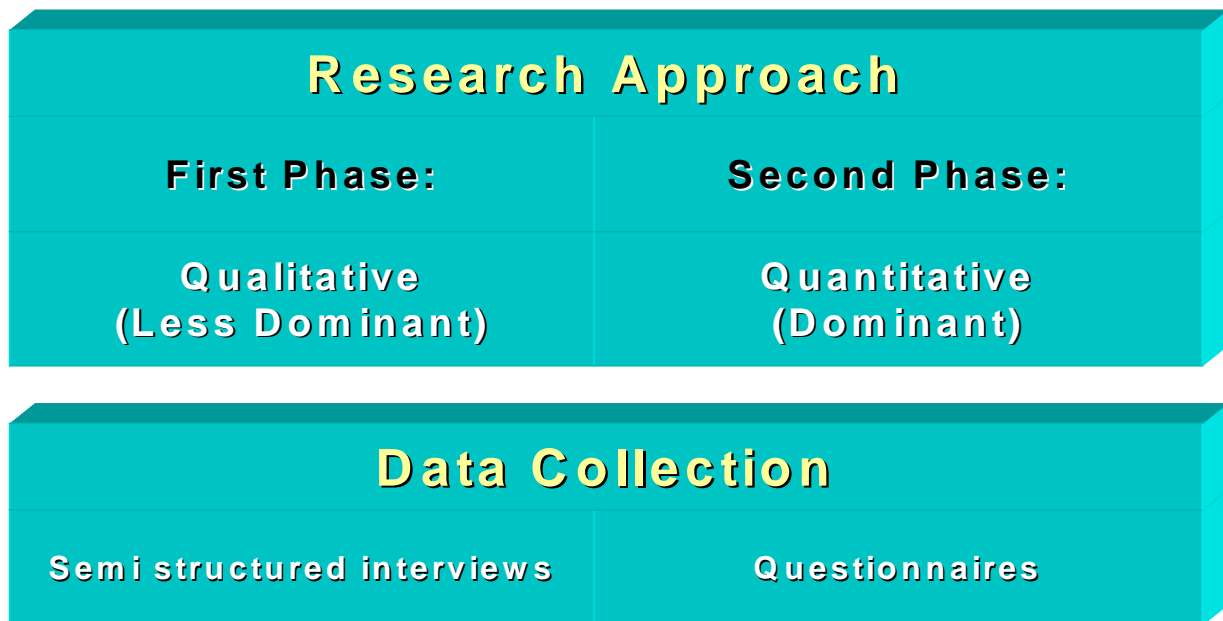
Figure 6.1 Research Approach

The two research approaches were used in conjunction with one another. The qualitative approach consisted of semi-structured interviews that were held with the participants two weeks before the stress management training. The quantitative approach included the pre and the post tests that were completed by the respondents before and after the intervention (stress management programme) took place. The two approaches complement each other and information gained from each approach portrays a more complete picture of the research findings.

6.6   TYPE OF RESEARCH

6.6.1   Applied Research

Two types of research were utilised during the course of the research. The first type was applied research which can also be described as knowledge development, knowledge utilisation and/or intervention design and development (De Vos, 1998:69 - 70).

The focus in this study was to gain, develop and utilise knowledge within the corporate environment with regard to stress management and to use play therapy mediums as part of the stress management programme. The knowledge base of the participating employees was increased by giving them information about stress and how it can affect an individual and these employees could use their improved knowledge base to make changes in their lives and to compile a personal stress management programme.

6.6.2   Intervention Research

Intervention research is explained by Schilling in De Vos (2002:396) as an action undertaken by a professional person to improve the functioning of an individual or group:

…to enhance the functioning or maintain the functioning and well-being of an individual, family, group, community or population.

A stress management programme was developed that was introduced to a group of

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employees from a corporate environment. This stress management programme served as an intervention because it could enhance the functioning of the corporate employees with regard to their stress levels and also their general functioning within the organisation and in their personal lives. Before the stress management programme was presented, the stress levels of the group were ascertained using a questionnaire and after the completion of the programme, a post-test was done. The pre and post-test results were compared to evaluate the effect of the programme.

6.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher made use of the quasi-experimental design for the study. The one group pre-test/post-test design was used to guide the study and included the following steps (Bailey, 1994:224):

- **The selection of subjects.**

    The study was aimed at individuals from the corporate environment. The researcher identified corporate organisations as possible research areas and gained permission to present a stress management programme to a sample of their employees.

- **Selection of the experimental environment.**

    Contact was made with a number of corporate organisations where the research could be done. These organisations expressed the need for stress management for their employees. Some of the organisations that were contacted had their own employee assistance programmes in place and they did not want a stress management programme to be presented to their employees. Two organisations

were identified – one for the pilot study and another for the actual research.

- **Pre-test**

  A questionnaire was handed to each of the participating employees for completion before the stress management programme was presented to them. The questionnaire was found to be appropriate because it is short (which was helpful because the employees working in the corporate environment do not have a lot of time to spare to complete long questionnaires) and yet it addressed some important issues regarding stress.

- **Administering of the experimental stimulus**

  A stress management programme which included play therapy mediums was presented to the corporate employees. The programme was divided into four sessions and was presented to the employees over a period of two weeks.

- **Post-test**

  A post-test was conducted after the programme was presented to the employees, to ascertain whether the stress management programme had an effect on the stress levels of the participating employees.

6.8 PILOT STUDY

Background knowledge regarding the study was gathered before the study was initiated. The researcher conducted a thorough pilot study by including the following aspects: a literature study, consultation with experts, feasibility study and the testing of the

questionnaires.

6.8.1 Literature Study

An extensive literature study was conducted to enable the researcher to be informed regarding the field of research. The literature review focused on the following aspects:

- Stress: Defining stress, where it originates from, what the effect of stress is and relevant stress management programmes.

- Corporate environment: How is the corporate environment structured? Who forms part of the corporate environment? What is the effect of the work place on the corporate employee? How (if at all) do management levels affect the corporate employees?

- Play therapy mediums: Defining play therapy mediums. How will play therapy mediums be used in a stress management programme? The use of play therapy mediums in working with adults.

- The Gestalt Theory: The theoretical framework that will form the basis of the study.

The literature study is ongoing. During the course of the research new literature was published and at later stages older literature was discovered, which was not accessible at the beginning of the study. Therefore, the knowledge base with regard to stress in the corporate environment is ever growing and increasing, which relates to the relevancy of stress as a field of study, as a problem within our society and specifically in the corporate environment.

6.8.2 Consultation with Experts

The researcher consulted with experts who have experience within this field of study or within fields of study related to stress within the corporate environment. These experts contributed in different ways and to a different extent to the research, but they all had valuable expertise that assisted in establishing a broader knowledge base for the study (refer to chapter 1).

6.8.3 Feasibility Study

A South African banking organisation, namely ABSA bank, expressed the need for a stress management programme to be presented to their employees. Permission was gained form the organisations' Human Resource Department to conduct the research with a group of the organisation's employees.

During the research process the researcher became aware of the fact that this type of training (soft skills) is not a priority within all organisations. Employees are exposed to more courses with regard to their technical skills and abilities than to courses that will enhance their interpersonal relationships.

6.8.4 Testing of Questionnaires and Measuring Instruments

The questionnaire that was used for the study was a published questionnaire (Burn & Payment, 2000:159-160). During the pilot study ten corporate employees underwent the same stress management training programme that was used during the actual training. These employees completed the questionnaire before and after a two-day stress management training programme. The employees seemed reluctant to

complete the post-test as they had not made any adjustments to their stress management styles at that stage. They expressed a need to internalise the information and then to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, the research was done over four days that did not run consecutively. The use of the questionnaires during the pilot study guided the researcher to make adjustments regarding the time frame of the presentation during the actual research.

6.9 RESEARCH PROCESS

The next section of the chapter will describe the population and sampling method, and illustrate the research findings in the following sequence:

- Population and Sampling Method.

- Data Collection.

    o   Findings of the Qualitative Research.

    o   Findings of the Quantitative Research.

        ❖   Results of the Stress Questionnaire.

        ❖   Results of the Burnout Questionnaire.

- The Intervention: Stress Management Programme.

    o   Evaluation of the Play Therapy Mediums.

6.9.1   Population and Sampling Method

Probability sampling was used and more specifically simple random sampling for the purpose of this study. Simple random sampling is explained by Strydom and Venter (2002:204) as follows:

In this situation each individual case in the population theoretically has an equal chance to be selected for the sample.

The researcher conducted a meeting with the Human Resources Department of ABSA, Midrand, to explain the extent of the research and what resources (such as a venue) would be required. The Human Resource Department of ABSA bank identified the IT department of the organisation as a very stressful working environment and, therefore, the IT department became the universe from which the sample was taken. Three project teams were working under a great amount of pressure with upcoming deadlines and the employees of these teams were identified as possible candidates for the training. These three teams formed the population from which the sample was taken. An invitation was sent out to all the members of these teams (which consisted of about sixty-five people) to take part in the training. Twelve employees replied that they would like to take part in the stress management training. A group size of between ten and sixteen people is ideal for stress management training because it is large enough for adequate group interaction to take place, but it also allows for personal attention from the social worker to each employee. The sample is illustrated as follows:
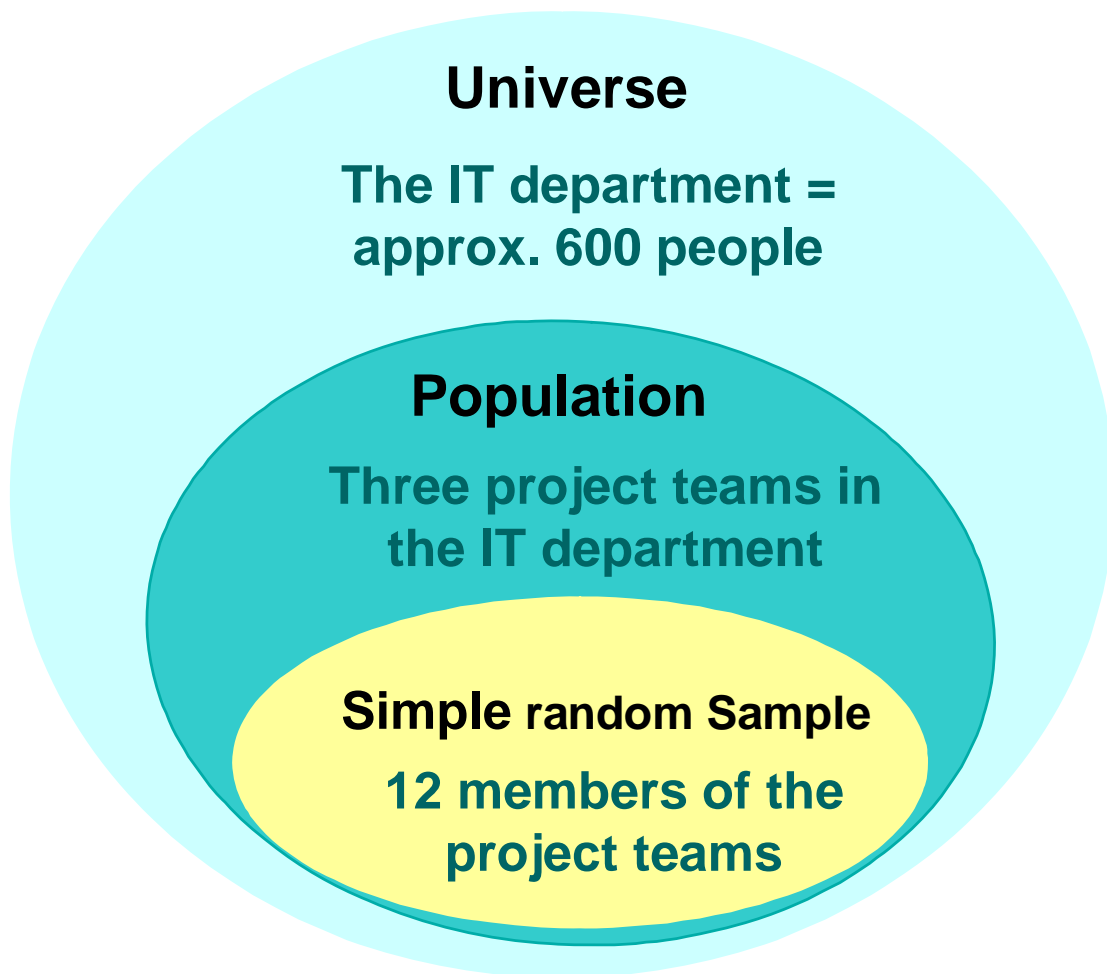
Figure 6.2 Sampling Process

Therefore, the sample for the research consisted of twelve employees from the organisations' IT department. The twelve participants were from different hierarchal levels, there were five males and seven females and the group was representative of different age groups and different races.

6.9.2   Data Collection

The following data collection methods were used for the research:

6.9.2.1   General Findings of the Qualitative Research

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participating employees, approximately a week before the stress management programme was presented. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to ascertain what the participating employees knew about stress and the effect thereof before the training was done. Furthermore, the researcher was interested to find out whether there were any specific needs that should be addressed throughout the training.

The themes and questions listed below were addressed during the semi-structured interviews. The findings of the qualitative research are given according to the responses of the employees who took part in the study.

- **Defining stress**

  o **What is stress?**

     Some of the corporate employees defined stress as follows:

     ❖ Stress is a form of anxiety and it is usually caused by frequent changes in one's lifestyle.

     ❖ Stress is problems from many sources, for example work, family and finances.

     ❖ Mental or emotional tension causes a change in one's state – for better or for worse.

     ❖ Stress is about constantly worrying about certain factors, such as losing your job, finances, children relatives. Stress is something that makes you worry.

❖ Stress is what one experiences as one tries to adjust to the environment. It creates positive and negative feelings.

❖ It is something that happens in one's life that was not planed for or that one did not foresee. One is then out of one's comfort zone.

❖ It is because of happenings that are out of the ordinary.

The ideas that the employees had with regard to stress all related to some or other aspect of stress, for example, the finances and concerns about work would be stressors and the physical reaction to stress would relate to the effect of stress on the individual. The way in which these definitions differ can actually be compared to numerous different definitions that are found in theory. Looker and Gregson (2003:25) 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.

According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:3) stress can be defined as follows:

It is usually used to denote a set of changes that people undergo in situations that they appraise as threatening to their well being. These changes involve physiological arousal, subjective feelings of discomfort and overt behaviours.

During the first module of the stress management programme the employees were invited to draw stress and this led to a discussion regarding what stress is

and how the sources of stress and the reaction to stress differs from stress.

o   **Is stress positive or negative?**

All but one of the participants said that stress can be negative and positive.

One of the respondents mentioned that stress could help or hinder a person, depending on the situation.

Another said it is only **negative**: It impacts your health, your personal well being, your interaction with other people, causes anxiety, negative thoughts and unhappy feelings and can ultimately lead to depression.

The other respondents said that negative stress can cause destruction; negative stress occurs when there is a goal that needs to be achieved but the goal is unrealistic; negative stress results in mental and physical collapse; negative stress can result in feelings of rejection, anger and depression.

Negative stress is also called distress and it is described by Looker and Gregson (2003:27) as follows:

Having too much to do in too little time; dealing with complex tasks without adequate training; promotion into a job for which we are not suited; having too many bills to pay and not enough income; worrying how we will manage if we lose our job; having domestic problems at the same time as changes at work. These are a few

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examples of the kinds of demands that can lead to distress.

Positive stress can result in new ideas and it can bring about improved performance. When a person is under pressure a person can think of alternative solutions for problems and innovating new ideas. A person may be more careful or pro-active because of positive stress. Positive stress leads to a person working harder and thus positive stress can help you achieve.

Cohen, *et al* (2001:190) agree that some stress is necessary for an employee to function at his/her full potential.

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

- **Causes of stress in the life of an employee**

The questions in this theme were the following:

o **What causes stress in your life?**

In general, the answers included the following:

Normal everyday situations, always striving to be the best, money, work, it can be summarised as everything, driving, job dissatisfaction, the unknown, lack of control, living up to other people's expectation.

It became clear to the researcher that the employees participating in this programme, seemed to set very high standards for themselves. They drive themselves and some of these characteristics match the Type A personality quite strongly. According to Looker and Gregson (2003:169), the image of the type A personality has changed. They describe it as follows:

So the popular image of the Type A individual who is ambitious, highly competitive, aggressive, hard-driving, a high achiever and therefore highly successful is not altogether true. The more relaxed, calmer, unhurried but still ambitious Type B individual proves to be just as successful, or more so, in the long run.

o **Do you experience stress within your working environment? Explain.**

Without exception all of the employees answered that they do experience stress in their working environment. Examples of the factors that cause stress in the working environment were strict deadlines, long working hours, unrealistic user expectations, conflict in the working environment, matching performance with career expectations, balancing home and work demands.

o **What causes stress in your home life?**

In general, the answers included the following:

Conflicting career ambitions between husband and wife, family demands, difficult children, financial pressure, family conflict, lack of communication, traditional role expectations, balancing home and work demands.

Communication can play a major role in eliminating the above mentioned sources of stress in the home life. Brehm (1998:158) suggests the following about communication:

Positive social support is an important stress buffer. Good communication skills help you create a support network of friends and acquaintances and give you the communication tools you need to access this support…. But this support can be more or less helpful depending on how you communicate.

- **The effects of stress physically, emotionally and psychologically**

o **How does stress affect you in the following areas?**

❖ **Emotionally:** The answers to this question differed from person to person, and varied from no emotional reaction to extreme emotional expression like crying, swearing, loneliness, distrust in others, anger

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and depression.

- ❖ **Physically:** The answers to this question included the following: muscle pain, flu-like symptoms, headaches, backaches, lack of sleep, loss of appetite, throat contraction.

- ❖ **Psychologically:** The answers to this question included the following: depression, hyper activity, lack of concentration, withdrawal, anxiety attacks.

It is important for the employees to be aware of how stress affects their bodies because if they do not realise how stress is affecting them, they will not realise what the long term effects of stress can be on their health, their emotional functioning and their psychological functioning.

Looker and Gregson (2003:75) give an example of the effect of stress on a person's health:

Eating whilst the digestive system is partially shut down during stress can lead to a number of problems such as indigestion, nausea and diarrhoea. In addition, many of the body's healing processes are affected.

Brehm (1998:55) states that stress and mental health are closely linked:

All of us are striving to move toward the optimal mental health end of the continuum; stress management helps with the journey….. Stress interacts with mental health and contributes to several psychological disorders.

She also states that emotions need to be communicated to avoid them becoming a negative force in a person's life.

Poor Communication often leads to anger, isolation, loneliness, and depression. These emotions are frequently the result of misunderstanding (Brehm, 1998:159).

- **The effects of life events**

During the semi structured interviews the employees were asked about major life events that took place in their lives during the past year. Four of the employees had major events that happened in their lives during the past year. These events were divorce, window smashing and handbag grabbing, a daughter who tried to commit suicide three times during the past year and a husband who was retrenched and has been looking for work for the past six months. These life events can cause higher stress levels.

- **The use of stress management techniques.**

  o **What do you do to manage your stress levels?**

    Most of the employees indicated that they do not do anything specific to address or manage their stress levels. One of the employees is a marathon runner and she indicated that she uses running to de-stress. Another employee indicated that he prays more when under stressful conditions, and that this lowers his stress levels.

o   **Do you think you can improve on your stress management techniques?**

All the employees said that they would like to improve on their stress management techniques, but they do not know what these techniques entail and how to implement them.

Few people realise they can actually improve their stress levels just by changing their lifestyle habits such as their diets, the amount that they exercise and the amount of rest that they get:

There are a number of ways in which you can alter your lifestyle to build up your resistance to stress. If you are healthy and fit you will feel good about yourself: your self esteem will be high, and your irritability, anger and hostility levels low (Looker & Gregson, 2003:146).

Furthermore, employees need to take responsibility for their own stress levels by implementing stress management techniques. Burns (2003:79) states the following about stress management:

The goal of stress management is not to eliminate the stress response, but to determine and control individual optimum stress levels – that is, where stress will work for you and not against you

Some of the stress management techniques were discussed in the stress management programme and there was a significant improvement in most of the employee's use of stress management techniques such as relaxation and

time management. This will be discussed in more detail, when the results from quantitative research are discussed in this chapter.

6.9.2.2   General findings of the Quantitative Research

- **Questionnaires**

During this part of the research each of the twelve employees were given a questionnaire (pre-test) to complete. The purpose thereof was to ascertain what their stress levels were, before the stress management programme was presented to them. The stress management programme was then presented to the corporate employees over four sessions, and thereafter they completed the same questionnaire as the post-test. A comparison could then be made regarding the pre and post-test scores, to ascertain whether the intervention that took place had an effect on their stress levels.

The following graph (Figure 6.3) illustrates per questions what the pre and post-test results were.

Overall Results per Question
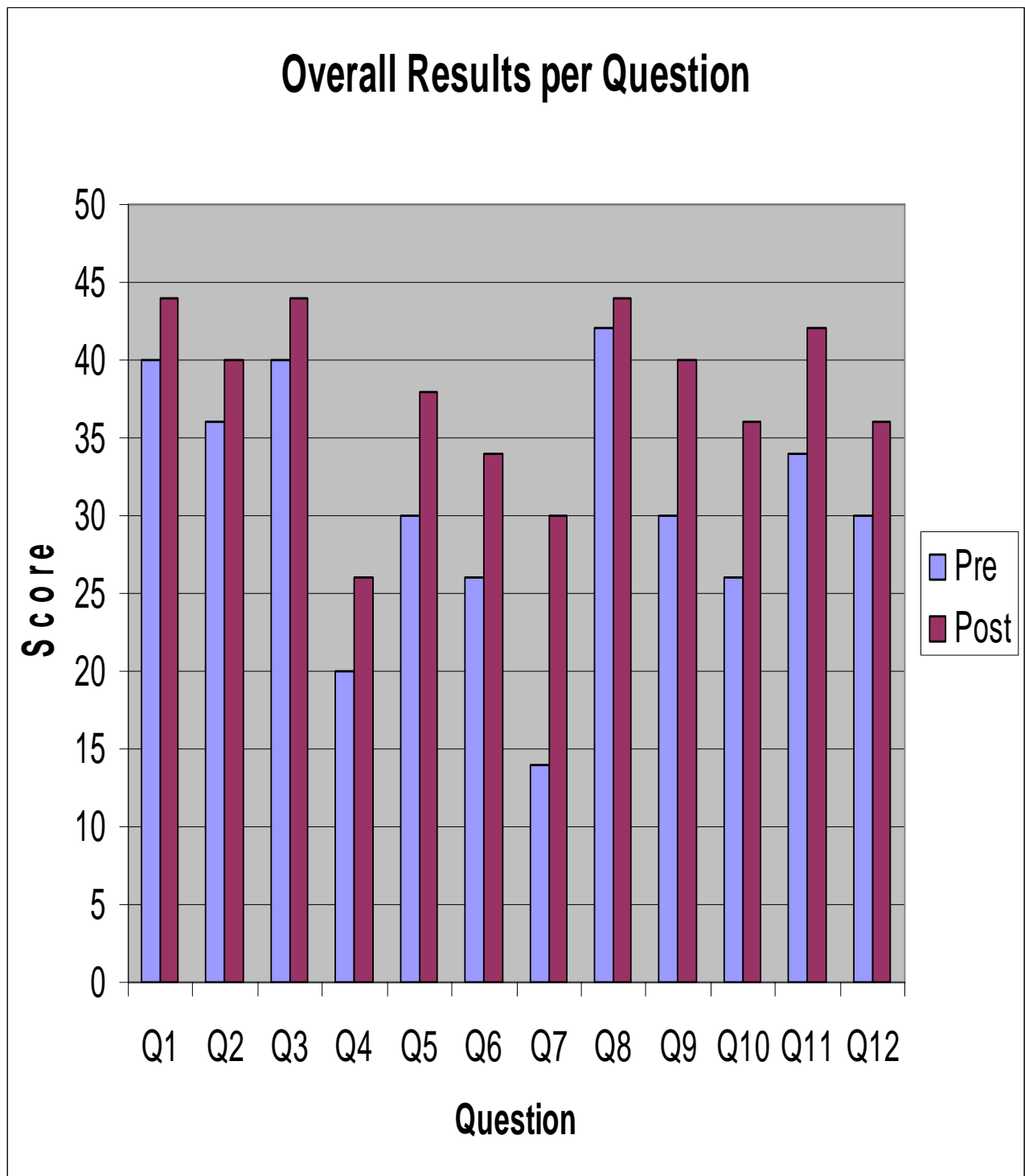
Figure 6.3 Results of the Stress Questionnaire

The employees were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is always, 3 is usually and 1 is seldom. A score of 50-60 indicated that the employee is taking the right measures to manage stress levels in his/her life. If the score is between 36 and 49, the employee is taking steps to manage his/her

stress levels but there is more that he/she can do and he/she has to rethink their priorities. If the employee's score is 35 and lower, it is pointing towards health problems and relationship problems at home and at work. These employee's stress levels are too high and they need to make adjustments in their lifestyles (Burn & Payment, 2000:159–160). Therefore, when looking at Fig. 6.3, **an increase in the scores of the post-test indicates a decrease in the stress levels** of the employees, per question. The pre and post-test results were as follows:

- **Question (1): "I manage my time effectively".**

Time management is an important part of effective stress management. According to Brehm (1998:132), time management helps employees to set priorities and work towards those priorities:

> *Good organisation in your daily life helps you manage multiple priorities with greater ease.*

The employees who were a part of this population (thus the three IT project teams) are all high performing individuals who work with definite deadlines. These individuals have to have time management skills in place to be able to manage the deadlines that form part of the job.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 40, which is an average score of 3,33 per individual.

o **Post-test**

The total score for the group was 44, which is an average score of 3,66 per individual.

There was a 10% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall improvement in the employees' time management skills.

- **Question (2): "I use assertive statements to protect my right to say "no" to others".**

Employees often find it difficult to be assertive in a working environment because they feel they need to be able to do all the work that comes their way. According to Looker and Gregson (2003:183), assertiveness is a resource that the employee can make use of in stress management:

> *Being assertive is the most effective way of increasing your coping resources. Assertiveness is a way of communicating effectively. It means to say what you feel, think and want.*

The employees were all assertive to some degree before they were exposed to the stress management programme, but there was definite room for improvement. During the training it became apparent that the employees saw assertiveness as a negative aspect where one employee is aggressive towards the other employee to get his/her own way. This way of thinking had to be reframed so that the employees could realise that it has to do with

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communicating your thoughts and feelings effectively and with respect towards the other individual.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 36, which is an average score of 3 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 40, which is an average score of 3,66 per individual.

There was an 11,11% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall improvement in the assertiveness skills of the employees.

- **Question (3): "I regularly show my feelings to someone close to me."**

The body of a human being reacts to emotions in a certain way. The levels of noradrenaline and adrenaline present in the employee's body can be related to the feeling that the employee is experiencing at that specific time (Looker & Gregson, 2003:54). When the employee experiences negative feelings over a long period of time, the body starts to experience physical reactions that could be to the detriment of his/her health.

Within the working environment employees are often not allowed to show their emotions. They have to cope with the pressure of the job or they have to leave.

The perception is often *if the job is too stressful find another* (Grobler & Hiemstra, 1998:19). This outlook often inhibits the employees from sharing emotions with the people around them.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 40, which is an average score of 3.33 per individual.

o **Post-test**

The total score for the group was 44, which is an average score of 3.66 per individual.

There was a 10% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall improvement in their emotional expression.

• **Question (4): "I do volunteer work that is meaningful".**

Because of the high demands of the working environment, many corporate employees focus on "surviving" and doing what they **must** do. They do not think that they have the time to reach out to anybody else. In the process they do not experience the joy of helping. Brehm (1998:242) formulates it as follows:

One of the most often overlooked sources of pleasure is helping others. When we are in dire straits, sometimes the last thing we think we have energy for is giving, but giving often gives energy back to us with interest.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 20, which is an average score of 1,67 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 26, which is an average score of 2,17 per individual.

There was a 30% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the corporate employees, there was an overall improvement in getting involved in changing the focus from themselves to other people with needs.

- **Question (5): "I eat a balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables."**

The corporate employee is often more inclined to do the work that needs to be done than to take time to eat healthy meals during the day. Nutrition is one of the body's best defence mechanisms against the effects of stress. Brehm (1998:183) explain it as follows:

> *Good nutrition and eating habits contribute significantly to good health and stress resistance. They are especially important in high-stress times, but these may be the times when we are least likely to eat well*

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The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 30, which is an average score of 2,5 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 38, which is an average score of 3,67 per individual.

There was a 26,67% increase in the results for this question, which indicates that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall improvement in their diets.

- **Question (6): "I do exercise at least three times a week."**

No stress management programme is complete if exercise is not included in that programme (Kantor, *et al* 1997:16). The corporate employees need to make positive changes in their lives to ensure that stress does not affect them in a detrimental way. Williams (1994:73) refers to exercise as a way of building resistance against stress. It is a resource that can be used by corporate employees.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 26, which is an average score of 2,17 per individual.

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- o **Post-test:**

  The total score for the group was 34, which is an average score of 2,83 per individual.

  There was a 30,77% increase in the results for this question, which indicates that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall increase in the amount of time they spent exercising.

- **Question (7): "I practice relaxation techniques daily."**

  Relaxation is a skill that can be used effectively to manage stress levels when there is much pressure as well as regaining balance after a very stressful time. Williams (1994:85) states the following regarding relaxation:

  > *Relaxation calms the body and the mind, and is probably the most effective way of enabling your body to adjust to its normal level of functioning when you are under stress.*

  This is a skill that needs to be acquired by the corporate employees to reduce the negative effects of stress on their lives. During the stress management programme that was presented to the employees, relaxation activities were done during each session. The purpose was to give the corporate employees the opportunity to make this skill part of their own stress management routine.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 14, which is an average score of 1,17 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 30, which is an average score of 2,5 per individual.

There was a 114,29% increase in the results for this question, which indicates that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was a significant overall increase in relaxation activities.

This question's score indicates the greatest discrepancy of the pre and post-test scores of all the questions. The pre- test scores indicated that very few of the participating employees made use of relaxation techniques to manage their stress levels. There was a marked increase in the use of relaxation techniques after the stress management programme was presented.

- **Question (8): "I avoid unhealthy habits (eg. smoking, or alcohol abuse) for coping with stress."**

Unhealthy habits such as smoking, alcohol abuse and high intake of caffeine have a negative effect on the immune system of corporate employees. Looker and Gregson (2003:151-155) suggest that these habits should be limited to the minimum.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 42, which is an average score of 3,5 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 44, which is an average score of 3,67 per individual.

There was a 4,76% increase in the results for this question, which indicates that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall decrease in unhealthy habits.

This is one of the most difficult lifestyle changes to make because it is habit, and in many cases an addiction. The corporate employees may need support if they want to change these habits.

- **Question (9): "I spend leisure time in a place where I have complete change of scenery."**

Corporate employees have to ensure that they have some fun and enjoyment out of life. This fun should be experienced in a different way than working. They should take up an enjoyable activity that gives them a sense of pleasure. Brehm (1998:243) explains it as follows:

> *Physical activities, hobbies and other leisure-time pursuits are forms of recreation, activities that refresh you by means of enjoyment and relaxation. Recreation re-creates you; it renews your energy and creativity.*

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 30, which is an average score of 2,5 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 40, which is an average score of 3,33 per individual.

There was a 33,33% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall increase in leisure activities.

- **Question (10): "I have talked to my boss about my work commitments and expectations."**

Corporate employees are under pressure to perform within their working environment. They are often subjected to long hours and high workloads and these have a negative effect on their lives.

Unrealistic expectations, especially in this time of corporate reorganisations which sometimes put unhealthy and unreasonable pressures on the employee, can be a tremendous source of stress and suffering. Increased workload, extremely long work hours and intense pressure to perform at peak levels all the time for the same pay, can actually leave employees physically and emotionally drained.

In such instances the corporate employee must have the courage and the conviction to discuss his/her workload with the manager of the team. According to the project manager of the corporate employees that formed part of this study, the employees have to work long hours and they work under pressure all the time because of the deadlines they have to meet. Each of the employees has to take responsibility to discuss their work functioning with their manager.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 26, which is an average score of 2,17 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 36, which is an average score of 3,0 per individual.

There was a 38,46% increase in the results for this question, which indicates that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall improvement in addressing the impact of work pressure and expectations.

- **Question (11): "I have talked to members of my household to divide responsibilities."**

In times when life demands more from a person it is necessary for that person to make use of social support and shared responsibilities. Looker & Gregson (2000:123) state the following:

> *Seeking help and support from others in the tasks you perform can be mutually beneficial in reducing workload and demands. Rather than struggle, ask for help.*

The employees have to realise that they can divide household chores and tasks between the members of the household to make the burden less. One individual of the household does not have to take responsibility for everything that needs to be done. Each person in the household should have certain responsibilities.

The results of this question were as follows:

- o **Pre-test:**

  The total score for the group was 34, which is an average score of 2,83 per individual.

- o **Post-test:**

  The total score for the group was 42, which is an average score of 3,5 per individual.

There was a 23,53% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, they shared more of their household responsibilities with other household members.

- **Question (12): "I get six to eight hours sleep every night."**

Some employees need more sleep while others need less sleep. In general it is accepted that most people need six to eight hours sleep a night. Burns

(2003:140) explains the following regarding rest:

> *The mind and body are constantly at work, even when you sleep.*
> *During sleep, however, the system has an opportunity to slow down.*
> *Energy used during exertion can slowly be restored when the body is*
> *at rest.*

Demands are made on different areas of the employees' lives in the workplace, in their personal lives, with their extended family and social engagements. To gain more time to fit everything in, the employees try and sleep less so their bodies do not have the time they need to rest. In the long run this could be to the detriment of the employee's health and general functioning.

The results of this question were as follows:

o **Pre-test:**

The total score for the group was 30, which is an average score of 2,5 per individual.

o **Post-test:**

The total score for the group was 36, which is an average score of 3,0 per individual.

There was a 20% increase in the results for this question, which indicate that after the stress management programme was presented to the participating employees, there was an overall increase in the amount of sleep per night.
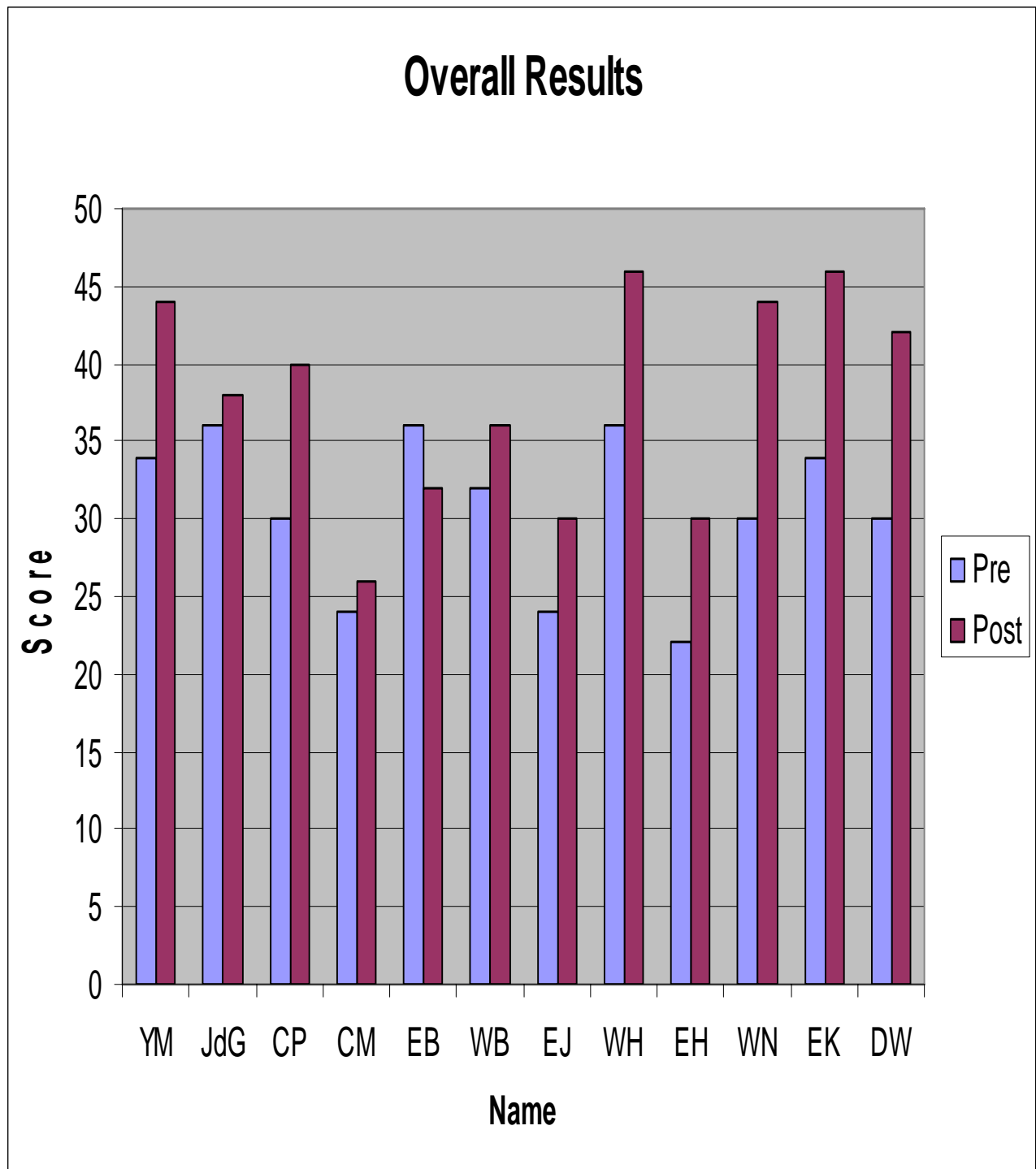
Figure 6.4 Result of the stress questionnaire, per person

The pre and post-test scores of all the corporate employees but one, who participated in this research study, indicated that there was an improvement in their stress levels after the stress management programme was presented to them. The overall results of the pre and post-tests of the group showed a

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23,37% increase in the total scores of the group.

One of the employees (EB) showed an increase in her stress levels after the stress management programme was presented. This employee was exposed to added stress during the course of the training because her father had a heart attack and he needed to be hospitalised and cared for after the hospitalisation. She also experienced physical symptoms of stress such as nausea and migraines and her energy levels were low throughout this period of time.

The researcher would like to mention two of the other employees who attended the stress management training and who were also exposed to stressful situations during this period of time. EJ had an incident on her way to work where her car's window was smashed and her handbag was grabbed out of her car. She displayed symptoms of stress with regard to the incident, but as the training proceeded, her functioning normalised and she did not display any overt symptoms of stress. The researcher is of the opinion that one of the factors that could play a role in EJ's stress reaction is hardiness of the personality. According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:41), hardiness is a personality trait that helps employees to cope with stress:

> *Hardiness consists of three components – commitment, control, and challenge. That is, hardy people believe in what they are doing and are fully involved in their daily activities; they believe that life experiences are controllable; and they view change in a positive sense and as a normal occurrence rather than as a aversive event.*

WB was also exposed to a stressful time during the past year because her

daughter tried to commit suicide three times. She indicated this stressful time in the activities (specifically the clay) that formed part of the stress management programme, but her post-test scores showed an improvement in her stress levels after the stress management programme was presented. The researcher is of the opinion that this could be due to the fact that she had the opportunity to make contact with the stressful issue that was in her foreground – thus her unfinished business – and she had the opportunity to ventilate her feelings. Another factor that could paly a role in WB's improved scores could be the fact that she has been living with this situation for a long time and "past experience" has helped her to develop a sense of self-efficacy. Auerbach & Gramling (1998:44) explains it as follows:

> *The most important way in which we develop expectations of self-efficacy is through successful personal mastery experiences.*

Figure 6.5 indicates the overall increase/decrease in the stress levels of the respondents within the group. The results indicate that after the Stress Management Programme was presented:

- 92% of the respondents' stress levels decreased.
- 8% of the respondents' stress levels increased.

Increase/decrease in stress levels

0%   8%

92%

- ■ Decrease in stress levels
- □ No change in stress levels
- ■ Increase in stress levels
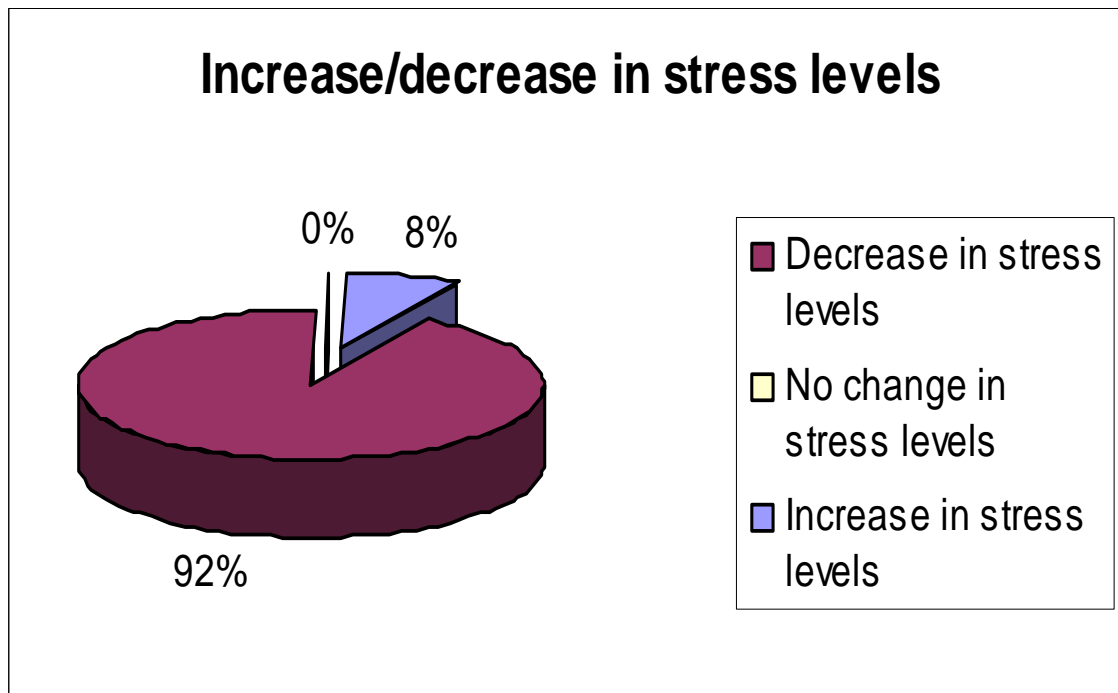
**Figure 6.5 Increase/decrease in Stress Levels**

The researcher included a burnout questionnaire as part of the pre and post-tests. When looking at the General Adaptation Syndrome, as explained by Ross and Altmaier (1994:3) it is obvious that the last part of the stress reaction is collapse. This collapse can be likened to burnout. Burnout can be defined as follows:

> *Burnout is a term that is used to signify the condition of an individual who, as a result of on-the-job stress, is completely drained and exhausted and can no longer function efficiently (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998:213).*

The researcher wanted to ascertain whether the stress management programme would have an effect on the burnout levels of the participating employees. Figure 6.6 and 6.7 indicate the burnout pre and post-test scores.
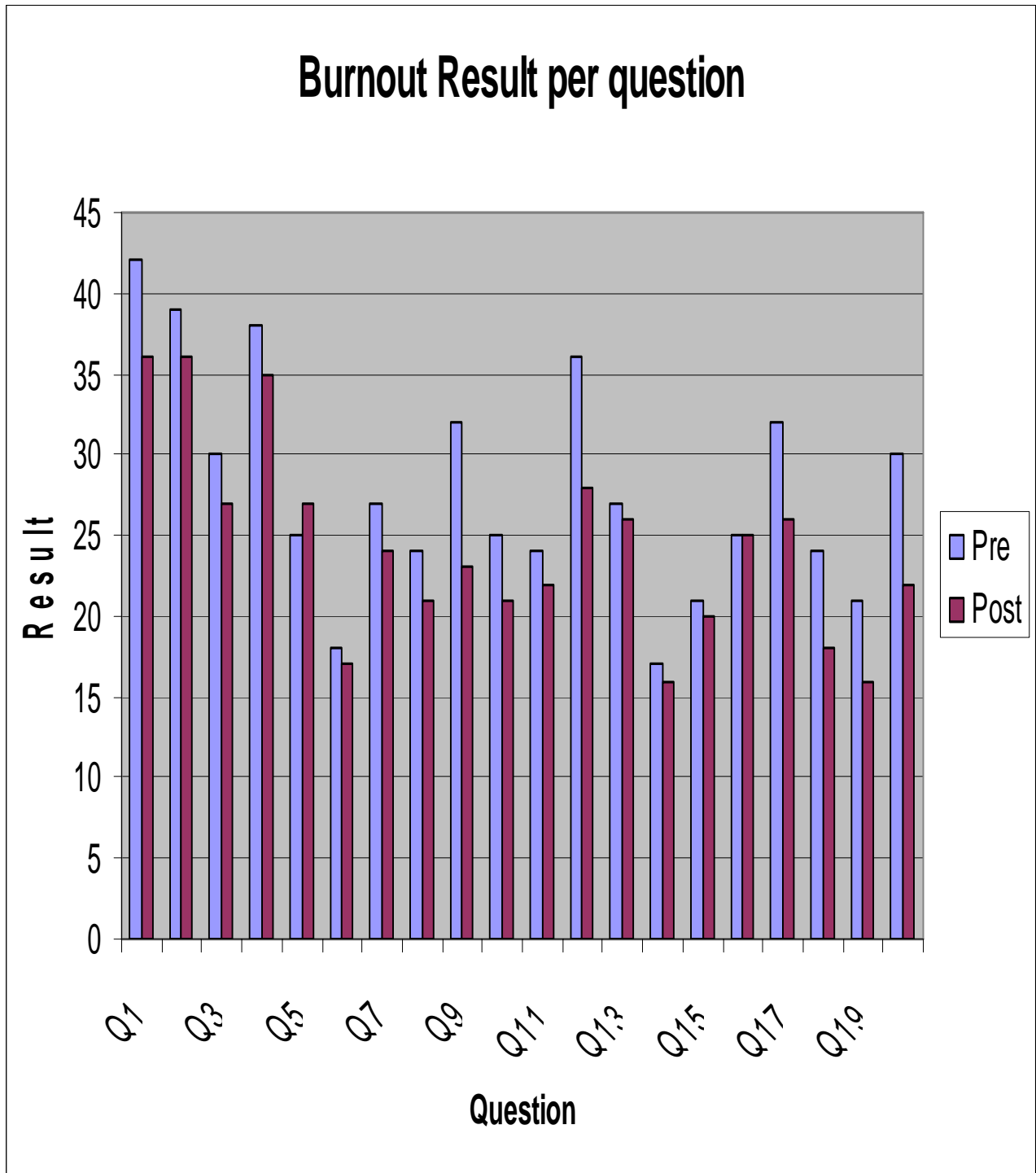
Figure 6.6 Burnout Results per Question
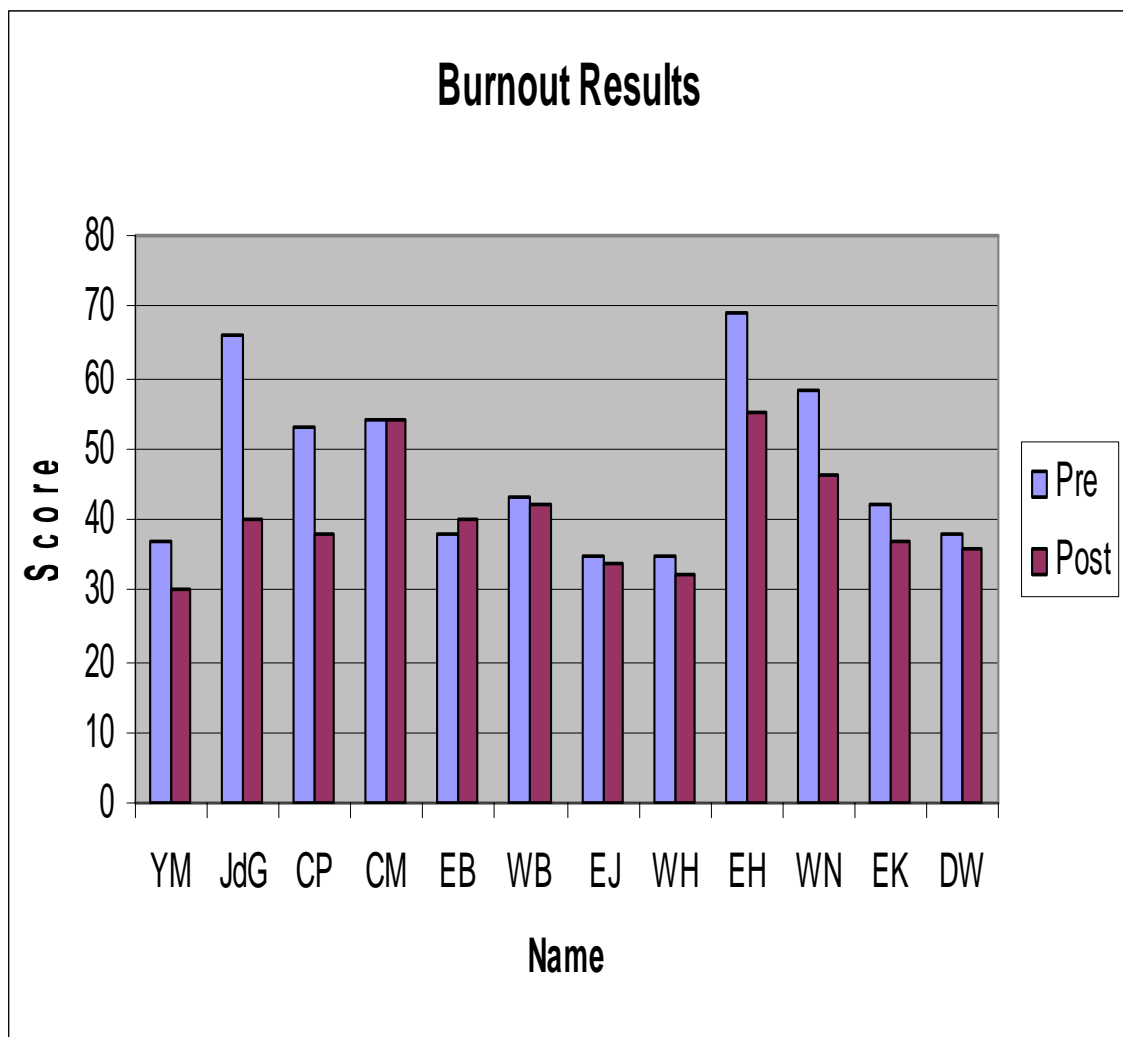
Burnout Results

Figure 6.7 Burnout Results per Person

The pre and post-test scores of the burnout levels of all the corporate employees but two, who participated in this research, showed a 12,75% decrease in their burnout levels after the stress management programme was presented to them.

One of the employees (EB) showed an increase in her burnout levels after the stress management programme was presented. As mentioned when discussing her results with regard to the stress questionnaire, this employee was exposed to added stress during the course of the training because of her father's illness. Whilst presenting the stress management programme, it became apparent that this employee felt

overwhelmed by the demands in her life and that she did not experience support from family and friends with regard to the general demands in her life and the added demands because of her father's illness.

One of the employees' (CM) burnout levels remained unchanged after the stress management programme was presented. When referring back to the general adaptation syndrome it is important to note that some people experience very high levels of stress for a long time and they adjust to that stress (Ross & Altmaier, 1994:3). The danger here is that this person may not even realise that he/she is heading towards a collapse. The researcher is of the opinion that this may be one of the reasons that CM's burnout levels did not change. She has been exposed to high levels of stress for a long time and even though she could make some basic changes that improved her stress levels, she would have to make the necessary adjustment in her lifestyle to prevent burnout. If she continues on the same path she could possible experience serious burnout in the future.

Figure 6.8 indicates the overall increase/decrease in the burnout levels of the respondents within the group. The results indicate that after the Stress Management Programme was presented:

- 84% of the respondents' burnout levels decreased.

- 8% of the respondents' burnout levels increased.

- 8% of the respondents' burnout levels remained unchanged.

Increase/decrease in burnout levels

8%   8%

84%

Legend:
- Decrease in burnout levels
- No change in burnout levels
- Increase in burnout levels
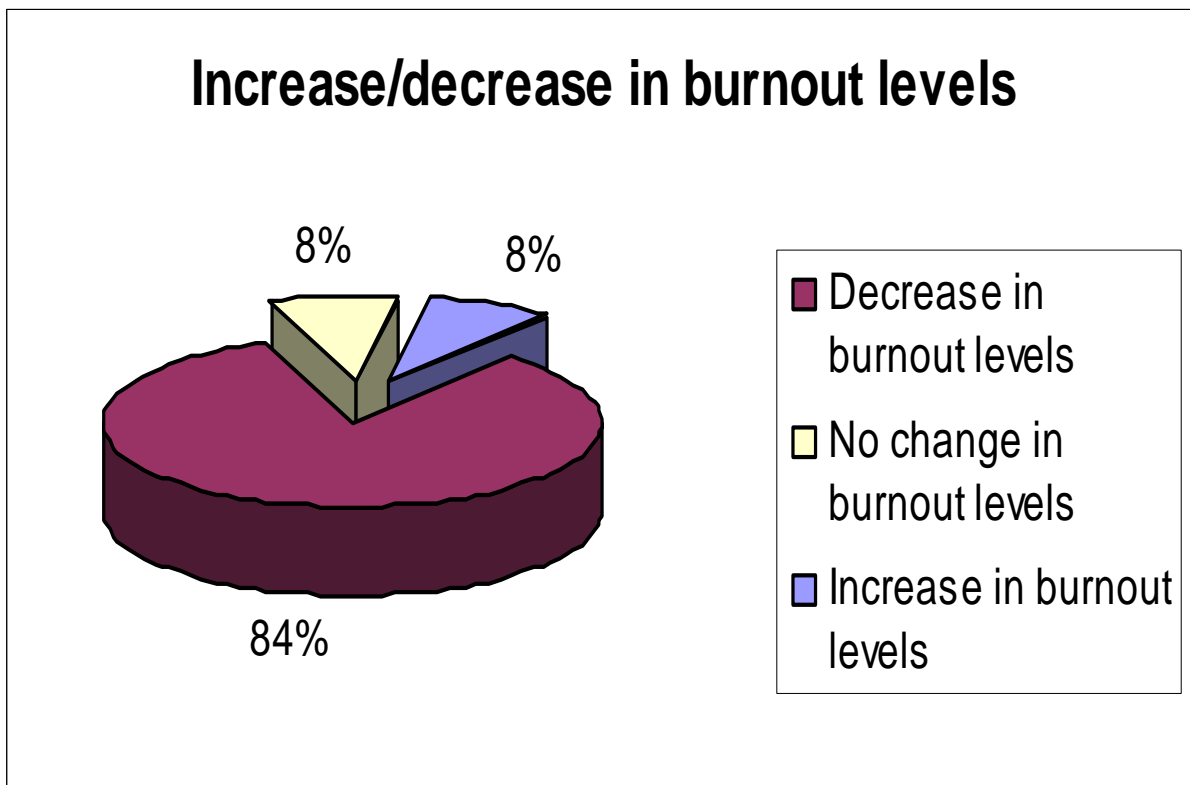
Figure 6.8 Increase/decrease in Burnout Levels

6.9.2.3   General Findings of the Quantitative Research

- Stress management techniques such as time management, assertiveness and communication improved after the stress management programme was completed by the corporate employees.

Brehm (1998:159) states the following regarding time management and communication:

> *Time management involves setting limits as well as priorities. Saying no to low priority requests and following through on your priorities and schedules is easier with good communication.*

Furthermore, Brehm (1998:169) states that assertiveness has an effect on people's stress levels:

> *Research has shown that people who do not assert themselves lack confidence in their feelings, beliefs and opinions. They are less likely to assert themselves in unpleasant social interactions and thus experience more interpersonal stress.*

- Emotional ventilation increased after the stress management programme.

- The use of play therapy mediums in the stress management programme resulted in an increase of the respondents' awareness of the effects of stress on their lives.

Awareness has an effect on the employee's general functioning as explained by Schoeman (1996:30).

> *Awareness is a means by which an individual can regulate him or herself by choice.*

- The increased awareness with regard to stress resulted in the realisation by the respondents that choices could be made with regard to stress management techniques in their lifestyles.

- These choices resulted in the realisation that control can be gained over personal circumstances by making certain lifestyle changes.

According to Looker and Gregson (2003:146), lifestyle changes would include changing aspects such as diet, caffeine and alcohol consumption, smoking habits, fitness and exercise, body weight and change with regard to the amount

of sleep and rest that the person has. Positive changes should have a positive effect on the person's stress levels.

Gaining control resulted in a decrease in stress levels. Auerbach and Gramling (1998:124) explain it as follows:

In general, the less control that the organism has over a stressor, the more severe the health outcomes: and, conversely, the more control an organism has over a stressor, the better the health outcomes

- The impact of the stress management programme was that the corporate employees became more aware of the importance of social support for their personal stress management. With regard to social support, Burns (2003:181) states the following:

Living a life with minimal stress requires human relationships that are not stressful. Humans are social animals and seek companionship, support, approval and acceptance from others at work, at home and at leisure.

- Continuous high stress levels resulted in high burnout levels before the stress management programme was presented.

Auerbach and Gramling (1998:212) state the following regarding burnout:

Burnout is the term that is used to signify the condition of an individual who, as a result of on-the-job stress, is completely drained and exhausted and can no longer function efficiently.

- The burnout levels of the employees decreased after the stress management programme was presented to them.

6.9.3   The Intervention: The Stress Management Programme

The stress management programme that was presented to the corporate employees was presented over four mornings and each session concentrated on a specific theme with regard to stress management.

Stress Management Programme			
Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4
Defining Stress	Effects of Stress	Stress Management Techniques	Personal Stress Management Programme
Relaxation & Drawing	Visualisation & Body Drawing	Clay & Relaxation	Sensory Exercise

Table 6.1 The Stress Management Programme

The following aspects were addressed during the training:

- Defining stress.

- The effects of stress physically, psychologically, emotionally and mentally.

- Stress management techniques.

- Personal stress management programme.

The training programme was based on literature and made use of activities to enhance the participation and the awareness of the employees.

6.9.3.1 The Use of Play Therapy Mediums

Play therapy mediums were used throughout the stress management training. The play therapy mediums were used to enhance the awareness of the employees with regard to their stress levels and the effect thereof on their functioning at work and in their personal lives. Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:35) mention the following regarding awareness:

With therapy based on an awareness of and contact in the here and now, solutions can thus be created.

The employees evaluated the use of the play therapy mediums as indicated in Figure 6.9.

Evaluation of Play Therapy Mediums
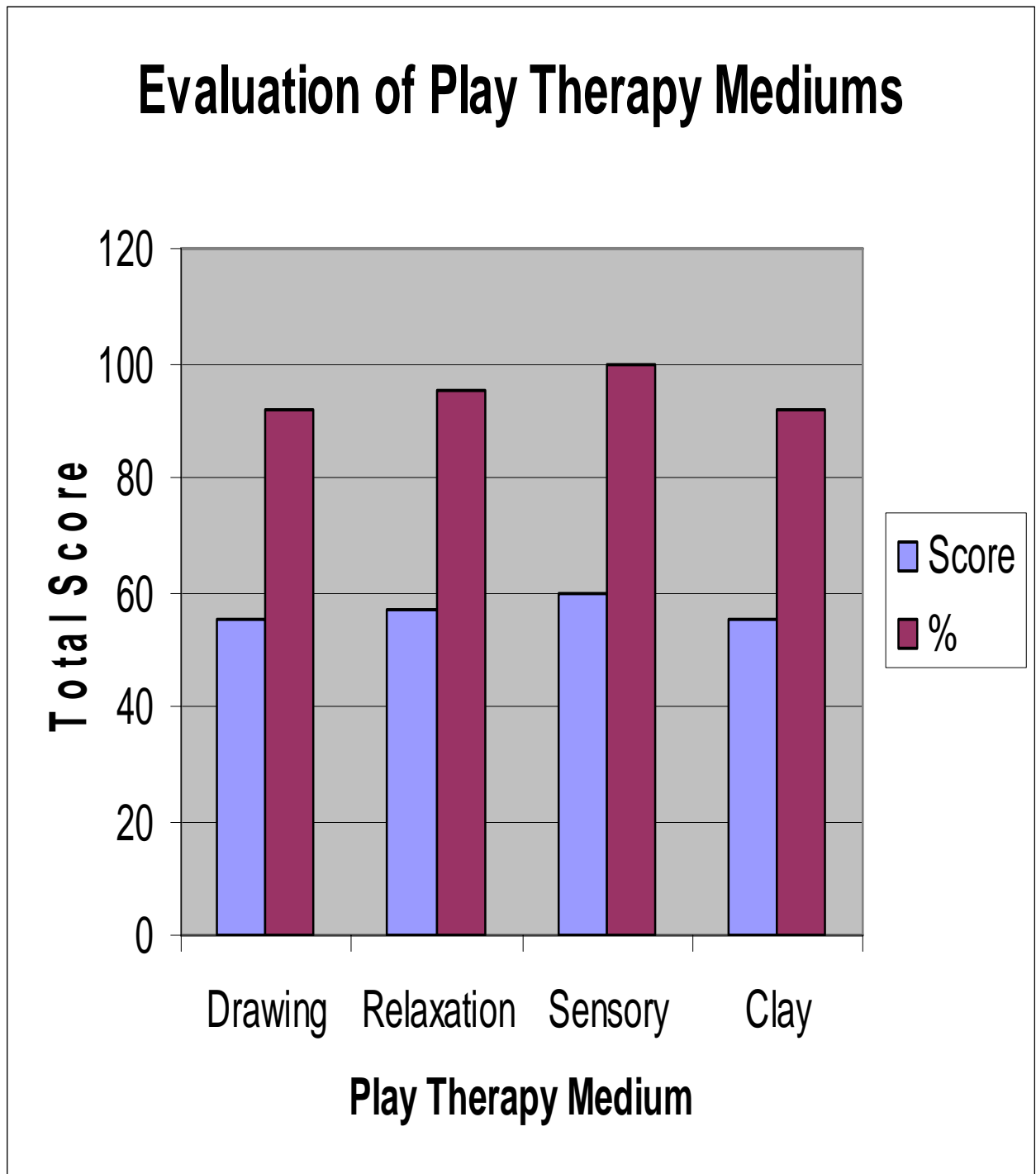
Figure 6.9 Evaluation of Play Therapy Mediums

All the participants were positive about the use of play therapy mediums during the stress management training. They participated voluntarily in all the activities that formed part of the programme.

- **Sensory Activities**

It is obvious from Figure 6.10 that the employees enjoyed the sensory work. The sensory activities that were used included the peeling of oranges (Oaklander, 1995), music was played during all the activities and the employees were made aware of their surroundings on a sensory level on a regular basis.

Practical Example:

The researcher gave the employees the opportunity to look around the room and to find an object that they liked. The employees then had to describe the object on a sensory level, thus "tell the group about the colour of the object, the sound that it makes, how does it taste, does it have a distinctive smell and what does the object remind you of?" This enhanced the employees' ability to make contact with their senses.

- **Clay**

It is important to mention that clay is a tactile medium and, therefore, it also works on a sensory level. All the employees took part in the activity with the clay. Some of them complained that the clay got stuck under their nails and that they did not like the feeling of the clay on their hands. Jennings (1993:90) states the following with regard to clay as a sensory medium:

> *It can be used to develop or express touch sensation, but also to activate other senses and to provide the context for imaginative play.*

Furthermore, according to Van der Merwe (1996:147), the clay offers the opportunity to make contact with and ventilate feelings:

It offers an acceptable medium for releasing feelings of hostility and aggression.

The employees were requested to create their greatest stressor in the clay with their eyes closed. Thereafter, the employees had the opportunity to give feedback with regard to the activity and they could share as much as they wanted to with the group about the stressor that they created. During this session one of the women felt she did not want to discuss anything in front of the group. She was given permission to discuss if she felt up to it, at a later stage. The next person discussed her stressor in a very general manner. The researcher asked W to discuss her experience and the stressor in her life. This participant started to tell the group in a very soft voice that the stressor that she made was her daughter and that her daughter had tried to commit suicide three times during the past year. This was creating enormous stress in her personal life and, therefore, it was having an effect on her work. She left the room crying – and returned five minutes later to continue with the training. (The researcher met with W after the session to confirm whether she was receiving therapy. She confirmed that she and her family were receiving therapy). After everyone in the group had had a turn, E asked whether she could have her turn again because she did not want to talk about her stressor the first time round. With the group's permission she then told the group that she divorced her husband a year ago and that she did not realise that the divorce was still having such an effect on her life.

The clay is an effective medium to bring troubling issues in the employees' lives to the foreground. They realise that they have unfinished business in their lives and that they

need to address the unfinished business before they will reach a state of homeostasis – thus learn to manage their stress levels more effectively.

- **Drawings**

The drawings were done as a group activity and as an individual activity. The group was divided into smaller groups and then were asked to draw the "stress". Thus they had to define stress in a drawing. This activity is effective because most times the group members draw their stressors and not "stress". This gave the researcher the opportunity to discuss the definition of stress and how stress can be positive and negative.

Piaget and Inhelder in West (1996:83) state the following about drawings as a play therapy medium:

> *…drawings and play have a special place in linking the internal and external domains.*

The next drawing that the group was asked to do was a scribble. Each employee had to do a scribble and find picture in the scribble. The picture was then named and the employee had to explain how the picture and the name of the picture related to their lives. The employees were amazed to realise that their unfinished business was projected onto the picture and this brought about awareness with regard to issues in their lives that they thought were forgotten or that they thought were not issues at all.

- **Relaxation Activities**

Each training session started or finished with a relaxation activity. The progressive muscular relaxation activity was repeated because the researcher is of the opinion that relaxation is a skill that people should to acquire. In the beginning it does not

come naturally, but the more a person does the relaxation activity, the easier it becomes (Auerbach and Gramling, 1998:55).

The relaxation activity varied slightly each time it was done. Initially the researcher concentrated much on the employees' breathing, the relaxation of different sets of muscles and on their awareness of their bodies. As the training progressed, visualisation activities were included in the relaxation exercises and the employees were invited to create their own safe place that they could return to at any time after the training was over. This activity was relaxing and it also created comfort for the employees, because it was something that they could take with them after the training was completed. According to Auerbach and Gramling (1998:137), relaxation can benefit corporate employees:

> *Relaxation techniques in general are widely used by people in informal ways to moderate anxiety and to deal with stress related somatic problems.*

For relaxation and to bring a fun element into the training, use was made of balloons. Each employee was invited to blow up a balloon. The employees were encouraged to blow all their stress into the balloon and then to knot the balloon and pass it on to one of the other employees in the group. Afterwards each employee was given permission to pop the balloon in any way that he/she felt comfortable. Some of the employees sat on the balloons, some stood on the balloons, others popped the balloons with pens and others just burst their balloons in their hands. This activity gave the employees an opportunity to relax and have fun. They laughed at each other and enjoyed the popping of the balloons. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to de-stress while doing this activity – they got the message that they had the ability to let

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go of the stress in their lives.

6.10 CONCLUSION

The researcher did research with a group of corporate employees. This research entailed that a pre-test was done to ascertain the stress levels of the participating employees. Thereafter, a stress management programme was presented to the employees and a post-test was done to ascertain what the effect of the stress management programme was on the stress levels of the employees.

The stress management programme included play therapy mediums that were used in activities throughout the programme. The results of the pre and post test scores indicate that the stress levels of the corporate employees who took part improved after presentation of the programme. The play therapy mediums had a positive effect on the employees. All of the employees took part in the activities and this led to greater awareness with regard to their own stress levels, the causes of stress in their lives and the choices that they had to make to take back the control over their lives.

The following chapter focuses on conclusions and recommendations that can be made from the findings of the research study.

CHAPTER 7

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate employees experience stress in the workplace because of reasons such as interpersonal relationships, organisational processes and work-home balance. They are expected to perform because there are deadlines that they have to meet, high management expectations and job insecurity. Often, they earn excellent salaries but they are expected to perform in accordance and even give more that their money's worth to justify their positions and their salaries.

Apart from the stress that corporate employees experience in the workplace, they also experience pressure in other areas of their lives outside the workplace. They have different roles that they have to fulfil and each one of these roles has their own demands.

All of these aspects add to the stress that is experienced by corporate employees. With ongoing stress, corporate employees start to feel out of balance with themselves and their environment. They experience a loss of control and they need to explore ways of regaining their equilibrium and thus their sense of being in control of their lives. If corporate employees do not take steps to manage their stress levels it could be to the detriment of their health and their work performance and it may even lead to burnout.

7.2 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

7.2.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was stated as follows:

To use play therapy mediums in a stress management programme to enable corporate employees to become aware of, and to manage their stress levels.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the findings that were gained from the pre and post-test indicate that this aim was achieved. The pre-test indicated that the stress levels of the corporate employees were very high. The stress management programme was presented to the corporate employees and play therapy mediums were used successfully throughout the programme. Thereafter, a post-test was done and it indicated that there was a positive change in the stress levels of the employees. The empirical results indicate a significant difference between the pre and the post-test findings.

7.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To conduct a literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees.
- To design a stress management programme using play therapy mediums to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects

of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.

- To implement a stress management programme that will enable employees to manage their stress levels more effectively.

- To evaluate a stress management programme for corporate employees.

- To formulate conclusions and recommendations which will be based on the empirical findings obtained from the study.

As discussed in Chapter 1, in order to achieve these objectives, the researcher essentially made use of quantitative research during this study, but for the sake of a more comprehensive research study, some aspects of qualitative research were incorporated.

With regard to the quantitative approach, the respondents completed questionnaires before and after they had undergone the stress management programme. The questionnaires gave an indication of the stress levels that the respondents were experiencing before the stress management programme, and what the effect of the stress management programme was on the respondents' stress levels. These results were analysed statistically to ascertain what the impact of the stress management programme was on each individual. The respondents were also asked to complete a checklist at the commencement of the stress management programme which they used for the compilation of their own stress management programmes. The checklists were not submitted to the researcher, but they remained the property of the respondents. In this regard a quantitative approach was followed.

Qualitative data was also gathered throughout the research. The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview schedule to have individual interviews with each of the respondents who took part in the study. This enabled the researcher to become

aware of their knowledge regarding stress and expectations regarding the stress management programme. Furthermore, the respondents were observed throughout the training and some conclusions were drawn with regard to the effect of the training on the respondents.

The objectives of the study were achieved as follows:

- An extensive literature study regarding stress management, play therapy mediums and corporate employees was done before commencement and during the course of the research study.

- A stress management programme with the use of play therapy was developed to facilitate greater awareness amongst corporate employees regarding the effects of stress on their daily functioning, their health and job performance.

- A stress management programme enabling employees to manage their stress levels more effectively was implemented.

- A stress management programme for corporate employees was evaluated by means of a pre and post-test as well as a separate evaluation that was completed by the corporate employees regarding the use of the play therapy mediums in a stress management programme.

- Conclusions and recommendations based on the empirical findings obtained from the study were formulated.

7.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was formulated as follows:

Will the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees, have a positive effect on their stress levels?

The research question can be answered as follows: Play therapy mediums can be used in stress management programmes with corporate employees to improve their stress levels. The pre and post test scores as discussed in Chapter 6, indicated that the stress levels of the corporate employees improved after exposure to a stress management programme wherein play therapy mediums were used.

7.4 HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were compiled, guided by the expectations regarding the outcome of the research study:

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Will be aware of what stress is.

- Will become aware of the effect of stress on their lives.

- Will become aware of what causes stress in their lives.

- Will be able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release.

- Will be able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives.

- Will be able to take responsibility for their lifestyle.

- Will be able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives.

- Will be able to compile a, personal stress management programme.

- The organisation will benefit from more productive and motivated employees.

From the quantitative research results, it was concluded that the hypotheses could be proven to be true as follows:

After participation in the stress management programme the corporate employees:

- Were more aware of what the meaning of stress is, because of the information that was presented to them during the course. Each of the employees was involved in a play therapy activity where they had to draw and discuss the definition of stress.

- Became aware of the effect of stress on their lives, because of the information that was presented to them during the course. Each of the employees was involved in a play therapy activity where they had to do a body outline drawing and discuss the effect of stress on themselves, physically, emotionally and psychologically.

- Became aware of the causes of stress in their lives through a checklist that they completed during the stress management programme.

- Were able to use the play therapy mediums as a stress release. The employees applied this during the stress management training.

- Were able to make use of the stress management techniques to alleviate stress in their lives. The employees applied this in the compilation of a personal stress management programme after completion of the stress management training. The post-test indicated an increase in the use of relaxation techniques, to manage their stress levels.

- Were able to take responsibility for their lifestyles. Most of the employees indicated that they needed to make lifestyle changes. They compiled a personal stress management programme, in order to address certain aspects in their lives that have an effect on their stress levels. They had the responsibility to make some lifestyle changes.

- Were able to make choices regarding their future reactions to stressors in their lives. Some of the employees approached their manager to discuss the impact of stress on their personal lives.

- Were able to compile their personal stress management programme. Each employee compiled a personal stress management programme which they applied for a period of three weeks. The post-test, after the stress management programme, indicated that the stress levels of the employees decreased.

- The organisation will benefit from more productive and motivated employees. This has not been proven from the quantitative research yet as one of the recommendations from this study is that further post- test should be performed in order to measure the longer term impact of the stress management programme on the employees as well as on the organisation. The literature study indicated that organisations benefit from more productive and motivated employees when their stress levels decrease.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations that can be made from the results that were obtained from the research that was done with corporate employees. Conclusions were derived from both the literature and empirical findings and were grouped as follows:

- The Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework for stress management with corporate employees.

- The effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees.

- The use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme with corporate employees.

7.5.1   Conclusions with regard to the use of the Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework in a stress management programme.

The Gestalt Theory can be used effectively as a theoretical framework for a stress management programme with corporate employees.

The concepts of the Gestalt Theory can be brought into relation with the effect that stress has on an individual. This conclusion is confirmed by Congress (1995:1121) when he states that the Gestalt Theory is holistic and can form the theoretical framework for work with any type of individual.

From the literature, the researcher derived the following concepts regarding the application of the Gestalt Theory in a stress management programme within the corporate environment. These concepts were discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

- **Awareness**

As discussed in paragraph 2.4.1, one of the main objectives of a stress management programme is to create awareness with regard to the cause of stress, the effect of stress and ways in which stress can be managed. The

Gestalt Theory focuses on awareness as part of the process of bringing the person in contact with him/herself and thereby the person can take responsibility for his/her life.

Furthermore, Robinson (1991:4) states that the basic goals of Gestalt are:

> *… for the clients to gain awareness of what they are experiencing and doing, and by becoming aware to take responsibility for what they are feeling, thinking and doing.*

The Gestalt Theory underlines awareness and can, therefore, be used effectively as a theoretical framework in a stress management programme with the corporate employee. The researcher experienced this concept as a fundamental part of the programme. As the awareness increased, the employees took more responsibility for their stress levels.

- **Homeostasis**

This concept was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.4.3. The person who is experiencing stress on an ongoing basis often feels that he/she is out of balance.

The person's Gestalt is intact when he/she is able to balance the different parts that form the Gestalt – the parts that form part of the foreground as well as the parts that form part of the background. Corporate employees often experience stress because they cannot balance all the aspects of their lives and, therefore, do not reach homeostasis.

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Therefore, using the Gestalt Theory as a theoretical framework for the stress management programme enables the employee to identify and address factors that cause an imbalance in their Gestalt, which leads to stress.

- **Wholeness**

Wholeness, as discussed in paragraph 2.4.2, is emphasised in the Gestalt Theory. There is no distinction between the mind and body or the thoughts and actions of people. They do not refer to feelings as separate from themselves – it is an integral part of them and should be viewed as such (Congress, 1995:1119).

Through the stress management programme and with the Gestalt Theory as theoretical background, the corporate employees realised that their emotions and their bodily reactions related to one another and, therefore, if they felt sad they may experience physical symptoms, for example headaches and stomach discomfort. The Gestalt Theory as theoretical framework for the stress management programme enables the employees to realise that all the parts of their person, work together as a whole. Their emotions have an effect on the physical person and this can have an effect on their psychological functioning.

- **Unfinished business**

The term "unfinished business" was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.4.4. People who have unfinished business cannot give their full attention to a specific situation because they have unfulfilled needs, unspoken needs or

unfinished situations that colour their perceptions (Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:111).

The corporate employees realise that if they have concerns at home, it could affect their ability to perform as expected of them. Unfinished business will always have an effect on their homeostasis. The employees feel out of balance and the unfinished experiences are projected into the workplace. This affects the stress levels of the employee negatively.

- **Responsibility**

As discussed in paragraph 2.5.8, corporate employees need to take responsibility for their lives and their stress levels. They need to take responsibility for their choices and make lifestyle changes to ensure positive stress in their lives. This concept from the Gestalt was emphasised during the stress management programme by allowing each employee to reflect on the causes of stress in their lives and how they need to make changes that will address these stressors. Therefore, they have to take the responsibility for the changes that need to be made. This concept enabled the social worker to explain to the corporate employees why it is important to take responsibility and to regain control over their lives.

Perls (1969) in Thompson and Rudolph (1992:113) refers to the aim of Gestalt therapy as follows:

> *… to help people help themselves to grow up – to mature, take charge of their lives, and become responsible for themselves.*

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The stress management programme ensures that the above is accomplished as each of the corporate employees compile a stress management programme. This enables them to take responsibility for the stress that they are experiencing as well as for the fact that they can make positive changes in their lives.

- **The use of sensory activities promotes awareness and helps the corporate employees to gain balance.**

Sensory awareness is one of the activities that can be used with corporate employees during the stress management programme. The employees become aware of how they can make contact with themselves and how sensory awareness can help them manage their stress levels more effectively. Oaklander (1988:128) supports this view by emphasising the use of sensory activities when she states that sensory contact promotes awareness and helps people to gain homeostasis. Once homeostasis is achieved, the employee feels more in control and his/her stress levels react more positively.

- **Projection**

Through the stress management programme the corporate employees realised that by projecting blame onto others, they are relinquishing control and giving everything and everybody else the control over their lives and their circumstances. According to the Gestalt Theory, an individual can stop projecting and regain the control over his/her own life. This concept was discussed in detail in paragraph 2.5.3.

Glass in Corsini (1984:60) indicates that someone who projects cannot take responsibility for his/her life:

Instead of denying, blaming, projecting and displacing responsibility for one's own experience, the individual is encouraged to accept thoughts, feelings and actions as part of the self. Attributing responsibility to scapegoats – parents, childhood traumas, spouse and the like – leaves the individual powerless and dependant.

The stress management programme gives the corporate employees the opportunity to stop projecting and to take responsibility for their lives. Their stressors were identified and they had to make a decision as to what they can do to address those stressors.

- **Polarities**

Polarities are a part of every aspect of every person's life (see paragraph 2.5.9). Once the corporate employees realised that there are positive and negative aspects to every situation and circumstance they started to realise that they should embrace the positive aspects and accept the negative aspects as part of their lives. With regard to this, Greenberg, *et al.* (1995:40) suggested the following:

…strength and weakness, kindness and cruelty, selflessness and selfishness integrate into a balanced capacity to act adaptively.

Polarities, as emphasised by the Gestalt Theory, is addressed in the stress

management programme. The employees had to compile a stress management programme for themselves that included positive and negative aspects. In this stress management programme the employees were asked to identify five aspects in their lives that have a depressing effect on them (stressors) as well as five strengths in their lives that have a positive effect on their functioning. They had to set goals for the positive as well as the negative aspects in their lives and therefore they could realise that all situations have positive and negative aspects and each person should work towards improving the negative aspects and take action to strengthen the positive aspects (which also form part of the individual's support system).

With regard to all the above mentioned concepts, the Gestalt Theory can be utilised effectively as part of the theoretical framework to implement a stress management programme with corporate employees.

7.5.2   Conclusions with regard to the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme for corporate employees.

The evaluation of the play therapy mediums (as shown in Figure 6.10) indicates that the mediums can be used effectively in a stress management programme with corporate employees.

From the researcher's observations during the presentation of the stress management programme, the following conclusions regarding the reaction of the corporate employees to the use of play therapy mediums were made:

- **The play therapy mediums create an atmosphere of fun in which the stress management programme can be presented.**

  The play therapy mediums were experienced by the corporate employees as **fun**. These are unique mediums that the corporate employees have never worked with before as the mediums have never been included in a training programme that they attended, before. The activities gave the employees the opportunity to laugh and while they were playing, they had the opportunity to de-stress as well.

- **Awareness regarding stress and the effect thereof on the corporate employee is facilitated by the use of play therapy mediums.**

  The play therapy mediums were effective in creating **awareness of the stressors and the effects thereof on the employees, in the here and now.** When the employees did the drawings of "stress" they had the opportunity to show what they knew about stress and their knowledge was broadened in the process. This was effective in bringing the employees in contact with their feelings, in the here and now.

- **When using the play therapy mediums the corporate employees have an opportunity to make contact with and to ventilate their emotions.**

  With the awareness came the opportunity for the corporate employees to make contact with their emotions and to **discuss these emotions** in front of the rest of the group.

- **All the corporate employees who took part in this research study participated in the activities with the play therapy mediums.**

  The play therapy mediums were experienced positively by all the members of the corporate team. The team consisted of males and females, junior staff, senior staff and managers from different race and gender groups. All the members of the **team participated** in the activities and there was no distinction between gender and race as to the effective use of the play therapy mediums. This is a definite indication that the play therapy mediums can be used effectively within a multi-cultural environment. Furthermore, the team members were all corporate employees and as play therapy mediums are traditionally used when working with children and not with adults, these adults, within a formal corporate environment, could relate to the activities and have fun whilst doing so.

- **Drawings can be used effectively as part of a stress management programme with corporate employees.**

  The following additional conclusions can be made with regard to the use of drawings in a stress management programme:

  o **Drawings serve as a metaphor into which the corporate employees project their own feelings and experiences.**

    The corporate employees were asked to make three drawings. The employees projected what they thought stress was and the effects thereof, into the drawings.

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o **Drawing is a fun activity**

The corporate employees are not familiar with the use of creative mediums such as crayons. They laughed at their own creations and also laughed with each other. They had fun whilst projecting their ideas and feelings onto paper.

o **Drawings ensure involvement from the participants**

All the corporate employees took part in this activity. Different people react differently to the instruction, but they all participated and, therefore, nobody in the group felt excluded.

o **Personal awareness is created with the use of drawings**

Through their drawings the corporate employees could identify the stressors in their lives and how it affects them. Furthermore, they could make contact with unfinished business in their lives while drawing their dreams. They could also draw how they would have liked their dreams to end.

- **The use of relaxation techniques in a stress management programme helped the corporate employees to relax and, therefore, lower their stress levels.**

The following additional conclusions can be made regarding the use of

relaxation techniques in a stress management programme:

o **The use of music in a stress management programme is effective in helping the employees to relax.**

Music was used before and during each training session. The corporate employees remarked that they enjoyed the music in the background before they started with the programme. It made their bodies feel as if they were not at work. If the music was not used during the activities, one of the corporate employees would ask if the music could be turned on.

o *Muscle relaxation techniques can be used by the corporate employees during and after the stress management programme to lower their stress levels.*

The researcher observed that the corporate employees seemed more focused on the training after a muscle relaxation activity. With the repetition of the activity they were able to memorise the steps and make it part of their own stress management programme.

o **Breathing exercises create awareness of how the stress affects their bodies.**

Whilst participating in the relaxation exercises the corporate employees were made aware of the effect on stress on their breathing – was the breathing shallow and/or fast and how it affects the body when the breathing becomes too fast. The corporate employees were encouraged

to take deep breaths when they felt stressed. This is one of the activities that formed part of their daily stress management programme.

o **Imagery and visualisation can be incorporated into relaxation exercises, to improve the stress levels of the corporate employees.**

Visualisation formed part of some of the relaxation activities. The corporate employees could visualise how to address a stressor successfully in their lives and through this technique, gain confidence in their abilities to address the stressor. The visualisation also gave the corporate employees the opportunity to create a safe place where they could return to when they experience stress.

• **The use of clay in a stress management programme with corporate employees facilitates awareness of emotions and gives the opportunity to ventilate emotions.**

The following additional conclusions can be made regarding the use of clay in a stress management programme:

o **Clay helps the corporate employees to relax**

The use of the clay medium contributed to the fact that the participants felt relaxed because they ventilated anger and pent up feelings.

o **The clay offers a sensory experience.**

The participants showed explicit reaction to the experience of the clay on

their hands. Some enjoyed the touch of the clay on their hands and others wanted to wash their hands as soon as possible after handling the clay.

o **The clay brings people into contact with their feelings.**

When the corporate employees were discussing their stressors with the rest of the group, they were very quiet and subdued. Some of the group members showed their emotions overtly.

o **Anger can be ventilated through the clay.**

The corporate employees had the opportunity to destroy their stressors in any way that they liked. Some of them crushed their stressors, others threw them and others ripped their stressors apart.

o **It is an appealing activity for adults to take part in.**

The corporate employees enjoyed the activity. The fact that there was no aesthetic value in their creation had the effect of more relaxed individuals who did not hesitate to participate.

o **The clay can be used as an activity in a group.**

The researcher observed that the corporate employees felt more comfortable with the fact that everyone in the group was participating in the activity, rather that them having to do it on their own. All the participants were involved in the activity, therefore no one felt left out and

the confidence of the corporate employees grew as they saw the other participants sharing.

- **The use of dream work in a stress management programme helps the corporate employees to deal with unfinished business that causes stress in their lives.**

Dream work is an effective way of completing unfinished business. With dream work the corporate employees became aware of stressful factors in their lives that they would not have identified as stressors. This activity increased the awareness and promoted homeostasis in the lives of the corporate employees.

- **The use of the sand tray empowers corporate employees to regain control of their lives.**

The sand tray was used during the pilot phase of this study and the researcher came to the following conclusions regarding the use of the sand tray in a stress management programme with corporate employees:

- o **The sand creates a tactile experience.**

Working with the sand enhances the sensory experience of the corporate employee and therefore facilitates greater awareness in the employee.

o   **The sand tray allows the corporate employee to take control of his/her life.**

The employees have the opportunity to play out their stressors in the sand and to create a scene where they regain control of their lives.

o   **Through the use of the sand tray employees are empowered to take control of their lives by facing their fears.**

Whilst using the sand tray the employees are empowered to take control over their lives. They find alternative solutions for problems and feel less overwhelmed.

o   **The employees have the opportunity to ventilate their anger when working in the sand tray.**

The employees are encouraged to get involved in the sand scene and to do what ever they like with the stressful situation. This gives them the opportunity to ventilate their feelings and, therefore, to feel more relaxed.

7.5.3   Conclusions with regard to the effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees.

A stress management programme can have a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees. This is indicated in Figure 6.3 where the post-test that was completed by the corporate employees indicated an improvement in the stress levels

of the employees after they completed the stress management programme.

From the literature, as well as the empirical findings, the researcher derived the following conclusions regarding the effect of a stress management programme on the stress levels of corporate employees:

- **The employees became aware that the long working hours have a negative impact on their stress levels.**

Corporate employees who work long hours are more susceptible to the effects of stress:

Individuals under 45 years of age who worked more that 48 hours a week had twice the risk of death from coronary heart disease as did similar individuals working a maximum of 40 hours a week (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:15).

These individuals are at risk of stress related illnesses but the organisation is also affected in a negative way as employees can become less productive and less efficient:

It is now commonly recognised that working beyond 40-50 hours a week results in time spent that is increasingly unproductive (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997:15).

The corporate employees who participated in this study work approximately 50-55 hours a week. Therefore, they form part of the high risk group in terms of the

effects of stress on their lives. Unfortunately the high performing corporate employee has to live up to the expectations in the working environment. Employees often find themselves in the situation where they have to work longer hours to meet the deadlines that have been set. This becomes stressful and the employee's health and efficiency can be affected by the long working hours.

- **The corporate employees took responsibility for managing their career development.**

One of the aspects that cause stress in the lives of corporate employees is the uncertainties that surround their career development expectations. The corporate employees may feel uncertain about their job security or about future prospects within their working environment. These aspects can lead to stress if they are not clarified with the employee's manager. Cartwright & Cooper (1997:19) explains it as follows:

> *A host of issues can act as stressors throughout one's working life. Lack of job security, fear of job loss, obsolescence, or retirement, and numerous performance appraisals – all can create pressure and strain.*

Career development was one of the stressors in the lives of the corporate employees who took part in this study. The outcome of the study revealed that some of the employees discussed their job design and career with their manager after the first session of the stress management programme and that it had a positive effect on their stress levels.

- **The use of social support is an effective way of lowering stress levels.**

One of the most effective strategies to manage stress is to make use of the support systems in a person's life. In this study, as well as in a study by Cartwright and Cooper (1992), many of the respondents made use of their family and friends as a strategy to cope with the stress that they were experiencing at work. Brehm (1998:89) supports this view by explaining social support as follows:

Most people need human contact in times of stress. We turn to people for help in solving problems, and we turn to them for comfort.

The stress management programme emphasised that each person should value his/her support system. This support system also plays a role in helping the corporate employee with the tasks and roles that he/she has to perform around the house. If family and friends do support, it takes part of the load off these employees and they can experience less stress. The corporate employees indicated on the post-test that most of them had a discussion with their families with regard to chores that had to be performed at home. This contributed to a decrease in their stress levels.

- **A lack of communication creates stress in the life of the corporate employee.**

Communication is a theme that is relevant to many aspects that can result in lower stress levels in the lives of the corporate employees. It relates to

communication with family and friends regarding the support that is needed, it is related to discussions with a manager regarding career development; it is related to the sharing of feelings and the handling of conflicts and confrontations in the workplace. Cohen, *et al.,* (2001:223) describe the role of communication by stating the following:

> *In any relationship people must communicate, which is always subject to distortion and misunderstandings.*

Effective communication was discussed as part of the stress management programme. All the respondents mentioned that communication and especially communicating their feelings is not a natural process for them. This causes misunderstandings between themselves and their colleagues, families, and friends. These misunderstandings contribute to an increase in their stress levels.

The stress management programme created awareness regarding the effects of communication on their stress levels. The questions which related to communication indicated an improvement in the post-test that was completed after the stress management programme mainly because they communicated with their manager, colleagues, family and friends, regarding the stressors in their lives and the support that they need.

- **Effective time management alleviates the effect of stress in the lives of corporate employees.**

If corporate employees experience difficulty in managing time effectively, it

causes stress in their lives. Time management is important because they have large workloads, deadlines to meet and they work long hours. This leads to the fact that they spend less and less time at home with family and friends – who should form the basis of the employees' support system. Cartwright & Cooper (1997:109) has the following opinion regarding time:

Time, like money, is a limited resource that can be used to good or bad effect. However, although it is possible to make more money, unfortunately you can't knit more time – there can be only 24 hours in a day. The inability to manage time effectively is often a major source of stress.

Greater awareness with regard to stress management techniques such as time management and the implementation thereof, has a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees. The post-test scores indicated more effective time management and this contributed to lower stress levels after the stress management programme was presented.

- **Balanced diet, exercise and rest improve the stress levels of the corporate employee.**

The above mentioned implicates that corporate employees must make lifestyle changes to ensure improved stress management in their lives. Daft (1997:773) explains the importance of exercise by saying the following:

Moderate exercise three to five times a week is a great stress reliever. If you find an exercise you really love, you are more likely to keep doing it.

The corporate employee must make more time to exercise and to rest. A change to a more nutritious diet will improve the immune system of the corporate employees and, therefore, they will be more able to withstand the negative effects of stress more effectively.

The empirical findings indicate that the corporate employees who started to rest and exercise more and who were prepared to make positive changes in their diets, experienced lower stress levels after the stress management training. This is one of the areas in which the corporate employees had to take responsibility for their lifestyles and make some changes.

- **A stress management programme can have a positive effect on the stress levels of corporate employees.**

This conclusion can be made from the empirical findings of this study. The pre-test indicated high stress levels but after the stress management programme was implemented, all but one of the corporate employees indicated lower stress levels. If fun activities such as play therapy mediums are included, it contributes to the de-stressing of individuals.

- **The employees became aware that processes within the corporate environment can have a negative impact on their stress levels**

The researcher observed that the following aspects have an effect on the stress levels of the corporate employees:

o **Job satisfaction makes the hard work and the long hours worthwhile.**

The corporate employees mentioned that if you enjoy your job, it does not matter that you work long hours and that there is a lot of stress involved. During the stress management training it was mentioned that all jobs have positive and negative aspects (polarities) and that each employee has to decide for him/herself whether it is worth doing the job.

o **Decision making**

During the stress management training, it became obvious that decision making is stressful to the corporate employees. The fact that they work in a team where everyone needs to be considered in decision-making complicates the process and often makes the process longer.

o **Communication**

A lack of communication causes misunderstandings between the members of the corporate team. This has the effect that deadlines can be missed and conflict can occur between the team members. This may also lead to stress within the corporate environment.

o **Organisational culture can be stressful to corporate employees.**

The organisational culture of this group of employees is to work and perform to their full potential to ensure that they meet deadlines and live up to the million rand contracts that they are working on. By discussing the organisational culture with the corporate employees, they became aware of the fact that this aspect of functioning as a team could have an effect on

their stress levels and they have to build positive aspects into their lives to counteract the negative effects.

o **Organisational change causes stress in the lives of corporate employees.**

The corporate employees' work in a changing environment within the organisation but they also function within an environment where change in the organisation and change in technology is something they have to cope with on a regular basis. Daft (1997: 770) states the following regarding change in the lives in employees:

> *There are many sources of stress for managers, especially when companies are changing and everyone seems to want more from less.*

While the training was taking place there was a takeover by another bank and this caused uncertainty with regard to their job security. Many of the corporate employees are contract workers and they did not have any idea how they would fit into the "new" company.

7.5.4   Stress Management Model

The following model is a summation of the use of a stress management programme on the stress levels of employees. The conclusions that can be made from this model are as follows:

- With the use of play therapy mediums awareness is created regarding stress and the effects thereof on employees.

- As soon as awareness is created with corporate employees, they take responsibility for their functioning and are prepared to make lifestyle changes.

- Through these changes the employees regain control of their lives and, therefore, regain their homeostasis.

- The stress management programme lowers the stress levels of corporate employees.

Figure 7.1 Stress Management Model

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.6.1   Theoretical Framework

- It is recommended that the Gestalt theoretical framework be implemented when presenting the stress management programme as it can serve as a guideline to the social worker when presenting the programme and it can facilitate greater awareness, homeostasis and the taking of personal responsibility.

7.6.2   Presentation of Stress Management Programmes

- A stress audit should be done with the corporate employees of an organisation to ascertain what their stress levels are and whether a stress management programme should be one of the measures implemented to lower the stress levels.

- The success of the stress management programme depends on the fact that all the participants compile their own goals whereby they plan to make lifestyle changes and, therefore, take responsibility for their own stress management.

- The group of employees participating in the stress management programme should not exceed 15 participants and should not consist of less than 8 participants. This will ensure that each participant receives individual attention and that there are enough people to create a group dynamic which will allow for all the participants to learn from each other.

- A follow-up study should be done with the participating employees to ascertain the long term effect of the presented programme on their stress levels.

- The organisation can make use of employee assistance programmes to address stress within their organisation on a pro-active and re-active level.

- Further research should be done with regard to the use of play therapy mediums in a stress management programme within the corporate environment.

7.6.3   Play Therapy Mediums

The researcher recommends that play therapy mediums are included in a stress management programme with corporate employees because it facilitates greater awareness and, therefore brings the participants in contact with themselves. The play therapy mediums should be included in each part of the stress management programme and a variety of mediums should be used to ensure that the participants do not get bored.

7.6.3.1   Reasons for the use of play therapy mediums:

- The social worker should create a fun atmosphere with the use of music and aids such as balloons.

- The social worker should allow for emotional ventilations from the participants and he/she should not become uncomfortable when such emotions are shown.

7.6.3.2   Recommendations when implementing the play therapy mediums:

- The social worker must ensure participation from every member by asking questions and being involved in the play therapy activity.

- When working with adults it is important to make sure that they understand the instructions with regard to drawings. This is not a natural activity for them and if the instructions for the activity are not clear enough, they may lose interest.

- When the body drawings are done the social worker must ensure that there is enough white board paper available for the participants to be able to lie down on the paper and make an outline of the body.

- Make sure that there are enough crayons and drawing materials for all the participants.

- When working with clay it is important for the social worker to ensure that there is big white board paper for the participants to do the activities on.

- The social worker should warn the participants that working with clay can bring some suppressed emotions to the fore and that it is a natural occurrence.

- The participants can be asked to wear comfortable clothing so that they feel free to take part in the activities.

- With regard to the sensory activities the participants should be warned that they must be aware of allergic reactions that can be caused by objects such as

oranges or food colouring before they take part in the activities. Some participants may be tactile sensitive and need to be informed before hand what the activity entails, what is going to be done and what the experience may be like. The participants should also have the social worker's permission to stop with the activity if it causes any physical discomfort for them.

- When working with play therapy mediums, it is always important to bring the employees back to reality before they leave the training session. The researcher recommends that the facilitator reminds them of the fact that it is allowable to "kill" someone when using a play therapy medium but it is never acceptable behaviour in real life.

7.6.4   General Recommendations

- Social workers should be used on a greater scale within the corporate environment to do stress management programmes with corporate employees.

- Training with regard to the use of play therapy mediums with adults should be included in the curriculum for social workers so that it is a skill that they can implement within the corporate environment.

- The training in the Employee Assistance Programmes at university levels should include a short course on the use of play therapy mediums with adults in the corporate environment.

- Training with regard to the use of play therapy mediums with corporate employees should be implemented in the form of a short course at all the

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Universities in South Africa.

- The stress management programme would be even more effective if the corporate employees could be moved out of their working environment, perhaps into a more natural setting, where the atmosphere is relaxing for the corporate employees.

- If the stress management programme is presented at the offices of the corporate employees, an arrangement should be made before that they should not be called out for urgent work, whilst the presentation of the stress management programme is being conducted. This may break the continuity of the training and the employees who leave the sessions may not receive all the information.

- Further research should be done with regard to the enduring effects of the stress management programme. The same post-test could be implemented after three to six months to ascertain whether the positive effects of the stress management programme had lasting effects in the lives of the employees.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-test / post-test (1)

Stress Management: How do you manage personal stress?

Every person responds to a new or difficult situation, in a unique way. How do you manage your stress in your life? Find out by completing the following assessment.

Instructions: For each of the statements below, rate yourself on the following scale.

5 = always; 3 = usually; 1 = seldom

__ 1. I manage my time effectively.

__ 2. I use assertive statements to protect my right to say "no" to others.

__ 3. I regularly share my feelings with someone close to me.

__ 4. I do volunteer work that is meaningful to me.

__ 5. I eat a balanced diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

__ 6. I do exercise at least three times each week.

__ 7. I practice relaxation techniques daily.

__ 8. I avoid unhealthy habits (eg. smoking or alcohol abuse) for coping with stress.

__ 9. I spend some leisure time in a place where I have a complete change of scenery.

__ 10. I have talked to my boss about my work commitments and expectations.

__ 11. I have talked to members of my household to divide responsibilities.

__ 12. I get 6-8 hours sleep every night.

Total: _____

Scoring and interpretation:

Total your score and write it on the line above.

A score of 50-60 indicates that you are doing the right things to manage your stress levels.

If your score is between 36 and 49, you are taking many steps to manage your stress, but there is more you can do. Rethink your priorities.

If your score is 35 and lower, you are pointing yourself the direction of health problems and relationship problems at home and at work. You need to make some adjustment in your lifestyle.

(Burn & Payment, 2000:159 –160)

ANNEXURE B: BURNOUT QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-test / post-test (2)

Burnout: Are you a candidate for job burnout?

Check the likelihood of your burning out on the job by taking the following assessment.

Instructions: On the line preceding each of the following statements, rate yourself according to the following scale.

5 = always; 4 = usually; 3 = about half the time; 2 = infrequently; 1 = almost never

__ 1. I am tired and exhausted when I get up on workdays.

__ 2. I have trouble getting to sleep, waking up or both.

__ 3. I am increasingly frustrated, impatient and irritable at work.

__ 4. I have work on my mind even when I am not at work.

__ 5. I am under appreciated (under valued) at work.

__ 6. I have difficulty making small decisions at work.

__ 7. I procrastinate more than in the past.

__ 8. I make small mistakes in everyday tasks.

__ 9. My loved ones tell me I am too intense.

__ 10. I am in a bad mood more that in a good mood.

__ 11. I am too busy to sit down and enjoy a meal with friends.

__ 12. I am too busy for leisure activities.

__ 13. It is difficult to make small talk with people I formerly enjoyed being with.

__ 14. I often loose my personal possessions such as keys and glasses.

__ 15. I seem to have lost my perspective.

__ 16. I am overwhelmed by all the responsibilities I have.

__ 17. I have insomnia, headaches, hypertension, rashes or digestive problems.

__ 18. I use alcohol, pills, chocolate or ice cream to help me cope with stress.

__ 19. I wonder if there is any point in living like this.

__ 20. I have fantasies about getting away from it all.

Scoring and interpretation:

Total your score and write it on the line above.

A score of 39 or less indicates that you are successfully avoiding burnout.

If your score is between 40 and 59, you managing your job stress well only some of the time. At other times you are compromising your health and well-being.

If your score is between 60 and 79, you are in the burnout danger zone.

If your score is over 80, you are already in trouble and you know it.

(Burn & Payment, 2000:37–38)

ANNEXURE C: CHECKLIST – CAUSES OF STRESS

To determine the causes of your stress, read through the following statements and decide up to which degree each one creates stress for you, indicate your score for each statement on your answer sheet.

0	1	2	3	4				
Causes no stress	Causes a little stress	Causes moderate stress	Causes much stress	Causes extreme stress				
1. FAMILY STRESSORS								
1. Marriage or serious relationship				0	1	2	3	4
2. Marital problems				0	1	2	3	4
3. Divorce				0	1	2	3	4
4. Marriage reconciliation				0	1	2	3	4
5. Disciplinary problems with children				0	1	2	3	4
6. Sexual problems				0	1	2	3	4
7. Addition of new family member				0	1	2	3	4
8. Lack of effective communication between family members (husband/ wife or parent/ child)				0	1	2	3	4
9. Problems with extended family members				0	1	2	3	4
10. Serious illnesses in family				0	1	2	3	4
11. Death of spouse				0	1	2	3	4
12. Pregnancy – self/wife				0	1	2	3	4
2. WORK STRESSORS								
1. Unemployment				0	1	2	3	4
2. Retirement				0	1	2	3	4
3. Started with a new career/ position				0	1	2	3	4
4. Incomplete job description				0	1	2	3	4
5. Too high workload, too busy				0	1	2	3	4
6. Too high work demands				0	1	2	3	4
7. Retrenchment				0	1	2	3	4
8. Disciplinary conduct/ serious warnings given by supervisor				0	1	2	3	4
9. Slow tempo of promotion				0	1	2	3	4
10. Having relationship problems with colleagues				0	1	2	3	4

	0	1	2	3	4
11. Problems with authority structure/ management	0	1	2	3	4
12. Lack of positive feedback by managers	0	1	2	3	4
13. Boring routine work	0	1	2	3	4
14. Irregular working hours	0	1	2	3	4
15. Difficulty in deciding about your career future	0	1	2	3	4

3. SOCIAL AND INTERPERSONAL STRESSORS

	0	1	2	3	4
1. Trouble with making friends/ too few friends	0	1	2	3	4
2. Lack of satisfactory, significant human relationships	0	1	2	3	4
3. Feelings of inferiority (minderwaardigheid) opposite friends	0	1	2	3	4
4. Experience social isolation	0	1	2	3	4
5. Feels like a victim of ethnic, racial, religious or sexual preferences	0	1	2	3	4
6. Death of a personal friend	0	1	2	3	4
7. Termination of a significant friendship	0	1	2	3	4
8. Friends live far away	0	1	2	3	4
9. Victim of crime	0	1	2	3	4
10. Relationship problems with friends	0	1	2	3	4
11. Live alone	0	1	2	3	4

4. ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS

	0	1	2	3	4
1. Noisy, unfriendly neighbours	0	1	2	3	4
2. Problems with municipal services	0	1	2	3	4
3. Lack of relaxation facilities	0	1	2	3	4
4. Overpopulated housing conditions	0	1	2	3	4
5. Poor housing accommodation	0	1	2	3	4
6. Noise (traffic, aeroplanes, trains, factories)	0	1	2	3	4
7. Pollution	0	1	2	3	4
8. High crime and vandalism in the neighbourhood	0	1	2	3	4
9. Construction in the neighbourhood	0	1	2	3	4
10. Ethnic or racial conflict	0	1	2	3	4

5. FINANCIAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS					
1. Cash flow problems	0	1	2	3	4
2. Loss of income	0	1	2	3	4
3. Increased expenses	0	1	2	3	4
4. Purchasing of expensive material (house, vehicle, furniture)	0	1	2	3	4
5. New bond/ loan	0	1	2	3	4
6. Slight infringement (parking ticket)	0	1	2	3	4
7. Participation in court cases/ court procedures	0	1	2	3	4
8. Imprisonment/ suspended sentence	0	1	2	3	4
6. CHANGE STRESSORS					
1. Change in health of family member	0	1	2	3	4
2. Change in to a new type of work	0	1	2	3	4
3. Change in marital status	0	1	2	3	4
4. Change in working hours/ work conditions	0	1	2	3	4
5. Change in residential situation	0	1	2	3	4
7. PHYSICAL STRESSORS					
1. Excessive alcohol use	0	1	2	3	4
2. Excessive usage of tranquillizers	0	1	2	3	4
3. Excessive usage of caffeine	0	1	2	3	4
4. Excessive smoking	0	1	2	3	4
5. Irregular eating patterns	0	1	2	3	4
6. Irregular sleeping patterns	0	1	2	3	4
7. Regular infections	0	1	2	3	4
8. Very unfit due to lack of exercise	0	1	2	3	4
9. Overweight/ under weight	0	1	2	3	4
10. Recent operation	0	1	2	3	4
11. Injuries	0	1	2	3	4

12. Discomfort due to chronic pain	0	1	2	3	4
13. Acute/chronic diseases	0	1	2	3	4
14. Lack of sexual interest	0	1	2	3	4

(Compiled from: *Auerbach & Gramling, 1998; Brehm, 1998)*