



# Training programmes for stress management in small businesses

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present: the problem of stress employees might encounter; the individual inclination to stress; the individual methods for reducing stress; and the authors' model of training for stress prevention.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper uses both descriptive and analytical approaches to research and dissemination. Within the descriptive approach various methods are applied, including compilation, descriptive and comparative techniques; the analytical approach involves inductive and deductive methods.

**Findings** – It emerges that individuals vary considerably in their ability to manage stress. Self-perception, locus of control, type A or B behavioural patterns and flexibility or rigidity, all appear to influence stress management abilities.

**Practical implications** – Some organisations might choose to assist individuals to manage stress by providing relevant training programmes.

**Originality/value** – The paper develops a model of training for stress prevention. This model could be customised to the specific needs of small, medium and large organisations.

**Keywords** Stress, Small enterprises, Training, Time-based management

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The word “stress” is one of the most frequently used words today. We live in a world developing fast, requiring constant adaptation. Technology is changing, so are social habits, values, social structures, and people. Everybody has to cope with those changes, not only individuals, but the organisations and governments as well (Pettinger, 2002; McClean, 1980; Moss Leonard, 1981). The pace of life is getting quicker, too. What was new yesterday, is already old today. A lot of people are aware of positive values of those changes, but very few would think of the negative consequences that may ensue.

According to some estimation, humankind loses 100 million workdays every year due to the aftermath of stress. What matters more, 50 to 75 per cent of today's diseases are related to stress. The European Agency for Health and Safety at Work states that stress within organisation is the second most frequent trouble and affects as many as 28 per cent of employees.

Loss of health due to stress constitutes neither the biggest nor the only cost in the companies. This may be a special problem in small companies that often have no more than 50 employees and hence, each of them is very important for the carrying out of business on time. Mistakes and/or false decisions, which employees make under the effect of stress, cost even more than loss of their health. In small companies such false decisions of the employees may have much worse effect. Therefore, it is necessary to think carefully what to do to prevent stress in employees. In order to solve this problem, various stress management training programmes can be developed in the



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company. Such programmes may educate employees about the nature of stress as well as how to use a particular relaxation technique for preventing stress.

### **Definition of stress**

The term “stress” is frequently used in everyday life. Hearing the word “stress”, makes us first think of something unpleasant, something menacing and beyond our influence. However, stress has been a factor helping people survive for millennia; today it is considered belonging to their enemies number one. One ascribes causes of many accidents, diseases, early deaths, suicides, dissatisfactions and tensions to it. In addition, it is difficult to calculate the losses it causes to the economy (Schmidt, 2001).

Nobody is completely immune against stress. It can affect anybody, since it is an important and vital part of our lives. Stress occurs as an inevitable consequence of our relations with our constantly changing environment we have to adapt to (Looker and Gregson, 1993).

The word stress comes from the Anglo-Saxon world and was first applied in physics for designating the mechanical force. It denotes the exterior pressure, tension, and load upon an object (Newhouse, 2000). The term stress was first introduced into medicine by Hans Selye in 1949 (Selye, 1976, 1986). According to his definition stress is a way of physical adaptation to new circumstances, a reply to irritations that disturb the individual balance (Luban Plozza and Pozzi, 1994).

Ivanchevich and Matteson (1993) define stress simply as “an interaction of the individual to his or her environment”. They also define this term in detail as: “adopted response of a person as a reflection of their diversity and/or psychological processes to activities, states, or events in the environment creating exaggerated psychological and physical needs”.

Greenberg and Baron (2000) define stress as “a complex pattern of emotional states, physiological reactions and related thoughts in response to external demands”. They refer to the demands emanating from the environment as stressors. Examples of stressors are: the demands of work assignments, interpersonal relations between co-workers, one’s relations with one’s spouse and children, and social obligations. The third term, strain connected to stress and stressors, according to these authors, refers to the accumulated effects of stress expressed as deviations from normal patterns of behaviour or activity and thus constituting a consequence to the exposure to stressful events.

### **Individual differences and stress**

Some people are more successful in facing stressful situations, while others respond to them with greater level of stress. What is it that differentiates people as regards their ability to handle stress? In searching for the answer we can help ourselves with the explanation of these dimensions:

- individual self-perception and power;
- locus of control;
- type A/B behavioural pattern;
- negative orientation; and
- ability.

*Individual self-perception and power*

Positive or negative self-perception affects the way in which an individual handles stressful life events. One of the more important facets of self-perception is self-esteem referring to the good or bad opinion about oneself. People who have a positive and a reasonably accurate concept of "self" have high self-esteem. They have confidence in themselves, they know their capacities and potentials and act accordingly. Self-esteem seems to moderate how one responds to stressors (Nowack, 1986). People with low self-confidence tend to have more intensive reactions to high stress than those with higher self-confidence (Davis *et al.*, 2000).

*Locus of control*

Some people believe that they are masters of their own fate, while others think that what happens to them in their lives is due to luck or chance. The first type, those who believe that they control their destinies, have been labelled internals, whereas the latter, who see their lives as being controlled by outside forces, have been called externals. A person's perception of the source of his or her fate is termed locus of control. Internals manifest stress in different ways from externals. Internals faced with a stressor are more likely to believe that they can have a significant effect on the outcomes as well as on the consequences of the stress circumstances effecting them. Hence, they tend to take control over events. Externals faced with a stressor are more likely to be passive, and defensive. Rather than to do something to reduce the stress, they acquiesce it. So externals are also more likely to experience stress that those coping with it with a greater courage and confidence (Davis *et al.*, 2000).

*Type A and B behavioural pattern*

Two cardiologists, Friedman and Rosenman, while conducting their research on the effects of stress upon the heart, divided people into type A and type B. According to the two researchers, people of type A are three times more likely to have a stroke or a heart attack than those in type B, even if they are doing the same kind of work and/or living in similar conditions. Type A individuals are action and results oriented, and in a hurry to complete work and move on to the next task. They are highly competitive, impatient with others and irritated when they find their situation preventing them from achieving their goals. Type B behaviour pattern manifest the opposite. Those who exhibit this pattern tend to be less aggressive, less competitive, and more relaxed. They rarely demonstrate high levels of emotion even in a crisis or emergency (Hellriegel and Slocum, 2004).

*Flexibility and rigidity*

Flexible people experience different stressors and have different stress reactions than rigid people (Davis *et al.*, 2000; Pettinger, 2002). It is characteristic for flexible personalities that they are relatively adaptive to change, somewhat free and open and responsive towards others. They may show some indecisiveness because they may struggle more with decisions. The flexible person does not have clear-cut rigid rules for handling situations. The rigid person is closed-minded, generally somewhat dogmatic toward life. Rigid people have a preference for neatness and orderliness. They are also inconsiderate of others, tend to be critical in judging others, and not very tolerant of others' weaknesses. A rigid person responds to stressors differently from a flexible one.

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He or she may spend more time and effort on the job trying to achieve more and ignore other facets of his or her life.

### **Methods and strategies for managing stress in work settings**

All individuals, both those who are less sensitive to negative effects of stress and those who are in terms of their personality more exposed to physical, psychological and behavioural consequences of stress, can manage stress in their lives quite effectively by means of individual strategies and methods (Plozza and Pozzi, 1994). Among these strategies that have proved successful with managing stress so far are for example regular physical exercise, meditation as well as the application of other techniques for relaxation (Kezele and Hampamer, 2002; Singh, 1996), lifestyle management and time management (Ferner, 1995; Tyrer, 1987).

In organisations, they may help to employees in managing stress with the formation of various programmes that are oriented to maintaining well-being of employees and prevention of stress.

We shall primarily turn our attention to the individual methods for managing stress with employees. Then the programmes for helping employees with stress reduction within the organisations will be discussed.

#### *Individual methods for reducing stress*

*Physical activities.* Physical activities, such as physical exercises, jogging, walking, aerobic dance, swimming, riding and cycling mean today an important part of many peoples' lives. Such activities are in fact a great protection against stress and stress related illnesses.

To achieve the best possible results in physical exercises is to practice them regularly. It is notwithstanding if an individual carries out any of such exercises once a month or twice a week. By including exercising in one's life they will strengthen their muscles around the heart, improve the quality and capacity of their breathing, enhance their efficiency at work and improve their overall well-being. However, regular physical activity of the individual does not mean that they are then free to smoke at will, eat and drink too much or expose themselves to the pressure of their job with impunity. Such activity warrants merely a less harmful effect on their health.

People who take regular physical exercise are mentally more alert, too (Markham, 1995). This is evident from the results of tests filled in by more or less active people. The beneficial effects of regular physical exercise do not reflect only in better health or in greater ability to resist stress but also in better decisions and considerable improvement of job performance.

*Deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.* Deep breathing is one of the simplest techniques for lowering physiological arousal. With this technique, individuals receive instruction on how to breathe more deeply, avoiding shallow breaths that are often associated with the stress response and instead breathing from the abdomen. Physiological arousal is affected by this technique because of the close association between the breathing centre and the reticular activating system (RAS) in the brain. The RAS controls neuromuscular functioning and, thus, deep breathing leads to relaxation in the neuromuscular system (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987).

An extension of deep breathing is progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), a technique developed by Jacobson (1938). With PMR, an individual is instructed to assume a

comfortable position and to begin to breathe deeply. Then, the individual relaxes groups of muscles one at a time, beginning with the muscles in the feet, the legs, etc. Jacobson proposed that the mind “relaxes” using this technique because relaxed muscles are associated with a decrease in emotional tension.

Just as with deep breathing, PMR can be taught but full development of the skill takes practice. Jacobson recommended practicing the skill two times per day for 15 to 20 minute sessions. Eventually the skill is learned so well that an individual can achieve complete muscle relaxation very quickly.

*Meditation.* The physicians recommend meditation for many diseases connected with stress such as heart conditions, shortness of breath and problems with the stomach. In his research Dr John L. Craven found:

Control experiments have confirmed some decrease of restlessness in patients practising meditation ... In many cases concerning stress, such as: anxiety attacks, hypertension, asthma, insomnia, heart arrhythmia, phobias, clinical application of meditation has improved the patient's condition (Craven, 1989).

Meditation helps the individual in many ways. In the first place it facilitates complete relaxation. When we are meditating, we are oblivious of our body and hence, our limbs are fully relaxed. We are also not aware of any physical discomfort or pain. Our body is relaxed as long as we indulge in meditation. The teachers of meditation maintain that one hour of meditation is equal to four hours of sleep. By meditation in everyday life we may achieve the same effect as with long rest. Meditation leaves us with restored power and vitality.

Meditation is also applied to diminish the troubles that affect people both emotionally and mental. Although science can help us control our physical environment, many people find themselves in a situation when they cannot master it. Some may have troubles in mutual relations, they are bothered by worries, depression, anger, fear and loss of self-esteem. A great part of the population consume alcohol and various drugs to moderate their emotional and mental problems. Such people may benefit from meditation that ensures restoring their balance within themselves.

One of the positive effects of meditation is to help us to look on problems we face from another point-of-view (Kezele and Hampamer, 2002). This fact can be illustrated by following story from the life of Akbar the Great, a ruler in India. He was surrounded by a group of consultants. Birbal was the wisest among them. One day Akbar presented them a problem to see which of them would be able to resolve it. He drew a line in the sand with a stick and asked if they could shorten it without touching it. The consultants thought about the problem but they were at a loss how to solve it. Birbal stepped forward, picked up the stick and drew another, longer line parallel to the previous one. So the first line looked shorter. Similarly, meditation may be a solution for problems in our lives. It does not eliminate them, but it does enable us to see them from a different perspective.

Meditation also increases our creativity, the ability of concentration and our effectiveness in everyday life. With regular exercise we become capable to manage our attention and turn it anywhere we want, for example to studies, career or solving problems. It enables us to concentrate to single thing in a particular moment. Behaviour oriented in such a way enables us to muster any field we choose. Besides physical and psychological benefits we may by meditation achieve both success in everyday life and improve the external conditions of our living.

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*Yoga.* Yoga is another effective method that enables individuals to control stress on physical and mental level. It includes knowledge about life and originated some decades ago in India.

According to the theory of yoga, we all consist of three basic “selves”:

- (1) The subconscious.
- (2) The intellectual.
- (3) The creative.

Ideally these three parts should be well-balanced, but in many cases they are not. There are some people, for example, who are stimulating intellectually but are lacking in the other two areas. In fact, the number of people who have a nature balance of these three areas of themselves are few, as we have all been continuously programmed and affected by such things as our environment and the people with whom we have come into contact.

This acquired imbalance in our inner selves always causes tension and internal conflict. Yoga works to restore the correct balance and thereby resolve this conflict. This is done by removing stresses of all sorts within the body and the mind (Markham, 1995).

Once we have learned through yoga to eliminate the tensions of our body, we may find that we have a far greater capacity for concentration, study and hard work. We will not be dissipating so much of our inner energies and so the making of decisions will be quicker and easier for us. The benefits experienced by someone in any area of the business world will therefore be significant.

It is possible to learn the technique of yoga by attending a regular class and then practising what we have learned. All we need to give is about 15 minutes of our time every day.

*Cognitive-behavioural techniques.* These techniques focus on the thoughts and actions a person has in relation to stress. The theoretical conceptualisations underlying these techniques are quite simple. In fact, Kendall and Bemis (1983) suggested that cognitive-behavioural techniques include four basic guiding principles:

- (1) Individuals do not respond directly to their environment; they respond to their own cognitive interpretation of the environment.
- (2) Cognitions (thoughts), emotions (feelings) and behaviours (actions) are causally interrelated.
- (3) The prediction and understanding of negative cognitions and behaviours are enhanced by paying attention to a person’s expectancies, beliefs and attributions.
- (4) It is possible and desirable to combine and integrate cognitive approaches to correcting problems with performance-based and behavioural contingency management.

One of the cognitive-behavioural techniques is cognitive appraisal, also called perspective taking (Ross and Altmaier, 2000). This technique involves teaching individuals to assess the severity of a stressor by considering the perspective in which they view a particular stressful situation.

A related cognitive-behavioural technique is cognitive restructuring. This technique is based on the premise that many people believe other people or events outside of



themselves are responsible for how they feel. The resulting beliefs can be irrational and quite often lead to increased stress.

Both mentioned techniques are designed to help people tolerate stressors after they occur. A related technique, cognitive rehearsal, involves helping people tolerate stressors by anticipating them before they happen. This technique calls for visualising a potentially stressful event before it occurs and practicing or rehearsing how to respond.

*Lifestyle and time management.* One of the most effective ways of coping with stress is to develop physiological resiliency by getting our body into shape: this way, it will not succumb to strain reactions. This may be accomplished in two ways that are easy to describe but often difficult to do:

- (1) Eating a proper diet.
- (2) Engaging in cardiovascular conditioning.

Today's physicians prescribe a regimen of proper eating and regular, moderate exercise for their patients with the benefits of these lifestyle practices in mind.

Another effective element of lifestyle management involves balancing life activities. Typically, people who experience stress in one segment of their lives spend more time in that segment. This may be detrimental, however, because it interferes with the balance in life activities that people require to do their best. For example, spending too much time at work actually might interfere with job performance, such as making people tired and blocking their creativity (Greenberg and Baron, 2000; Treven, 1998). Instead, people can develop resiliency to stress by being well-rounded in their life activities, which help them to approach work fresh, relaxed, and able to take on the challenges they face more effectively.

It is also important for people that they assume control over how they spend their time. This is especially important on the job, where many events threaten to distract us from doing what's most important. In addition, to the extent we allow distractions to over-run our lives, the resulting pressures we experience may bring still more stress to our lives. The key to managing time effectively and to avoiding the stresses created by mismanaging time, involves taking control over our own actions. There are some effective ways to go about this:

- set priorities and stick to them;
- do not allow others to distract you; and
- delegate responsibility to others.

#### *Training programmes for managing stress with employees*

Special programmes may also help employees to manage their stress more effectively. The most often applied programmes of the kind are:

- stress management programmes;
- wellness programmes; and
- employee assistance programmes.

Stress management programmes are developed in organisations to acquaint the employees with various techniques such as meditation, yoga, relaxation training, managing of life style. Their intention is to teach the individual how to reduce stress in his life effectively. Many organisations in the USA have applied such programmes in

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the last few years as they find that the effects of those programmes are also positive from the costs point of view. Those organisations that cannot afford to create their own programmes contact exterior consultants to help them choose an appropriate programme for training of employees on stress management. They may also decide on purchasing audiovisual programmes or videocassettes.

Wellness programmes have been developed to help employees to maintain their physical and mental health. A healthy person can manage stress more easily than the one suffering from phobias, nightmares, lack of appetite, heart disease or other health troubles. Typically, wellness programmes consist of workshops that train employees how to perform some of the stress reducing individual behaviours, such as losing weight, exercising, giving up smoking and the like. Although organisations provide the relevant know-how, the individual employees are responsible for taking control over their own lives. Organisations that provide wellness programmes for their employees consider such programmes sensible investment with positive financial effects. The employees able to manage stress effectively enjoy better health which in turn means reduced absenteeism from work because of illness and greater productivity.

Employee assistance programmes support employees assistance in facing all kinds of problems, such as career planning, financial and legal advice and others (Newton, 1995). The application of such programmes has been in use for quite some years in the USA; while in western Europe and in Slovenia it is also increasing.

### **Training in methods for stress prevention**

In previous chapter we have already mentioned that various programmes may be used in small business companies in order to help employees in managing stress. In this chapter we will turn our attention to the designing a training programme and the content of various stress management training programmes.

#### *Designing a training programme*

The initiative for organising a training programme can come from a training agency or a group of trainers, or an organisation that is interested in the training of its staff.

Regardless on whose initiative the training programme is being organised, the first step in designing a training programme is to identify and catalogue the training needs of the proposed target group. This exercise takes into consideration not only the existing situation in the organisation, but to some extent, the post-training scenario as well. The process of identifying training needs is, therefore, often complex and extensive (Agochiya, 2002; Treven, 2003).

The second step in preparing a training design is to set the programme objectives. They are broad statements of intent, action and outcomes. They articulate final outcomes or end results of the training. Programme objectives describe what the participants will be able to do or perform at the end of the training programme.

Third step in designing a training programme concerns the phases in preparing an action plan for the programme. These phases may include identification of the programme content, distribution of the programme content into sub-topics or modules, organisation and sequent of the programme content, decision making on training methods and techniques, allocation of time, stipulation of support materials, facilities and equipment, delegation of the responsibilities for management and administration of the programme, and determination of mechanism for monitoring and evaluation (Agochiya, 2002).



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Key considerations in designing a training programme is the forth step in preparing a training design. In this step it is necessary to keep those factors in view that have the potential of influencing the implementation of the programme.

The last step involves informing the participants of the programme. The information about the programme is sent in advance to the participants. The main objectives of this communication are to inform them of the details of the programme, to prepare them for the programme and to arouse their curiosity.

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#### *Content of various stress management training programmes*

Stress management programmes may consist of various workshops in order to introduce employees to topics of stress and stress management. Such workshops can give the employee general knowledge about the causes of stress, its consequences and the stress management methods or they can be oriented to the training of an employee in a particular method such as yoga, meditation, breathing and relaxation technique and others.

*General stress management workshop.* The employees who attend general stress management workshop benefit in many ways. First, they are acquainted with the nature of stress and how humans respond physically and psychologically to stressful situation. Second, they are informed about the specific stressors and symptoms that cause them the most difficulty in their lives and work settings. Third, they are educated in the possible consequences of stress.

Stress has its origins in the demands of organisational and personal life. The stress response occurs as a result of the individual's interaction and reaction to the stressor (Quick and Quick, 1984; Treven, 2001). Every individual exhibits several responses to the demands that are faced. The behavioural response to the demand is the set of specific observable actions taken in response to the demand. In addition to the behavioural response, the individual will have a psychological response which takes the form of cognitive and emotional reactions.

Employees may be influenced by specific stressors and symptoms relating to the organisation or job and the factors relating to other aspects of their lives. Therefore, we can distinguish:

- work-related causes of stress; and
- causes of stress outside work.

Work settings can be very stressful for employees. Some jobs and organisations expose individuals to high levels of stress, whereas others involve much less stress. In work settings various factors may cause stress with employees, such as type of job, role conflict and others. A list of work-related causes of stress are presented:

- type of job;
- conflict between work and private life;
- role conflict in work settings;
- role ambiguity;
- role overload;
- responsibility for others;
- organisational factors;

- mobbing and workplace violence; and
- physical work conditions.

Work is one of the most important activities for people living in the modern, market-oriented society, it is however not the only one. Thus, events occurring outside work settings often generate stress with these people. Since stress usually does not cease immediately after the event is over, the individual brings it with him/her to the organisation in which he/she is employed. Many factors outside work settings contribute to stress in this manner. Most, however, fit in two broad categories: stressful life events and daily hassles. A list of stressful life events is presented in Table I.

Traumatic life events (mentioned in Table I) are highly stressful, but they are luckily rather rare. Many people live for years or even decades without experiencing even a single one. This, however, does not mean that such individuals live a totally tranquil life. In one's life one has to cope with numerous minor irritations on a daily basis. These may be of low intensity, but of high frequency of their occurrence. We can call them daily hassles (too many things to do in a short time period), financial hassles (concern about making money), and hassles of parenthood (assistance with studying, bringing up children). These daily concerns are typical of the human life, and are an important source of stress, too.

The employees who attend general stress management workshop are educated in the possible consequences of stress, too. Stress namely causes a variety of different health problems, including medical, behavioural, and psychological problems. Some of the major consequences within each category are presented in Table II.

*Relaxation training.* Relaxation is a form of meditation, a state of concentration. By using the mind to focus upon an object, image, or thought, one cancels out all distraction associated with everyday life. The "relaxation response" is induced to counter balance the stress response. There are four basic elements of the "relaxation response" (Ross and Altmaier, 2000):

- (1) A quiet environment – to turn off external distractions.
- (2) A comfortable position – sitting or kneeling with back straight.

Event	Relative stressfulness
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Jail term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Marriage	50
Fired from a job	47
Retirement	45
Pregnancy	40
Death of a close friend	37
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with boss	23
Change in residence	20
Vacation	13
Christmas	12

**Sources:** Greenberg and Baron (2000), Ross and Altmaier (2000)

**Table I.**  
The stressfulness of  
various life events

**Table II.**  
Health-related  
consequences of stress

Medical consequences	Behavioural consequences	Psychological consequences
Heart disease and stroke	Smoking	Family conflict
Backache and arthritis	Drug and alcohol abuse	Sleep disturbance
Ulcers	Accident proneness	Sexual dysfunction
Headaches	Violence	Depression
Cancer	Appetite disorders	
Diabetes		
Cirrhosis of the liver		
Lung disease		

**Source:** Greenberg and Baron (2000)

- (3) An object, thought, or image to dwell upon (repetition of a word or sound such as “ohm”, focusing upon breathing, or saying “I am relaxed”).
- (4) A passive attitude – allowing an emptying of distracting thoughts.

Training programmes in techniques for relaxation may consist of various workshops in order to teach the employees how to use a particular technique, like meditation, yoga, deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation or how to use some of the relaxation techniques sequentially. Such workshops can give the employee a general knowledge about relaxation together with instructions in how to do specific relaxation technique.

General information about relaxation may include four basic elements of the “relaxation response”, information about the experience the employees will have during relaxation as well as information about the effects after relaxation.

Information about the experience the individuals have during relaxation concern experience, such as:

- a decrease in the rate of metabolism, a restful state with a drop in heart rate and respiratory rate;
- a marked decrease in the body’s oxygen consumption;
- a decrease in blood pressure; and
- a decrease in muscle tension.

Information about the effects the individuals may notice after relaxation concern the effects, such as:

- lower response to stress – less anxiety;
- better coping abilities;
- a new found acceptance of self, more tolerant of own weaknesses or limitations;
- improved learning ability, better retention and recall; and
- a sense of calm, of being collected – more quiet, philosophical attitude.

In addition to above-mentioned information, workshops in relaxation techniques also consist of instructions in how to do the specific relaxation technique. General instructions for the deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation technique are as follows:

- assume a comfortable position;
- close eyes;
- begin to breathe deeply; and
- relax groups of muscles one at a time, beginning with the muscles in the feet, the legs, etc.

There can be of course more precise instructions about the position an individual may assume during the relaxation, about the breathing technique as well as about muscle relaxation. The employees can use various breathing techniques, like abdominal breathing, breathing for stressful situations, breathing to aid sleep, and others. Instructions for breathing for stressful situations are as follows:

- remove yourself from situation – step to side or out of room;
- breathe in deeply for a count of eight;
- as you exhale for count of eight, visualise yourself as being calm, relaxed, and in control; and
- repeat sequence several times until level of relaxation is obtained.

### Concluding remarks

Stress is a universal experience in the life of every small company, every executive, manager, and individual employee. It is a naturally occurring experience that may have beneficial or destructive consequences. The destructive consequences of a stressful experience are not inevitable. They only result from ineffective management of stress and stressful events. The thesis of this paper is that the destructive consequences of stress may be avoided through the appropriate training of employees on stress and techniques for stress prevention.

We pointed out in the paper that such training can give the employee general knowledge about the causes of stress, its consequences and the stress management methods, or it can be oriented to the particular method such as yoga, meditation, breathing and relaxation technique and others. It can also include the stress inoculation training that was developed by Meichenbaum (1977). The stress inoculation training focuses on altering the way an individual processes information about a stressful situation and identifies cognitive and behavioural coping skills to change unproductive ways of reacting (Ivanchevich and Matteson, 1993). It includes three stages:

- (1) Preparation.
- (2) Skill training.
- (3) Application training.

This approach can help employees deal with a wide variety of stress reactions including anger, anxiety and fear.

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