STRESS MANAGEMENT AT THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT OF THE STANDARD GROUP LTD

By

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has never been presented in any university/college for the award of degree/diploma/certificate.

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This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family members; namely: my wife Jael Mbulia, son Julius Mwagandi and daughter Sharmila Wakio. Thank you for your inspiration and belief in me. I love you all.

It is also dedicated to my late parents, Julius Mwagandi and Phillipinah Mghoi.

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This MBA program has been very taxing and challenging in terms of time and resources. Its success was therefore made possible by the contributions of many people. For this reason I would like to recognize each one of them.

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Martin Ogutu, my supervisor, for his guidance and availability throughout the duration of the project. He truly was there when I needed him. Let me also appreciate the respondents for taking time off their tight schedules to answer my questions. To my colleagues, "Thank you for the audience that you gave to me and the experiences and opinions that we shared". I'm as well grateful to my family for their inspiration, support and companionship. And above all, I thank God for everything.

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ABSTRACT

Competition in the business world is growing aggressive by the day to the extent that success of an organization is not guaranteed. An organization cannot afford to be complacent. It must effectively implement its strategy. To do this, all the factors that affect implementation must be well managed. One of the factors that is giving organizations stress is stress itself, one only needs to look at the dailies to see how relevant this topic has become.

Stress may be defined as an adaptive response mediated by individual differences and/or the psychological processes that is a consequence of any external action, situation or event that place excessive psychological and/or physical demands on a person. It has three stages; alarm, resistance and exhaustion. Low stress levels increase organizational performance, but high stress levels are detrimental to it. In addition to the above, different individuals have different stress coping abilities. Clearly therefore, stress in organizations must be continually maintained at optimal levels in order to ensure survival, and more so, sustained organizational success. It is this occupation that is referred to as stress management. Stress management comprises stress reduction, resilience and recuperating strategies. Stress could emanate from outside the organization, within the organization, groups or individual characteristics. Apart from decreased productivity, stress may be seen in people in the form of increased smoking, drinking, drug abuse, tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover.

In the transport department of the Standard Group, absenteeism and drinking is a bit frequent, and this is a pointer to high stress levels. This study therefore sought to determine the strategies that the department adapted to manage stress and establish their perceived effectiveness as well. The results may be useful to the management of The Standard Group Limited, its employees, other researchers, management consultants and guiding and counseling officers.

This study required an in-depth understanding of the department. To achieve this, the research design of a case study was adapted. The data collected was primary in nature and was gathered by the researcher using an interview guide. Content analysis was performed on the findings.

It was found out that stress does exist at this department as indicated by high levels of irritation, smoking, absenteeism, drinking, anger, and depression. Extra organizational, organizational, group, and individual stressors were all present. The bulk stressors emanated from the organization. In order to keep stress at the right levels, the department adapted and implemented the following strategies: brief evening meetings (to give update and feedback on day to day activities), selecting people who can work under pressure, training on stress management, flexible work schedules, involving employees in decision making, setting smart targets, reviewing organizational structure and design, clarifying roles, doing appraisals once per year, and guiding and counseling by immediate supervisors. These strategies were perceived to be effective in that fewer counts of absenteeism, drinking, smoking, irritation and anger were recorded compared to the previous year.

It is evident from the findings that despite the strategies employed being effective, stress is still experienced at the department. There is therefore need for the department to

continuously do a survey of stress levels in order to determine the effectiveness of current strategies and also craft and implement better ones. There is a general feeling by the respondents that the department should push for the set up of a gym within the premises to encourage exercising which in turn aids resilience and recuperation in as far as stress is concerned. Introduction of a guiding and counseling office also featured prominently. Other strategies the department should consider are: planning and developing career paths for employees, encouraging employees to talk to one another, offering stress oriented therapy, offering guidance on altering type A personalities and supporting wellness programs like providing workshops to help people quit smoking, lose weight, and control alcohol use.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Competition in the business world is growing aggressive by the day to the extent that success of an organization is not guaranteed. An organization cannot afford to be complacent. There is need for continuous improvement and adoption of a proactive perspective of management i.e. for an organization to be successful; it must effectively implement its strategy.

Strategy may be defined as a ploy, a plan, a pattern, a position or a perspective. In simple terms, it means the direction to be taken by the organization. Strategic management on the other hand refers to the conception of strategy, its implementation and evaluation. Of the three stages, implementation is the most challenging because it is affected by both internal and external factors. Strategy may also mean creating a fit between the external characteristics and internal conditions of an organization to solve a strategic problem which is a mismatch between the internal characteristics of an organization and its external environment. Therefore, for success to happen, all these factors must be well managed.

One of the factors that is giving organizations stress is stress itself, one only needs to look at the dailies to see how relevant this topic has become e.g. The Daily Nation; 10th July 2009 jobs pg 1 and 4,30[th] June 2009 smart business pg 17, 17th July 2009 jobs pg 45, August 2009 jobs pg 4-5, The Standard; 26th June 2009 workplace pg 40, 18th June 2009 panorama pg 22, 17th July 2009 jobs and careers pg 37. Stress is the response you get for saying 'Hi' ("Office Culture", 2009). In other words, this is the reply that is gradually replacing the usual 'I am fine' to the social ice breaker, 'How are you?' In today's fast paced environment, it is not uncommon to hear phrases like: 'I cannot cope', 'Am stressed', 'This is too much'. These are expressions of feelings that people are increasingly becoming unable to deal with the pressures of today's hectic lifestyles. It happens when people feel that their responsibilities are too heavy to bear.

Further, with companies downsizing workers, those who remain find that their jobs are demanding increasing amounts of time and energy and job security is no longer

guaranteed. In addition, there are long distances to be commuted to work, increasing number of working wives, global competition is real, Saturdays and Sundays are no longer pure resting days, emails and mobile phones have increased work and intruded into personal lives, and many people spending months working away from their families.

1.1.1 Stress Management

Cole, (2005) quotes de Board (1998) in defining stress as a condition in which the body reacts to danger in the same way as our hunting ancestors, but spread over a big period…when man, the hunter had fled from a bear or fought for his life, he slept in order to recover from the effects of his body's internal actions. In a stress situation today, people are likely to feel continually tired because they are never able to fully recover from the effects of their bodies' internal activity. Stress is an adaptive response mediated by individual differences and/or the psychological processes that is a consequence of any external (environmental) action, situation or event that place excessive psychological and/or physical demands on a person.

Drummond (2000) demonstrates that stress has a pattern. It has three stages; alarm, resistance and exhaustion. In the alarm stage, an outside stressor mobilizes the internal stress system of the body e.g. when there is work overload, you may hear, "I'll never finish this job in time". This will elicit a 'fight or flight response' e.g. increase in heart rate, blood pressure and adrenaline secretions among others. If the stressor continues, the body enters the resistance stage where it calls upon the needed organ or system to deal with it e.g. forgo lunch break to finish the work or brew coffee to stimulate oneself to keep going. During this stage, the body is not or may be less resistant to other unrelated stressors (explains why one may easily get sick stressed at work). Finally, if the stressor persists over a long period of time, the reserves of the adaptive mechanisms during the second stage may become drained, and exhaustion sets in. When this happens, there may be a return of the alarm stage, and the cycle starts again with another organ or system, or the "automatic shutoff valve" of death occurs (Luthans, 2008).

Low stress levels increase organizational performance, but high stress levels are detrimental to it (Robbins, 2007). Due to high competitive pressures and turbulence in the current business environment, organizations are doing whatever it takes to succeed including exerting too much pressure on workers. The results thereof are usually decreased productivity. There is therefore an inverted U kind of relationship between stress levels and job performance. This is illustrated in figure 2 below.

Figure 1: The Inverted U Relationship between Stress and Job Performance
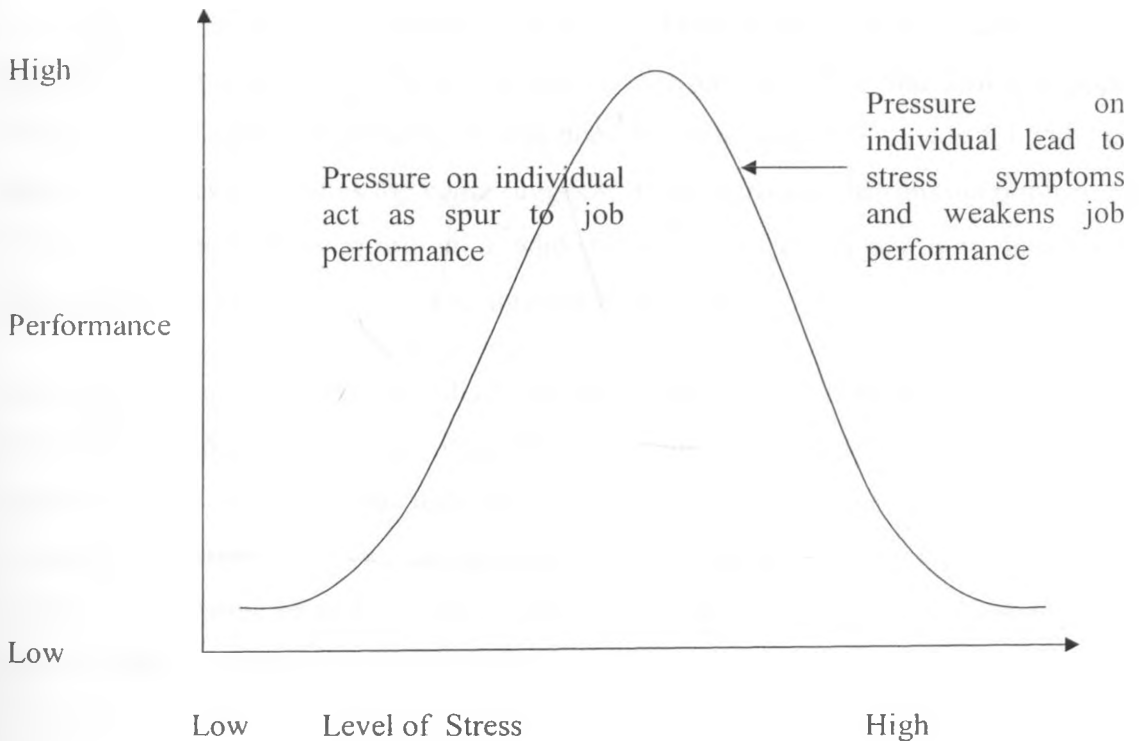
Source: Cole (2005), *Organizational Behavior*, p 213

In addition to the above, different individuals have different stress coping abilities. Clearly therefore, stress in organizations must be continually maintained at optimal levels in order to ensure survival, and more so, sustained organizational success. It is this occupation that is referred to as stress management. It entails controlling stress levels at both individual and organizational spheres.
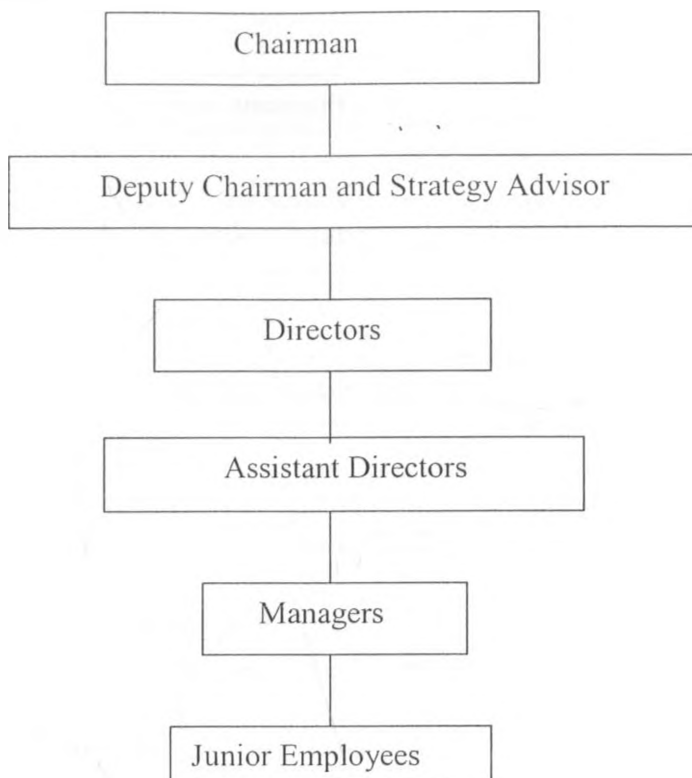
1.1.2 The Standard Group Limited

The Standard Group Limited was formerly known as East African Standard while under The Lonrho Group of Companies. It belongs to the Kenyan media industry and was founded in 1902. Its vision is to be a leader in this industry by delivering world class products and services to its customers and is in a mission to inform, entertain, and educate its customers by reporting, publishing, and broadcasting relevant and timely content through their talented and professional staff while being enabled by customer service excellence, world class business processes and the right business behaviors.

It comprises three strategic business units, namely The Standard, KTN TV and PDS. The Standard concerns itself with the publishing and distribution of The Standard newspapers whilst Kenya Television Network (KTN) does broadcasting. PDS stands for Publisher Distribution Services and as the name suggests, it specializes in distributing publications of other publishers. Plans to roll out a radio station are at its high gear now. In addition, the company provides online services through its web site.

This organization is headed by a chairman who is assisted by a strong deputy chairman and strategic advisor, currently Paul Melly. Below him is managing director, Paul Wanyaga; he coordinates the technical, operations and commercial and the finance directors. Answering to these are assistant directors of legal, HR and administration; commercial; creative services; editorial; print, sales and distribution. Then managers and junior employees follow thereafter as shown below:

Figure 2: Organization Structure of The Standard Group

Source: *http://168.1.3.35/hr* (October 2009)

1.1.3 The Transport Department of The Standard Group Limited

Satisfying people's needs for knowledge, education and entertainment involves four stages. These are: news gathering, production, distribution and sales. All these phases require mobility. There are products, equipments, and people to be moved from one place to another and within specified times. Provision of this mobility is what the transport department is mandated to do.

The transport department has four levels of workforce. The drivers and loaders report to transport supervisors, transport supervisors report to the transport analyst who in turn reports to the senior transport officer as shown in figure 3. Numerically, there is one senior transport officer, a transport analyst, six supervisors, 95 drivers and 18 loaders. Of these, only six drivers are employed at the branches; Mombasa, Kakamega, Kisumu, Eldoret, Nakuru and Nyeri.

Figure 3: Structure of the Transport Department
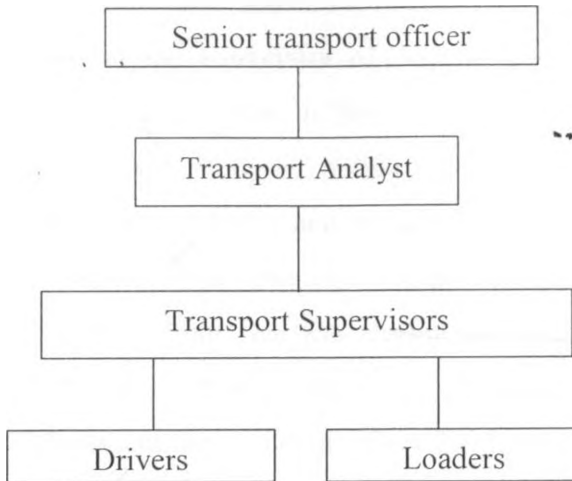
1.2 The Research Problem

Robbins (2007), purports that there is an inverted U relationship between stress levels and job performance i.e. little strain on an individual strengthens job performance while high levels weaken it. Thus, the big question is how to maintain stress at the right levels, and this is what stress management is all about. It entails controlling these levels through both individual and organizational initiatives. These initiatives fall into three categories; stress reduction, resilience and recuperating strategies (Luthans, 2008). Those that fall in the first classification (stress reduction strategies) aim at reducing the number of stressors affecting a person while those in the second group (stress resilience strategies) help a person develop physical and psychological stamina against potentially harmful stressors. The last one aids people rejuvenate physically and psychologically after severe distress. Apart from decreased productivity, stress may be seen in people in the form of increased smoking, drinking, drug abuse, tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover. In the transport department of the Standard Group, absenteeism and drinking is a bit frequent, and this is a pointer to high stress levels.

In Kenya, several studies have been done with respect to stress in organizations. Included here are: Determinants of stress management in Schenker Ltd in Embakasi area of Nairobi province, Kenya (Gichani, 2003), Prevalence of burnout syndrome and its health impacts on accountants at the University of Nairobi (Nga'ng'a, 2008), Occupational stress management in consulting firms in Nairobi (Gachana, 2000), Occupational stress among Kenyan police: a case study of police officers in Nairobi province (Wangui, 2006), Prevalence of burnout syndrome and its health effects among academic staff at the Kenya Medical Training College, Nairobi campus (Muriungi 2008), Stress coping strategies among primary school teachers during disciplinary process : a study of Marakwet district,(Kipkemoi, 2006) and Stress - causing problems among public secondary school students and the challenges faced by the teacher-counselor: a case study of students in Ngong division, Kajiado North district (Nyamu, 2008). Of all of these, none has been done on the relationship between stress management and the levels of stress. This project therefore sought to do this by way of a case study of the transport department of The Standard Group Limited. It sought to answer the following questions: First, what stress management strategies are employed here? And second, what is their effect on stress levels?

1.3 The Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

i.   To determine the strategies that the transport department of The Standard Group of Kenya Limited has adapted to manage stress.

ii.   To establish the perceived effectiveness of stress management at the department.

1.4 Importance of the study

The study may be useful to the management of the transport department of The Standard Group Limited. It can use the findings and recommendations to do a self audit of its stress management techniques. In other words it is able to identify its strengths and weaknesses in as far dealing with stress is concerned. This will then enable it craft and implement relevant stress management strategies.

The other stakeholder that stands to benefit from this study is the staffs at the department. They will use this information to identify the strategies they can apply in their individual capacities to tackle stress and its effects. In addition, they can assist others lower their stress levels. And finally, they will be better placed to advise management on the various avenues of reducing stress in the organization.

The study is also of good use to other researchers. It is an addition to the current body of stress knowledge. On top of this, it can be used as a base for further research and also desk research. By extension, management consultants and guiding and counseling officers will find this study invaluable.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Stress

There exists a body of knowledge regarding stress. Several studies have been done in order to describe stress, explain it, predict whether stress can result, predict its consequences, prescribe solutions to stressful situations, and prescribe ways of avoiding it. The word stress derives from the Latin word 'stringer', meaning to draw tight. The concept of stress emanates from physics and engineering whereby pressure is seen as resulting from strain and ultimately fracture-hence for example, 'nervous breakdown' (Drummond, 2000).
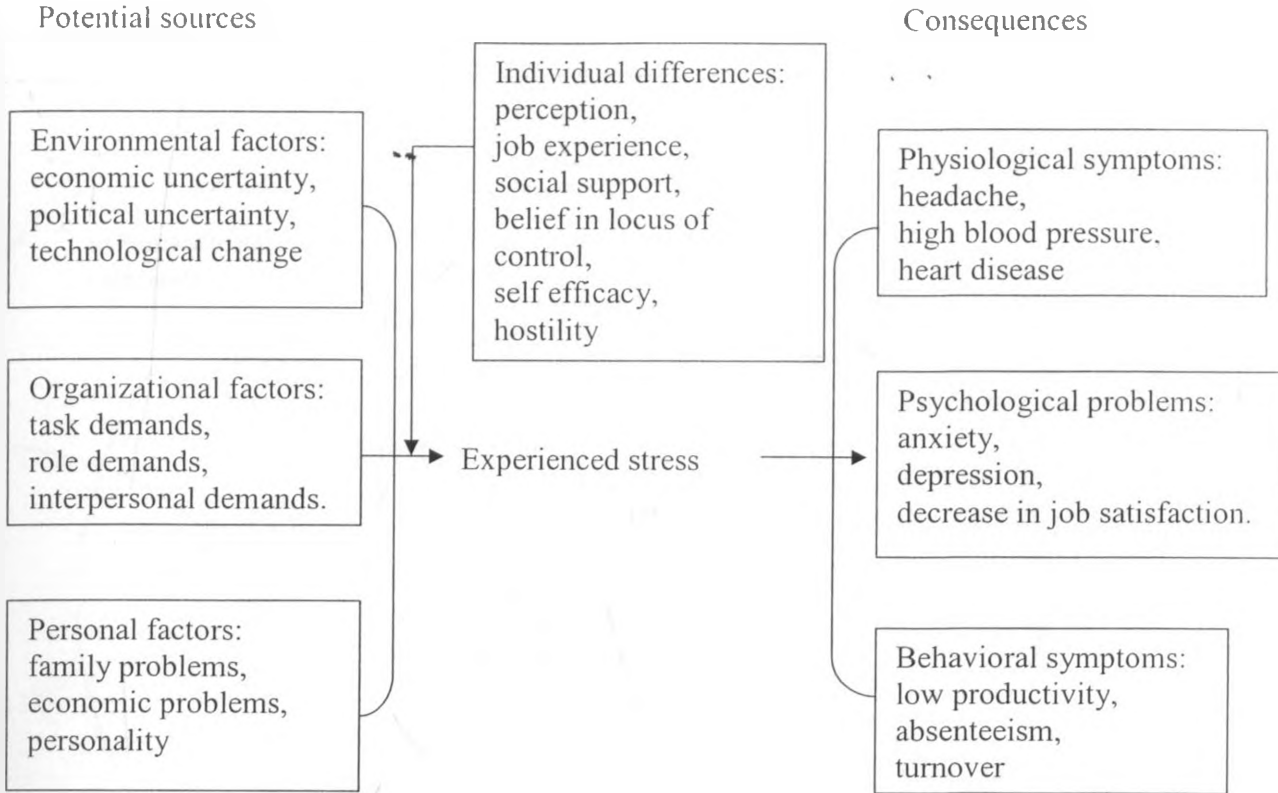
Numerous attempts have been made by modern behavioral scientists and article writers to define stress. Among them is, "…stress is a person's adaptive response to any form of stimulus which places excessive psychological or physical demands upon them" (Drummond, 2000 p 203). From this definition, it can be gathered that for stress to result, the individual must experience the demand on him/her as excessive. This explains why different people find different things stressful. For example some people find it difficult to concentrate in noisy environments such as open plan offices, where as others appear unaffected. Generally, stress is modeled as shown in figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4: A Model of the Popular Meaning of Stress

Unpleasant situation

Uncomfortable state of mind ───────────► Disturbing physical symptoms

Source: Organ (1991) *Organizational Behavior*, p 369

Figure 5: A Model of Stress

Potential sources   Consequences

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┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Environmental factors:  │      │ Individual differences:  │
│ economic uncertainty,   │      │ perception,              │
│ political uncertainty,  │      │ job experience,          │      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ technological change    │      │ social support,          │      │ Physiological symptoms:  │
└─────────────────────────┘      │ belief in locus of       │      │ headache,                │
                                 │ control,                 │      │ high blood pressure,     │
                                 │ self efficacy,           │      │ heart disease            │
                                 │ hostility                │      └──────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────┐      └──────────────────────────┘
│ Organizational factors: │                                        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ task demands,           │                                        │ Psychological problems:  │
│ role demands,           │         Experienced stress             │ anxiety,                 │
│ interpersonal demands.  │                                        │ depression,              │
└─────────────────────────┘                                        │ decrease in job satisfaction. │
                                                                    └──────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Personal factors:       │                                        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ family problems,        │                                        │ Behavioral symptoms:     │
│ economic problems,      │                                        │ low productivity,        │
│ personality            │                                        │ absenteeism,             │
└─────────────────────────┘                                        │ turnover                 │
                                                                    └──────────────────────────┘
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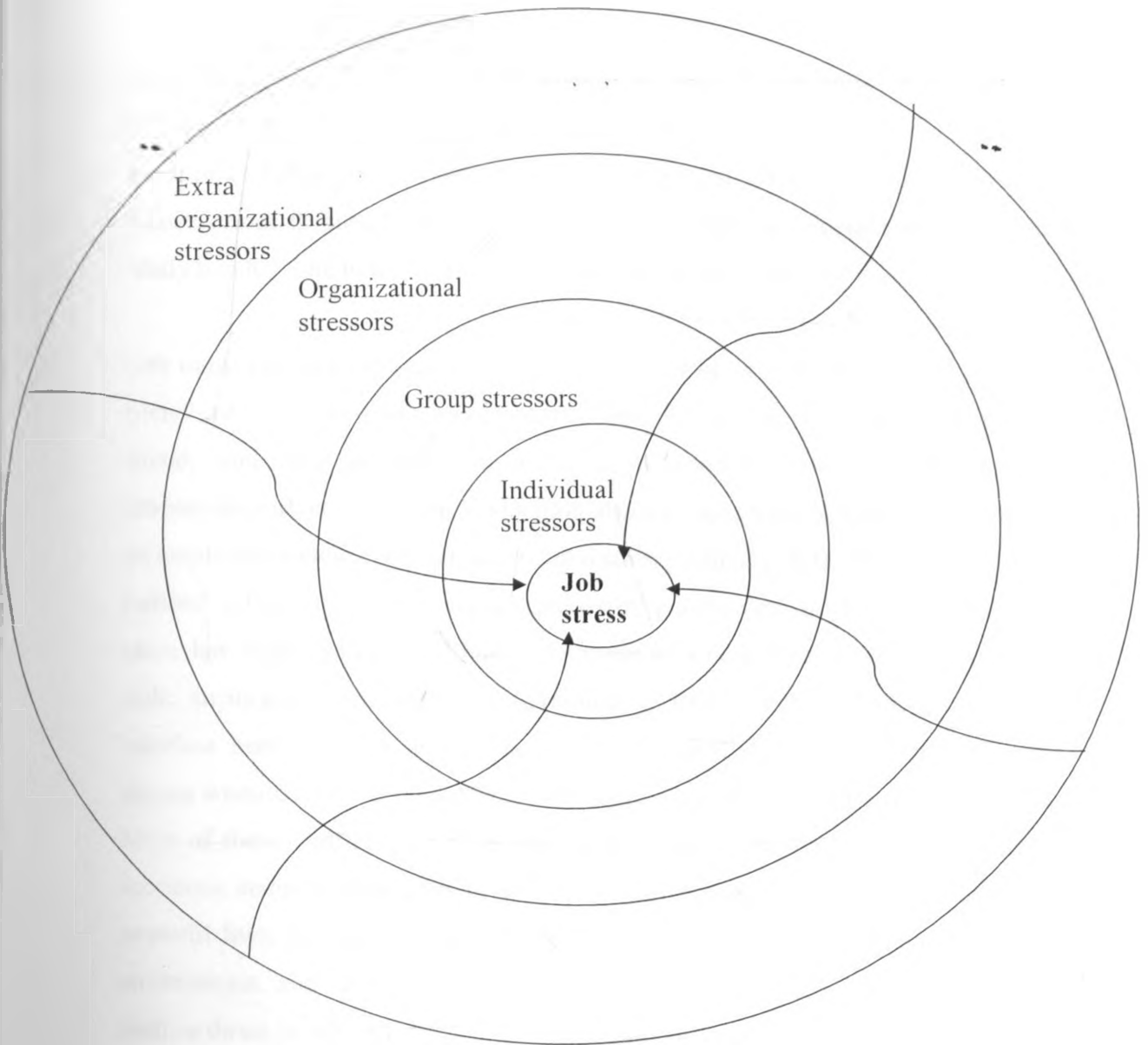
Source: Robbins (2007) *Organizational Behavior*, p 667

2.2 Causes of Stress

Causes of stress are the ones referred to as sources in the above model i.e. stressors. A stressor is any psychological or physical factor which places excessive demand upon the individual (Drummond, 2000), or simply put, it is what causes stress (stresswithwork.com). Luthans (2008) summarizes the antecedents of stress affecting today's employee into four major sources, namely; extra organizational stressors, organizational stressors, group stressors, individual stressors as shown below:

Figure 6: Categories of Stressors Affecting Occupational Stress

Extra
organizational
stressors

Organizational
stressors

Group stressors

Individual
stressors

**Job
stress**

Source: Luthans (2008) *Organizational Behavior*, p 248

Stressors are additive, stress builds up. Each new and persistent stressor adds to an individual's stress level. So a single stressor may be relatively unimportant in itself, but if it is added to an already high level stress, it can be "the straw that breaks the camel's back". Therefore to appraise the total amount of stress an individual is under, we have to

sum up his or her opportunity stresses, constraint stresses, and demand stresses (Robbins, 2007).

The old adage of employees being required to leave their troubles at the factory gate is unrealistic. Events in an employee's private life can lead to stress which spills into the work place (Drummond, 2000). Extra organizational stressors are the sources of stress whose origin is outside the organization. These may be grouped into life transitions, 'daily hassles', the home/work interface and socio-economic status.

Life transitions refer to major events in a person's life e.g. the death of a close relative or friend can be a very shocking period, becoming separated from someone who has been a friend, and has brought you a sense of comfort, results in feelings of loss (stresswithwork.com). A family situation also e.g. squabbles or illness can cause stress to an employee. (www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management). The second group, 'daily hassles' refers to the disruptions suffered by people day in, day out, including traffic jams, late running trains and buses, the noise of a neighbors' television, running out of milk, an incorrect bill and so on (Drummond, 2000, quoting Kanner et al. 1981). The interface between work and home is another potential source of stress. Conflict here occurs when either work interferes with family life or family life interferes with work. Most of these conflicts are associated with heavy alcohol consumption. Lastly, socio-economic status causes stress in the sense that the people in the lowest scale lead more stressful lives because they have fewest coping resources such as education, quality of environment, and income. When technology changes, it brings with it a lot uncertainty such as threat to job security. Cultural shock stressor may be brought about by relocation. Stress does also arise from our ethnic backgrounds (like the one witnessed during post election period). Cole (2005) sums up these factors as domestic, political, economic, sociological, competitive and technological factors

Organizational stressors are the sources of stress that are from within the organization. Shift working for instance is potentially stressful because it causes severe disturbance of circadian rhythms, physical and psychological ill health, and social and domestic

disruption (Drummond, 2000). Cole (2005) explains that sour work relationships do also result into stress. These relationships could be with parties such as the supervisor, colleagues, own staff, customers, suppliers and other outside parties. Bullying at work is as well a major cause of stress. It results from personality characteristics within the bully or from external factors which encourage managers to behave in bullying ways e.g. "macho" management cultures and pressures to reduce costs among others. Bullying may involve applying excessively tight supervision, sabotaging or impeding the victim's work performance, deliberately supplying false information, and giving a person jobs he/she cannot be reasonably be expected to complete satisfactorily and then claiming that the individual is incompetent.(Bunnet, 1997).

Drummond (2000) posits that sexual harassment is a major source of stress. It manifests itself in the form of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of sexual nature. It mainly occurs when admission to sexual request is an explicit or implicit condition of employment, influences an employment condition, or where behavior is such that it interferes with work performance or creates a hostile or offensive work environment.

Role related factors that have been identified as potentially stressful are: role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility for others. Role ambiguity arises when role requirements are unclear e.g. where standards are vague, where an employee is unsure about what and for whom he/she is responsible. Role conflict on the other hand arises when an individual is faced with conflicting job requirements, or adverse role requirements, or illegitimate role requirements. In other words the specific elements of a particular job are inconsistent with one another. Finally, responsibility for others causes stress because of the need to make hard or unpopular decisions or engaging in interpersonal conflict (Drummond, 2000)

Some occupations are noteworthy for their constant physical hazards, as is the case for miners and police officers. But the more characteristic feature correlated with such symptoms as high blood pressure is the combination of high psychological demand and

low decisional control. In other words, the "killer jobs" expose to high levels of pressure and responsibilities while giving them little authority or few resources to deal with the problems (Organ, 1991)

Others include administrative policies and strategies (downsizing, competitive pressure, merit pay plans, bureaucratic rules and advanced technology), organizational structure and design (centralization and formalization, specialization, no opportunity for advancement), organizational processes (tight controls, only downward communication, little performance feedback, punitive appraisal system), and working conditions (crowded work areas, noise, polluted air, heat, cold, strong odor, unsafe conditions, poor lighting, toxic chemicals and radiation)., quantitative and quality overloads of work.

Group stressors, as the name suggests, are provided by groups. They can be further divided into two categories; lack of group cohesiveness (caused by task design, supervisor prohibiting togetherness, or members shutting the person out), and lack of social support (when the employee does not share his/her joys, successes, problems etc with coworkers) (Luthans, 2008)

Lastly, Individual stressors individual stressors are individual dispositions such as type A and B characteristics; a personality A individual is always moving, talks rapidly, is impatient, feels continuously under time pressure, is competitive , obsessed by numbers , is often aggressive hence more likely to suffer stress, type B on the other hand is less concerned about time , tends to more relaxed in approach to work thus less likely to suffer stress (Brook, 1999) ; personal control, the higher it is, the less the stress; learned helplessness i.e. feeling that one has no control over fate, the stronger the feeling, the higher the likelihood of stress and vice versa; psychological hardiness i.e. the belief that one can control own outcomes, it enables individuals to resist the adverse effects of stressful life; perception, a person's fear that he will lose his/her job because his company is laying off personnel, and this may be perceived by another as an opportunity to get a large severance allowance and start own business; and self-efficacy i.e. self belief that a

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person is capable of performing a task (Robbins, 2007), those with high self efficacy tend to remain calmer when faced with stressful situations.

2.3 Effects of Stress

As pointed out in the introduction, low levels of stress can enhance job performance. People in certain jobs such as sales or creative fields (for example newspaper journalists and television announcers who work under time pressure), would seem to benefit from mild levels of stress. People in other jobs like police officers or physicians, may not benefit from constant mild stress (Luthans, 2008). The effects of stress therefore may be summarized as shown in the figure below:

Figure 7: Effects of stress
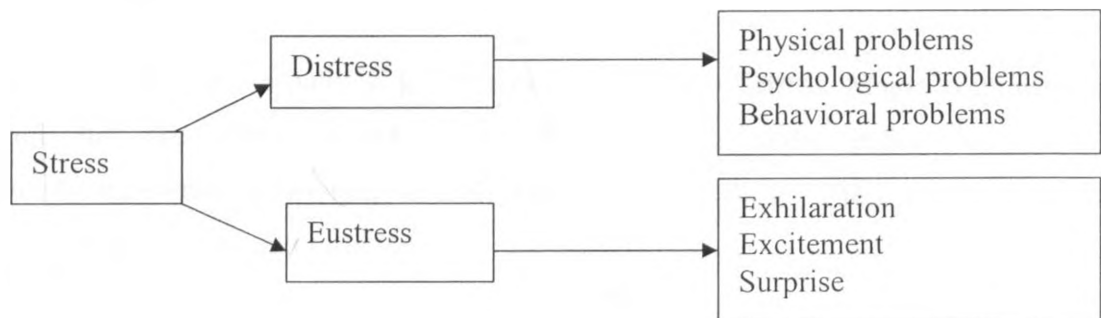
From the diagram above, it can be inferred that stress may be distress (bad stress), which causes physical, psychological, and behavioral problems. On the other hand, stress may be eustress, which is "good". Eustress may in turn cause exhilaration, excitement or surprise. The level of difficulty and the nature of the task being performed and personal dispositions may affect the relationship between stress and performance. However, it is safe to conclude that the performance of many tasks is in fact strongly affected by stress and that performance usually drops off sharply when stress rises to high levels (Luthans, 2008).It is the dysfunctional effects of high levels of stress that are a major concern to the society in general and effective management of human resources in particular.

Physical problems are those consequences of stress that are health- related. These are immune system problems (lessened ability to fight illnesses), cardiovascular system

problems (high blood pressure and heart diseases), musculoskeletal system problems (headaches and back pain) and gastrointestinal system problems (diarrhea and constipation). Not all the above problems can be linked to stress. Environmental conditions and the person's general state of health, heredity, and medical history also contribute (Luthans, 2008)

Under psychological problems there is anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, tension and boredom. The effects of this on individual employees are changes in mood and other emotional states and, especially relevant to job performance, lowered self esteem, resentment of supervision, inability to concentrate and make decisions, and job dissatisfaction. These outcomes of stress can have a direct effect on the organization e.g. increased insurance claims.

Behavioral problems are pathological reactions to causes of stress. Major examples are alcohol and drug abuse (Dessler, 2008). Others are under eating, overeating, sleeplessness, increased smoking and drinking, and drug abuse. These may result into tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover.

Prolonged stress usually results into burnout. Drummond (2000) says that burnout occurs where the individual's emotional and physical resources are depleted to such an extent that they are no longer able to cope with the demands of the job. It is caused by excessive striving to reach an unrealistic work related goal and builds gradually, manifesting itself in symptoms such as irritability, discouragement and resentment (Dessler, 2008). Drummond (2000) posits that it is characterized by emotional exhaustion, feeling distanced from others (depersonalization) and diminished personal accomplishment. It is a special case of distress and is often used to describe extreme cases of stress in the work environment. It is experienced by people in jobs with high levels of interpersonal interaction, jobs that require helping other people, and is also experienced by people who have a high emotional investment in their work, derive a major part of their self esteem in their work and have few interests away from work.

2.4 Stress Management

Stress management has the objective of maintaining stress at optimal level in order to most effectively achieve the goals of the organization. This is because some stresses are unavoidable, and some amount of stress is not bad for some people. Both organizations and individuals have a role to play in managing stress.

Individual stress managing strategies are the strategies that are initiated by the person. They tend to be more reactive in nature i.e. are ways of coping with stress that has already occurred. However some of them are both reactive and proactive e.g. physical exercise. They can be divided into three broad categories; reduction, resilience and recuperating strategies.

Stress reduction strategies mainly aim at decreasing the number of stressors affecting a person. The most obvious one is to avoid events and circumstances that cause distress. Others are: planning; help a person prepare for stressors, learning; e.g. about the organization and a job before accepting a position prepares a person for new stressors, avoiding food and beverages that cause stress e.g. large quantities of caffeine, perceptually block stressors, selectively ignoring stressors by looking for positive elements in them, cognitive therapy by psychologists (Luthans, 2008), and proper time management in order to manage multiple demands. Developing a social support network e.g. family, friends, and work colleagues provides an outlet for stress by giving an ear to problems and offering a more objective perspective to the situation (Robbins, 2007). Someone to talk to has two benefits, first being advice and practical assistance. The second is having someone just to listen to the individual's problem without judging it, in other words, counseling. It aims at providing a supportive atmosphere to help people find their own solution to a problem (Torrington, 2005)

Stress resilience strategies help a person develop physical and psychological stamina against potentially harmful stressors. The major ones are exercise, diet and weight control. Lastly, stress recuperating strategies help people rejuvenate physically and psychologically after severe distress. Included here is vigorous exercise, relaxation,

meditation, (focused awareness), diversion and balanced work-home lifestyles. In order to deal with burnout, one may break patterns, get away from it all periodically and reassess goals in terms of their intrinsic worth (Dessler, 2008)

Organizational stress management strategies are those that are developed at the organizational level and tend to be more proactive. The idea behind it is to remove existing or potential stressors. Dessler (2008) suggests a three- tiered employee stress reduction approach. It consists of three steps. The first one is primary prevention which aims at ensuring that things like job designs and work flows are correct. Second is intervention. It comprises individual employee assessment attitude surveys to find sources of stress at work and personal conflicts on the job and supervisory intervention. The final one is rehabilitation, through employee assistance programs and counseling.

Luthans (2008) adopts the approach of reduction, resilience and recuperating strategies. Stress reduction strategies by the organization include training programs (job, time management, and stress management), personnel policies, redesigning jobs, introducing sabbaticals, selecting persons with stress conducive personalities, selecting persons without bully characteristics, regular performance appraisals in order to monitor workers activities and inform them of any problems at early stages, effective communication, noise controls, proper temperatures, removal of obnoxious odors, daycare centers, setting smart targets, flexible work schedules, involving employees in decision making, combining stressful components of several positions into a single high stress job to be undertaken by an employee specially trained in stress management, conscious attempt by management to manage change systematically and effectively, plan and develop career paths and promote counseling, reduce conflict and clarify organizational roles, and good organizational design.

In order to create resilience, the organization can provide on-site space for training, encourage employees to do exercise, and establish a cafeteria to offer stress resilient diets. Further, it may support wellness programs (Robbins 2007). These are programs that focus on the employee's total physical and mental condition e.g. providing workshops to

help people quit smoking, lose weight and control alcohol use. The assumption underlying this is that employees need to take personal responsibility for their physical and mental health. The organization is merely a vehicle to facilitate this end.

Finally, in order to initiate recuperation, the organization could set up a gym for vigorous exercise, offer training on stress - oriented therapy, offer counseling that focus on behavioral changes such as reducing drug abuse, and also guidance on altering type A personalities. Managers have a dual responsibility. They must manage their own stress and manage the demand placed on others. Ethical as well as pragmatic considerations enter into any approach to balancing these responsibilities. The martyr who spares everyone else by burning his or her own resources will probably not realize optimal contribution of the work group. The supreme egoist who deflects every imposition onto others will sooner or later become estranged from the salubrious bonds of fellowship (Organ, 1991)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study sought to determine the strategies adapted by the transport department of The Standard Group Limited to manage stress and their perceived effectiveness. It thus required an in-depth understanding of the department. Such understanding was provided by a case study. Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2007) did put it clearly that the case study strategy is of particular interest if one wishes to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted. This study therefore took the form of a case study at the organizational level. The unit of study was the transport department of The Standard Group Ltd.

The case study research design has evolved over the past few years as a useful tool for investigating trends and specific situations in many scientific disciplines, especially social science, psychology, anthropology and ecology. This method of study is especially useful for trying to test theoretical models by using them in real world situations. Basically, a case study is an in depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic (www.experiment-resources.com/case-study-research-design.html, 2009)

3.2 Data Collection

The type of data collected was primary in nature. It was gathered through in-depth personal interviews with the transport analyst, a supervisor, and the assistant manager in charge of administration. A questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher and used as an interview guide. This guide was structured to capture sources of stress, the stress management strategies adopted and their perceived effectiveness.

The three respondents were selected because they hold senior positions in the transport department. By extension, they are better placed in as far as understanding stress and its

management in their department is concerned. They thus provide the rich or in-depth understanding that was being sought.

3.3 Data Analysis

The variables studied here were the stress management strategies employed by the transport department of The Standard Group limited and their perceived effectiveness. Since the data obtained was qualitative in nature, it involved content analysis. Content analysis entails identifying and extracting the key themes, concepts and arguments. This type of analysis has been successfully applied by Odhiambo (2006).

Content analysis measures the semantic content or the 'what' aspect of the message. Its breadth makes it a flexible and wide-ranging tool that may be used as a stand alone methodology. It follows a systematic process of coding and drawing inferences from texts. This technique begins by determining which units of data will be analyzed in order to get a basis for coding. There are four types of units, namely: syntactical, referential, propositional and thematic (Cooper, D.R. and Schindler, P.S, 2006)

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Current Stress Situation

All the three respondents agree that there is an element of stress in the transport department of The Standard Group Ltd. This is indicated by high levels of irritation, smoking, absenteeism, drinking, anger, and depression. All these may not be related to stress, but at least they are pointers of stress.

The sources of stress that were mentioned by the respondents were many and varied. Among the stressors that emanated from outside the organization were sick relatives. Two examples of an insane brother and a mentally unstable wife were given. The 2007 elections also brought tension in the form of PNU (Party of National Unity) and ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) camps. Employees from Mount Kenya and Eastern regions were pro PNU while those from the Western region were pro ODM. These were characterized by rivalry between them which was manifested in the allocation of duties. The supervisors, most of which belonged to ODM, prepared the duty rosters in a manner that favored the members of their camps. There was even a time when a member of the PNU side complained to the management about this through an anonymous letter. Other sources were economic hardships and technology where drivers feared the introduction of a fleet management system which will monitor all their movements and activities. They are used to a free world where misuse of vehicles and fuel is the order of the day. They could make money through 'kikapu' (carrying unauthorized passengers and goods). Since the new system would capture these, they fear for their economic status and also disciplinary measures.

The organizational stressors cited were as follows: role ambiguity/conflict; the roles of the analyst and the officer are not clear. The organizational chart indicates that supervisors report to the analyst, but there are times when they report directly to senior transport officer. Micromanagement; the supervisors feel that they do not have room to do what they feel is right and that management does not have trust and confidence in them. Tight controls; in as much as they are good, they make staff feel that they lack the

trust of management. Overwork; due to the symptoms stress mentioned above, mainly drinking, employees may not turn up for work. When this happens, the resilient employees are made to do more than is usual. Lack of opportunity for growth; drivers and loaders rarely get promoted to supervisory levels. This happens because most of them do not have the qualifications and the ability to lead others, they nevertheless feel that they are ripe for leadership. Responsibility; a decision to sack a driver does not go down well with other drivers. All the three respondents gave an example in which a driver was terminated after causing an accident. The drivers felt it was not fair given that no one likes to be involved in an accident. Nature of the job; it requires driving at night, sometimes through unsafe roads. For example Isiolo is characterized by constant clashes and some areas like Nyeri are Mungiki prone. Often times, vehicles in this route have their tires spiked by nails and windscreens smashed. Sabotage; this normally arises when change is introduced. When the motor vehicle movement logbook was reintroduced, there were staff who were out to make it not work. They would be heard saying "Wengine walijaribu wakashindwa, tutaona kama mtatoboa" that to say "Others tried and failed, we will see if you will succeed". Preference of Toyota vehicles to Nissans; drivers feel a bit uncomfortable when allocated Nissans since Toyota vehicles are better performers. Everybody therefore would love to drive one, but this is not possible as the fleet is composed of both. Group-wise, there were claims of favoritism in which people believed to have been brought by bosses were treated with a soft heart and allocated light duties.

Lastly, the individual stressors mentioned were learned helplessness. Some employees have come to believe that there is nothing they can do to improve their situations, especially those who have sick relatives. Personality A and low self esteem are also evident in some of the transport department members. Of all of them, organizational stressors carry the day in terms of numbers.

4.2 Stress Management Strategies

Stress is not always a bad thing, some levels of stress actually spur performance and some people perform best while under pressure. The challenge is therefore to keep stress at optimum levels, and the ways of doing this is what is referred to as stress management strategies. The transport department of The Standard Group Limited has adapted and implemented quite a number of them.

The first one is brief evening meetings between the drivers and their supervisors. Every evening, at around eight o'clock, the night supervisor calls a meeting with drivers and loaders. The objective of this meeting is to get to know the challenges that the team has faced during the day and also brainstorm on ways to overcome the same. It also provides avenue for staff to be listened to, thus reducing stress levels because a problem shared is a problem half solved. In addition, management uses them to pass messages to the drivers and loaders and vice versa.

Secondly, the department selects people who are able to work under pressure. The minimum qualifications of a driver in this department include among other things the ability to drive long distances at night and three to five years experience of this kind of driving, and also the ability to work long hours. The interviews conducted are the 'pressure type'. This is to say that the candidates are asked questions that are intended to annoy them in order to measure their resilience capacity. It is assumed that those, whose anger takes longer to rise, possess higher levels of perseverance. The respondents believe that older drivers are not comfortable driving long distances; they thus allocated short routes and the younger ones long routes.

Third is training on stress management. Every year, the human resources department, in conjunction with the transport department, outsources stress training services. The service provider usually talks to the team about their sources of stress and also provides available alternatives of dealing with them. The beauty of this strategy is that the trainer uses an open discussion format; meaning that people will be in a better position to talk about their

stressful situations. On top of this, since the working environment is the same, those who are reserved, will learn from those who ask a lot of questions.

The fourth one is flexible work schedules. Ordinarily, the diary of the supervisors, the loaders and the drivers is controlled by the duty rotas. However, when someone needs to operate outside these, they only need to speak to their immediate supervisors so that amendments can be made. They are driven by the motto, 'Bora kazi isilale'. In other words, 'you may do anything as long as work is not negatively affected'. This approach has greatly assisted the people with sick relatives.

The department does involve its employees in decision making. An example that featured prominently among the respondents is the one of the score card. A score card is a tool that is used to gauge the drivers' and loaders' behaviors in a manner that will allow ranking from position one to last. It was developed so that it could aid management in picking the best driver and the best loader so as to reward them. Before it was put in place, a meeting was called to enable the whole team to discuss it. The questions that were asked and the opinions that were given were very many. A lot of resistance could have occurred, and resistance is directly related to stress.

Setting smart targets is the sixth strategy. Drivers' targets are normally expressed in terms of hours and fuel used to complete a journey. These are realistically set because they involve a supervisor accompanying the driver right from the point of departure to destination. The supervisor will then calculate the amount of time used, and this becomes the time target. To get the fuel target, the vehicle's tank is filled at the beginning of the journey by the driver in the presence of the supervisor. It is then refilled at the end of the trip. The amount that goes into the tank during refill becomes the target. This way, the targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound.

There is also reviewing of the organizational structure and design. One of the respondents, the assistant manager in charge of administration, said that he constantly reviews the organizational structure of the transport department. At the time of the

interview, he was thinking about removing the position of the transport analyst so that its work may be done by the transport supervisors. He felt that this will reduce cases of supervisors bypassing the analyst to report directly to the senior transport officer.

Clarifying roles; all the three respondents cited a time when the roles of the transport analyst and the senior transport officer were not clear. Each one of them will for instance fight to report accidents to the insurance company. To avoid cases like this, a document was developed that outlined the duties of analyst and the officer. This document cleared the air and efficiency increased.

At position nine is the doing of appraisals. In this department, they are done once per year. The instrument used comprises of key performance indicators (KPIs) and objectives. Against each objective, there is a column to be filled in by the staff being appraised in terms of what they have done towards achieving the set objectives. Below these, there is a space for strengths and weaknesses. It is filled in by way of discussion between one and his/her immediate supervisor. The end product is expected to reduce stress in the sense that it will enable management to identify weaknesses of staff and respond accordingly.

Finally, the immediate supervisors do guide and counsel their subordinates. This is prompted in two ways; one, when a member of staff seeks counseling and two, when the supervisor identifies a candidate for counseling. The later involves monitoring behavior patterns so as to notice any strange ones (out of the norm). Further, the supervisors are expected to always lend ears to their team. It is believed that the act of listening goes a long way in reducing stress. One of the respondents gave an example of how he listened to a driver whose wife had run away with his child and household goods without contributing to the talk. He says the driver felt better as it was evident on his (driver) facial expressions.

4.3 Perceived Effectiveness of Stress Management

Effectiveness is a subjective variable. Different people define it differently. In this case, it is used to answer the question, "Are the stress management strategies being implemented at the transport department of The Standard Group of any value?" In other words, do they make sense to the three respondents?

Yes, they all agree that the strategies have been effective. They establish the effectiveness through two ways; one is by comparing the current situation with the situation that existed last year. Fortunately all have worked for over one year. Two, is by establishing the contribution of each strategy. It is revealed that absenteeism has reduced, there is less irritation, there are more smiles, and there is reduced smoking and drinking.

It was said that the brief meetings that are held every evening have had the greatest impact on reducing stress. They have offered an avenue through which potentially stressful situations are arrested. For instance the fuel target set for the Isiolo route was seen to be too high by the drivers. They felt that the amount of fuel allocated to this route was too little and could run out before route completion. This issue was raised in one of these meetings and a five litres increment was suggested. It was agreed on and implemented.

The current team of drivers is stress resilient. The respondents attribute this to the selection process. It emphasizes on recruiting people who can work under extreme pressure. That is to say people who can and have the experience of driving long distances that are dangerous at night. They are thought to be resilient because they are yet to complain about the nature of their work.

The supervisors, drivers and loaders are now more aware of the sources of the stress in their lives courtesy of the stress management training sessions. This was established through a survey that was conducted after the training. The trainees were asked to state their understanding of stress on a scale of one to five before and after the sessions.

Further, they now know how to avoid and deal with stressors. This could also be the reason why there are many smiles around the department, one respondent said.

Flexible work schedules have added value in stress reduction by allowing people to attend to more pressing issues without causing work to suffer. If a driver is sick for instance, immediate adjustments on the daily rota are done. This ensures that there is no void at any particular time. Two of the respondents attribute reduced absenteeism to this strategy. The other example cited on flexibility is that when a driver causes two consecutive accidents, he is allowed to rest for three days.

Involving employees in decision making was also deemed to be effective because of the role it played in reducing resistance to change. There is consensus that the score card could have elicited a lot of resistance were it not for the meeting in which drivers and loaders were asked for their opinions by management. The scorecard was a new document that was meant to measure the behavior of these employees with an aim of ranking them from the best to the least best. The objective was to reward best performers so as to spur motivation.

The setting of smart targets has ensured that employees are not pushed too far. It is said that they are realistic and that it is fun striving to achieve them. The organizational structure has not changed yet but the assistant manager in charge of administration is optimistic that the changes he has in mind will definitely reduce stress levels. However, the changes that he did on the roles of the senior transport officer and the analyst have borne fruit. He clarified their roles and now there exists harmony between them.

Usually, the training conducted by the human resources department is based on the information found in the appraisal documents. Training breeds knowledge, and the more one knows about his or her job, the less the stress that will be experienced. Towards this end therefore, appraisal as a stress management strategy is perceived to be effective. Lastly, guidance and counseling by the immediate supervisors gives opportunity for the staff to talk. By extension, they feel their problems are half solved.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary and Conclusions

All the three respondents agree that there is an element of stress in the transport department of The Standard Group Limited as indicated by high levels of irritation, smoking, absenteeism, drinking, anger, and depression. Although all these may not be related to stress, but at least they are pointers of stress. Extra organizational, organizational, group, and individual stressors were all present. The bulk stressors emanated from the organization.

In order to keep stress at the right levels, the department adapted and implemented the following strategies: brief evening meetings (to give update and feedback on day to day activities), selecting people who can work under pressure, training on stress management, flexible work schedules, involving employees in decision making, setting smart targets, reviewing organizational structure and design, clarifying roles, doing appraisals once per year, and guiding and counseling by immediate supervisors. These strategies were perceived to be effective in that fewer counts of absenteeism, drinking, smoking, irritation and anger were recorded compared to the previous year.

It is evident from the findings that despite the strategies employed being effective, stress is still experienced at the department. This occurs mainly because stress management is not a one off activity; it requires to be done endlessly. There is therefore need for the department to continuously do a survey of stress levels in order to determine the effectiveness of current strategies and also craft and implement better ones.

There is a general feeling by the respondents that the department should push for the set up of a gym within the premises to encourage exercising which in turn aids resilience and recuperation in as far as stress is concerned. Introduction of a guiding and counseling office also featured prominently. Other strategies the department should consider are: planning and developing career paths for employees, encouraging employees to talk to one another, offering stress oriented therapy, offering guidance on altering type A

personalities and supporting wellness programs like providing workshops to help people quit smoking, lose weight, and control alcohol use.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The case study relied solely on the employees at the transport department. This reliance is prone to some level of subjectivity since the respondents would want to be seen to be working. They thus might filter unfavorable information.

Further, it left out other senior managers like the managing director who could have lots of information regarding stress management for the whole organization. It was difficult to prove some statements like 'there was less anger this year than last year'. This is because there are no tools that can be used to measure anger.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

Since this study was a case of Stress Management at the transport department of The Standard Group Ltd, it would be prudent if future researchers look into stress management at the transport departments in the media industry in Kenya. This would allow for a comparison of the stress management styles of the different media houses. In addition, the results will benefit the whole industry.

A study titled, 'Stress Management at The Standard Group Limited' is also recommended. The objective of this could be to establish whether there are similarities between stress management at organizational and departmental levels. The results could then be used to identify strategies that are effective in both scenarios and then advise the management to lay more emphasis on them.

5.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

People will continue to be affected by stress. This is in view of the fact that it is practically impossible to eliminate all sources stress. The question that arises therefore is, "What should organizations do in order to have stress at levels that are not detrimental to the performance of an organization?"

As the saying goes, 'prevention is better than cure'. Organizations should include in their policies, first and foremost, measures that are aimed at preventing stress from happening. They should for instance commit to conducting periodic stress surveys whose objectives are to identify stressors and eliminating them.

And since stress must happen, organizations should also come up with reduction, resilience and recuperating strategies. A strategy that should not miss in the list is training on stress management. Training is this important because stress affects an individual, and training empowers the individual to manage his/her own stress. If each individual manages their own stress, stress in the whole organization is managed.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The Standard Group Limited

Transport Department

Stress management

1. What is your position in the company?

2. For how long have you worked in this position?

3. I understand that stress can be detrimental to an organization's performance, what is your take?

4. What is the stress situation in this department?

5. What are the indicators of stress here?

6. What are the major sources of stress in this department?

   - From outside the organization

   Domestic

   Political

   Economic

   Social

   Technological

   - From the organization

   Sexual harassment

   Bullying

   Role ambiguity and conflict

   Administrative policies and strategies

   Working conditions

   Organizational processes

   Organizational structure and design

   Nature of the job

   Quality and quantity overloads of work

- From group interactions (lack of cohesiveness or social support)
- From the individuals:

Personality A

Learned helplessness

Psychological hardiness

Self efficacy

7. In order to reduce stress in your department, do you:

- train your employees on time management?
- redesign jobs that cause stress?
- select persons with stress conducive personalities?
- select persons without bully characteristics?
- train your employees on stress management?
- do regular performance appraisals in order to monitor workers activities and inform them of any problems at early stages?
- practice effective communication?
- control noise?
- control temperatures?
- remove obnoxious odors?
- have daycare centers?
- set smart targets?
- set flexible work schedules?
- involve employees in decision making?
- combine stressful components of several positions into a single high stress job to be undertaken by an employee specially trained in stress management?
- consciously manage change systematically and effectively?
- plan and develop career paths and promote counseling?
- reduce conflict and clarify organizational roles?
- review organizational design?
- provide on-site space for training?

- encourage employees to do exercise?
- have a cafeteria to offer stress resilient diets?
- support wellness programs like providing workshops to help people quit smoking, lose weight and control alcohol use?
- set up a gym for vigorous exercise?
- offer training on stress - oriented therapy?
- offer counseling that focus on behavioral changes such as reducing drug abuse?
- offer guidance on altering type A personalities?
- others?

8. Have the strategies that you have mentioned been effective in reducing stress?
9. Why do you think so?
10. What do you think can be done differently to improve stress management in this department?

Thank you so much for your participation

APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

School of Business,
University of Nairobi
P.O Box 30197,
Nairobi
2nd November 2009

Dear Respondent,

RE: MBA RESEARCH PROJECT

I am a Master of Business Administration student in the School of Business, University of Nairobi. It is a requirement of this degree that I conduct a research project.

Towards this end, I have undertaken to study 'Stress Management at the Transport Department of The Standard Group Limited'. Consequently, you have been selected to form part of the respondents. The information you will provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and is needed purely for academic purposes.

A copy of the final report will be made available to you upon request.

Your assistance and cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

_____   _____

Shadrack Mwagandi   Martin Ogutu
Student.   **Supervisor,**
                                            School of Business,
                                            University of Nairobi.

*Office*Culture

Stress is the response you get for saying 'hi'

PRESSURE AT WORK WON'T DISAPPEAR SOON, SO HERE ARE TIPS OF HOW TO GO AROUND IT

"...mm" followed by a shake of the head and a sigh. This is the response that is a gradually becoming the usual "I'm fine!" to the old ice-breaker, "How are you?" Never mind that the person asking can't care two or more hoots while it is plastic.

"I'm stressed!" is sometimes an excuse to procrastinate, skip paying debts, postpone dates, or fail to attend pre-wedding parties, which these days basically harambees held in goat ribs.

But surveyed stress free, stress is known as moody bosses, layoffs, and salaries, and dilute office chat with the high cost of living (dying), overbearing workload, unemployment prospects, and

peer, beer, fear, and tear pressure.

Psychoanalysts assert on good authority that to experience stress is normal. It makes you work with urgency and purpose. Trouble is when your cup of stress overflows. It will interfere with productivity, and reduce physical and emotional health.

Since work related stress, like traffic jams, won't disappear soon, finding a bypass to circumvent it should be in order, and not via substance and spouse abuse.

According to author Carl Mueller, symptoms of stress include extreme anxiety — the kind felt by a jackpot winner who has just lost at gambling. Stress also creates insomnia, fatigue, headaches, constipation (even on empty stomach), social

withdrawal, lack of concentration, and twisted sex drive. For those who partake, it could lead to excessive smoking and drinking.

Stress management shouldn't be left to its victims. The common advice is that companies should provide conducive working environments. Some jobs and bosses cause more stress than being summoned to The Hague. That ought to be addressed.

In any case, stress contributes to lost days or hours of work, more sick-offs, higher costs of quality control, lost opportunities, poor performance and bad attitudes and moods in the office.

The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health short-listed several causes of stress at the workplace. They

are workload (too much or too little), random interruptions (telephones and visitors), pervasive uncertainty (when confronted by new procedures), mistrust, unclear policies,

office politics, job ambiguity, and lack of feedback, appreciation, communication and control.

While employees can reduce their stress levels if allowed to pull the CEOs nose every evening, there are more appropriate ways of doing it. Consider our parody of Mueller's suggestions in the book, *Stress Management in the Workplace*:

Direct injection: Watch what you're taking in, insults from your boss or excuses from dodgy clients notwithstanding. Anxiety and irritability can be symptoms of low blood sugar. Frequent consumption of small snacks helps to maintain it. Eating too much *ngali* can be a sedative, and hangovers can feel like 10 dreadlocked devils dancing in your head.

Indirect injection: Exercise regularly. Taking stairs to the 10th floor when there is a power black out is not included. Rest and get

If you can't beat stress, find a way around it

From Page 3a enough sleep.

Mind gym: Read books, tackle crosswords, play chess, scrabble, video games, or any other mentally stimulating game. An active brain easily rises to the occasion.

Heart and soul: Feed them through renewing acquaintance with the almighty, and by communing with nature, music, art, or any other pastime hobby. Meditation is also good fodder for these parts of your being.

City clock: Good time management reduces half the stress occasioned by over indulgence with time wasters.

Breakaway: Turn weekends and off days into mini holidays. They can be useful for unwinding and recharging.

Shift gears: Change jobs when there's a possibility and if it makes sense. Maybe you'll have more satisfaction driving across town to deliver parcels and pizzas than serve as a cashier.

kmutunga@nation.co.ke

ASKCHARLES

How do I make a harmless switch from my employer?

Graduate

Learn people skills to win hearts and jobs

If you have a problem getting along with classmates, start working on it now. Professionals are advising that learning to get along with people early as you begin to mould your career has valued benefits.

Being good in relating with others will not only finally be useful at work, but also play an important function in getting yourself a job. Interpersonal skills now rank high among attributes that employers look out for during recruitment. It is necessary for the smooth flow of work.

"Getting along with people at work is like a marriage, a relationship that must not be broken and one that you are required to work at to make things work," says Josiah Kang'aru, a management consultant.

"People come from different backgrounds and beliefs. You have to learn to relate with even the extremists. A good relationship with colleagues pays handsomely especially if you want to have an easy and productive time at work," he advises.

It all begins with being tolerant and kind to colleagues at whatever level in your life. Nurture the attribute of good interpersonal relations early, so that you don't have to struggle wit it as a forced requirement in your latter roles.

While you may get away with bullying classmates into moving aside for you in the computer room or at the library, you can't afford not to be polite to people at the office when you finally take a seat in one.

A rewarding culture at the workplace is that you treat everybody with equal respect. When you come from a background where you learnt only to choose who to accord respect and who to ignore, it will show at work.

For example, treating your lecturer with utmost respect because you need good grades and undermining a classmate with whom you share a desk because you think they don't matter as much is a misplaced act. You are nurturing a trait that will drive you into respecting your supervisor at work and disregarding the workmate next to you.

"Don't look down upon anyone, regardless of their position," warns Kang'aru. Developing interpersonal skills goes beyond being warm with words. It includes actions, such as being willing to help when a colleague approaches you for a solution over a given assignment.

It is considered a good trait, and builds a good bond. That means you will also be assisted in your time of need.

The ultimate effect is the creation of a sense of togetherness, the kind that every employer would be proud of because it will promote a team-based workflow and not an "everyone for themselves" kind of environment.

inyambura@nation.co.ke

A call for employers to speak out

From Page 44 The average worker is increasingly stressed, according to Mr Ithola, and the average employer is not tackling the government hard enough the issues that stress.

In 2007, Prof Cameron remains a consultancy professional trainer, [illegible]

that it may be time employers used pushed the government hard enough to improve governance in the areas of infrastructure, cost of living and service delivery including transport and housing.

"Large sums of money are paid as corporate and some tax to the government, [illegible]

munities, should now be taken beyond building schools, planting trees, and digging boreholes.

"Times are changing," he says. "As much as employers [illegible] rations on matters of national governance, cost, service delivery and rising cost of living are increasingly affecting their [illegible]

When it's time to call a counselor

A manager should look out for employees who are anxious, angry, have poor concentration, are always absent and look unwell

By PETER KAMURI

Counseling at the workplace can reduce stress and help workers to be more productive.

When professionals counsel staff, it reduces low productivity, sickness and absenteeism resulting from depression and stress. Counseling can also have positive effects on levels of job satisfaction and commitment.

In the book *Counselling in the workplace the facts* published by The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the findings are clear. To improve productivity at workplace, managers should be on the lookout for employees who may need counseling. Such staff can be identified in the following ways.

COPING MECHANISM

First, take note if you see apparent indications of despair in your co-worker. Has your coworker been irritable of late?

This may be a sign of depression. When despair sets in, even among the most resilient and affable of colleagues, they can change.

It is therefore important to take note of any unusual behavior.

Have you noted any cases of decreased productivity in the workplace, weight loss or absenteeism? This may be due to depression.

Try to establish whether there are indications of problems at home or any other probable causes of the hopelessness. If yes, then this is the time to call a counselor.

NATIONAL AIDS CONTROL COUNCIL

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE AN IMPACT

The National Aids Control Council (NACC) is mandated to provide a strategic framework to coordinate stakeholders in the implementation of the national multi-sectoral response to HIV and AIDS in Kenya. In order to strengthen capacity to accomplish its mandate, NACC through USAID/Kenya PEPFAR funded program is seeking to recruit a suitable and motivated individual to fill the following key position:

SENIOR HIV PREVENTION EXPERT REF: NACC/SHPE/05/01 (Re-advertised)

Reporting to the Chair of the National HIV Prevention Task Force, this position will provide strategic and technical leadership, advice and support to define and implement the HIV prevention agenda in Kenya.

Specific roles and responsibilities will include:

- Provide technical advise and direction in respect to the KNASP strategic priority "to prevent new infections: reducing the number of new HIV infections in both vulnerable groups and the general population"
- Provide leadership and guidance to NACC in the development, refinement, and execution of the HIV prevention agenda.
- Provide assistance to NACC in planning and implementation of prevention programs, including establishment of new programs, resource allocation, and expansion of the national prevention programs;
- Provide strategic advice to the HIV Prevention Task Force and NACC management on emerging and strategic issues to scale up HIV prevention as well as impact alleviation;
- Facilitate the development of a detailed work programme for the national HIV Prevention agenda through the national Prevention Task Force
- Facilitate the development and revision of the national HIV prevention strategy to be incorporated into the Kenya National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (KNASP);
- Closely monitor implementation of the HIV prevention framework with focus on early detection and communication of problem areas;
- Provide technical input and participate in national HIV prevention summits and Joint HIV and AIDS program reviews (JAPR);
- Provide periodic status reports on the Kenya HIV prevention agenda;
- Propose and manage development of innovative modalities and tools to strengthen national HIV prevention programs;
- Foster collaborative relationships with relevant entities and stakeholders involved in HIV prevention;
- Recommend areas of operational research through the national research mechanism recommend best possible methodologies for HIV incidence estimation and trend monitoring for Kenya; and
- Participate in the design and implementation of high-quality bio behavioral surveillance protocols

Qualifications, experience and competencies

Applicants to this position must have a Masters degree in Social Sciences, Public Health or Epidemiology with a focus on prevention. A Doctorate degree will be an added advantage. In addition, they should have over 10 years working experience in project management and strategy development, with at least 5 years managing HIV programs in low-income countries. In-depth knowledge and understanding of HIV prevention programs and research as well as excellent ability in fostering collaborative relationships with external institutions are required.

Candidates must demonstrate exceptional computer skills, writing, communication, organization and interpersonal skills. In addition, the candidates must be self-motivated, have the ability to work independently and possess strong team playing skills.

If you believe you can clearly demonstrate your abilities to meet the criteria for any of the roles above, please submit your application with a detailed CV stating your current position, remuneration, e-mail and telephone contacts quoting the relevant reference number on both the application letter and envelope...

DFID Department for International Development

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND GROWTH ADVISER

Introduction

Reducing poverty is the primary aim of the British Government Department for International Development (DFID). DFID Kenya and Somalia is responsible for managing the British Government's contribution to international development in Kenya and Somalia, with the objective of supporting governments to reduce poverty in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A vacancy has arisen for a Private Enterprise and Growth advisory post to be based in the DFID's Nairobi office. Appointment will be under local terms and conditions and is subject to security clearance.

We are seeking a professional with private sector or economic experience who will work on DFID's Kenya and Somalia programmes promoting inclusive growth that will result in the reduction of poverty. You will provide quality advice across a range of sectoral and thematic areas. The key responsibilities of this post are:

- Contributing to and advising on the preparation of new programmes for both Kenya and Somalia as well as providing cross cutting advice
- Developing strong working relations with the private sector government and the development partners in supporting public financial management, private sector growth and economic reform.
- Providing advice to colleagues in DFID and externally on making markets work better for poor people

You will have the following technical and behavioural competencies:

A master's degree that is relevant to the work and a track record of professional experience covering such fields as economics, business administration, accounting, finance or development studies. Prior experience in providing policy advice at all levels to the public and private sectors would be an advantage.

The ability to support the design and management of programmes/projects and their human and financial resources is required as well as showing skills in working effectively with colleagues and other professionals.

The confidence to represent DFID and to communicate and lead DFID's dialogue in programme related donor groups, relevant government-hosted meetings and in national events in order to promote and develop effective partnerships.

The ability to analyse and interpret information, a wide knowledge of the role of the private sector in poverty reduction and to contribute advice on the investment climate, financial sector development and international capital and flows.

Benefits

A competitive remuneration package will be offered including Medical & Retirement Benefit Scheme

How to Apply

- If you are interested in applying for this position please send an email to ... to obtain the application form and relevant job description. Only applications made using this application form will be considered
- Completed application forms should be emailed to ... or sent by ... copy to Adept Systems Management Consultants ...
- The closing date for applications is 3 pm on Friday 10th July 2009. Under no circumstances applications be accepted after this date
- ... should be directed to Adept Systems

WILDLIFE

What happens if you tickle a gorilla?

cording to a new
dy, the ape laughs,
ich would mean
re not the only
imals born with
ny bones
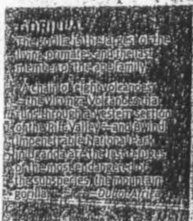
y tickling young gorillas, chimpres, bonobos, and orangutans.
chers say they learned that all
apes laugh.

heir findings suggest we inhereur own ability to laugh from the
common ancestor from which
ans and great apes evolved,
ch lived 10 to 16 million years

FIVE SPECIES

rimatologist and psychologist
Davila Ross of the UK's University of Portsmouth led a team that
d the necks, feet, palms, and
its of infant and juvenile apes,
human babies. The team recordmore than 800 of the resulting gig
and guffaws.

Mapping the audible similarities
d differences in laughs across the
species, the researchers created
acoustic family tree of human and
ni ape laughter.

The tree, they found, closely
atched the standard genetics
ased evolutionary tree of primates.
"So we concluded that these volisations all share the same common ancestry," Davila Ross explained. But even the most casual
tener can tell a human laugh from

an ape laugh. Davila Ross points out
that human laughter has distinct differences from ape laughter, most
likely because humans have evolved
much more rapidly than apes during
the past five million years.

And at least one great mystery remains: What purpose does ape laughter serve?

"I'm very keen," Davila Ross said,
"on learning how laughter is being
used among great apes as compared
to humans."

IS IT REALLY LAUGHTER?

It's previously been argued that
chimps chuckle, but their method—
"laughing" on both the exhale and
inhale—had been deemed too different from the human, exhale-only
laugh.

The tickle study, however, found
evidence that most ape laughter, especially among gorillas and bonobos, shares key traits with human
laughter.

Like humans, for example, gorillas and bonobos laughed only while

exhaling—leading University of Wisconsin zoologist and psychologist
Charles Snowdon, who was not involved in the study, to conclude that,
"contrary to current views, the exhalation-only laughter is not uniquely
human but is found in our ape ancestors."

Furthermore, gorillas' and bonobos' exhaling breaths during laughter lasted three to four times longer
than during normal breathing, an
important in speech evolution that
was thought to be unique to humans.

— National Geographic

A mountain gorilla and a baby (inset). A study found that most ape laughters share key traits with human laughter. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

Compiled By Ally Jamah

The bad effects of diet pills

People who are desperate to lose
weight often turn to diet pills yet
most do not work in the long-term
and are dangerous to your health.

From prescription drugs to overthe-counter thermoregulators, the
pills are touted as weight loss muscles.

But most only cause the body to
lose water which is mistaken for fat
loss. Others are depressants that
curb appetite to lower your calorie
intake. Lower food intake leads to a
drop in your metabolism rate, which
slows down weight loss. Pills are a
short-term solution to weight loss.

MOST OMINOUS

But most ominous is that extended use cause stomach and intestinal ulcers, high blood pressure,
diabetes, anaemia, nervousness,
anxiety, depression, seizure, difficulty in urination, sleeplessness,
tremors, dizziness and headache.
Other complications include heart,
liver and thyroid diseases including
palpitations or tingling sensations
and strokes. The pills cause nervousness, mood swings and bad
temperament.

Most over-the-counter products
are a hodgepodge of diuretics —
medication that increase urine output —, stimulants and laxatives that
may lead to a temporary loss of water weight, and jitters.

The pills can interact with other
drugs to produce adverse reaction.
When it comes to diet pills, you
need to be more than wary. Be
smart.

Before you fall for the claims
made by makers of the latest antiobesity drug, read label warnings.
You may find that the benefits are
not worth their risks and health
hazards.

Before deciding to take a pill
consult a doctor, nutritionist or
pharmacist.

—email.nutrition@zenihealth.com

GOOD HEALTH / M MERALI

Simple ways to reduce and cope with stress

Headaches are a sign of stress.

Stress is the feeling that one cannot cope with the pressures of today's hectic lifestyle.

You are stressed if you feel your
responsibilities are too heavy to
bear.

While the positive aspects of
stress can be a source of motivation,
the negative parts torture mentally

and physically. "I cannot cope," is
becoming an all too common phrase
in today's fast-paced living environment. This can lead to anger, frustration, depression, loss of interest in
everyday activities and ultimately, a
feeling of utter hopelessness as well
as withdrawal and isolation.

The end result is that your life becomes difficult, communication
breaks down in families, workmates
and friends leading to a snowballing
effect of additional stress build-up.

Those in demanding positions
need to be especially aware of their
own, colleagues and family members' stress.

Factors that contribute to stress
include too much work, unreasonable demands, wrong timings, bad
time management, life, or work
changes, studies, lifestyle and posture.

INABILITY TO COPE

Finance, family and relationship
problems also cause stress.

Signs of stress include inability to
cope at work, poor performance, illnesses such as high blood pressure,
headaches, backaches, ulcers, lack of
appetite, higher alcohol or tobacco
use, relationship problems, anger,
sleep disturbance, negative thinking,

anxiety and depression.

Indicators for stress fall into three
categories: physical, psychological,
behavioural and emotional.

Physical factors include tiredness, shortness of breath, skin rashes, wheezing attacks, dizziness and
headaches, palpitations and chest
pain, body aches and pains, stomach
problems such as aches, diarrhoea,
constipation and nausea.

Psychological ones include irritability, tension and anxiety, lack of
concentration, pessimism, nervousness and inability to relax and memory loss. Common behavioural disorders include increased drinking

of alcohol or smoking, drug use, violent behaviours, stammering, lack of
interest in favourite hobbies or pastimes, sleeping disorders, or muscle
notches. You can manage stress
through effective time management,
prioritisation, counselling, planning,
upgrading of skills, delegation and
proper diet. Building a buddy system, realistic expectations, resolving
conflicts, positive thinking, exercise
and good diet, faith, family, financial
management and positive help.

— The writer is a consultant counselling psychologist at Aga Khan University Hospital