

**EUSTRESS : A UNIQUE DIMENSION TO STRESS MANAGEMENT**

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**Abstract**

*Stress, like conflict, has a positive as well as a negative side. But that positive side tends to be overshadowed by concern with the negative. A life without stress is a life without challenges, simulation or change. Many positive and exciting events like- promotion, decision making, learning, leadership- have been found to create stress. Does that mean these events should be avoided? The answer is obviously "No". Unfortunately, when most researchers talk about stress and the need to reduce it, they tend to overlook its positive side. This research paper is based on analytical research work which tries to focus on the positive side of stress which is termed as **Eustress**. Eustress is the positive psychological response to a stressor, indicated by the presence of positive psychological states. This paper's purpose is fourfold. First, it introduces the idea of eustress vs. distress. Second, it presents the models to show that how eustress can be helpful to employees. Thirdly, it assess that how self efficacy influence the level of eustress. The fourth section covers the factors that may increase or decrease the chances of experiencing eustress. At the end it is concluded that stress is not always a bad thing. Stress is simply the response to changes that create taxing demands. This paper highlights that there is a difference between eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress. In daily life, we often use the term "stress" to describe negative situations. This leads many people to believe that all stress is bad, which is not true. Eustress, or positive stress, helps in motivating employees to improve their job performance.*

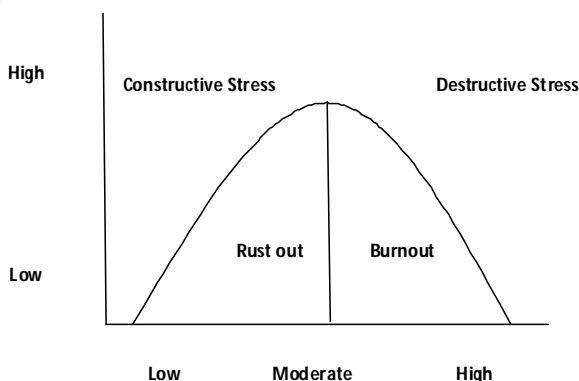
**Key words :** Eustress, stress, distress, job performance and self-efficacy.

**What is Stress ?**

Stress may be understood as a state of tension experienced by individuals facing extraordinary demands, constraints or opportunities. The pressures of modern life, coupled with the demand of a job, can lead to emotional imbalances that are collectively labelled 'stress'. However, stress is not always unpleasant. To be alive means to respond to the stress of achievement and the excitement of a challenge. Stress is the spice of life and the absence of stress makes life dull, monotonous and spiritless. There is, in fact, growing evidence that people need a certain amount of stimulation and that monotony can bring on some of the same problems as over- work. The term stress normally refers to excessive stress caused by extraordinary demands (which cause us to lose something we desire), constraints (things that keep us from doing what we desire) or opportunities.

**Two Faces of Stress**

There are actually two faces to Stress, as depicted through figure.



**Constructive Stress** (Eustress as it is sometimes called) acts in a positive manner for the individual and the organisation. Eustress can indicate a situation where the individual is in balance or within tolerable limits. The figure shoes that low to moderate amounts of stress can at in a constructive or energising way. Moderate stress can increase effort stimulate

creativity and encourage diligence in one's work. It can equate with tension that causes you to work hard at workplace.

**Destructive stress** (Distress) is not healthy for the individual and/ or organisation. Distress would indicate effects that are out of balance or outside the tolerance limits. Excessive stress may lead to overload and break down a person's physical and mental systems. Performance can suffer as people experience illness brought on by very intense stress and/or react to high stress through absenteeism, turnover, errors, accidents, and dissatisfaction and reduce performance.

**Objectives of the study :**

The purpose of the study is to analyze how the concept of eustress can be used.

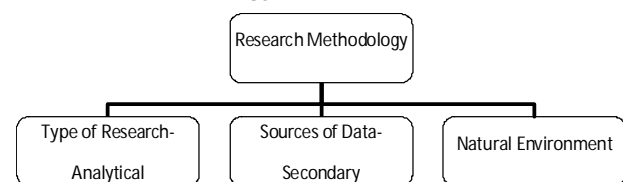
To study the difference between eustress and distress.

To study different models to find out how they support the concept of eustress.

To find out the interdependence between the concept of self-efficacy and eustress.

To determine the factors affecting level of eustress among employees.

**Research Methodology :**



This research study is based on analytical research design, in which I have used facts and information already available, and have analyzed these to make a critical evaluation of the material. Within analytical research, articles, data and other important facts that pertain to a topic is compiled; after the information is collected and evaluated, the sources are used to support an idea. And the nature of study is based on Natural environment which means that as a researcher I have not manipulated with the variables, this paper is based on non-experimental design which uses secondary data to come on conclusion.

**Concept of Eustress :** Eustress is a type of positive stress that first used and defined by Selye (1987) as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it.” Eustress has many advantages for people from three aspect, include enhance people physical health, bring passion and motive power to people and help people to reduce other kind of stress. Firstly, eustress is existed in order to enhance people physical health and well being. To distinguish between eustress from the scope of impact on people can be divided into advantages of short-term and long-term. On the short-term, although the stress is onerous, eustress still can motivate people to maintain the momentum of moving forward with a target or project. For example, people planned to participate in sports activities such as walking, jogging, or working out in a gym does place some degree of stress on the body. Eustress causes the release of endorphins that help people protect their physical and emotional health. This is the most directly reflects of eustress to show the protection of the people’ health. On the other hand, in the long-term, eustress helps promote emotional balance, confidence, the feeling of want and need, and throughout the whole life of most of people to ultimately provide some degree of happiness and well being. As a result, the role of eustress is to minimize the possibility of many people’s psychological and physiological diseases developing. Secondly, eustress can bring passion and motive powers to people enjoy their life. An easy analogy to help make the concept of eustress clearer is to think about physically and emotion training. If people without eustress, they cannot feel exciting and passion. When people running greater and greater distances or doing some exercises well, all of these can push people to challenge themselves and in new and demanding ways.

According to Simmons (2000), positive stress and negative stress cannot be definitely separated. They are mixed together like water in a bathtub. Positive stress is like cold water whereas negative stress is like hot water. When hot and cold water are filled into a bathtub they will be combined and the water temperature will be determined by the quantity of hot and cold water.

**Eustress vs. Distress :** Many people are unaware that there are two categories of stress : **Eustress and Distress**

Eustress is the good stress that motivates you to continue working. Stress can be a motivator and provide incentive to get the job done. This “good stress” is what eustress can be identified as and some people enjoy it. Everyone needs a little bit of stress in their life in order to continue to be happy, motivated, challenged and productive. It is when this stress is no longer tolerable and/or manageable that distress comes in.

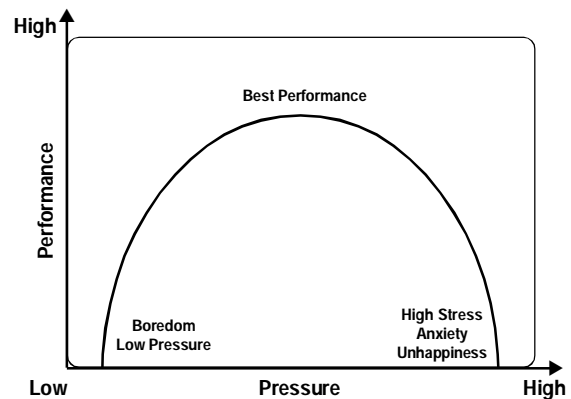
Bad stress, or distress, is when the good stress becomes too much to bear or cope with. Tension builds, there is no longer any fun in the challenge, there seems to be no relief, no end in sight. This is the kind of stress most of us are familiar with and this is the kind of stress that leads to poor decision making. Physiological symptoms of distress include an increase in blood pressure, rapid breathing and generalized tension. Behavioral symptoms include overeating, loss of appetite, drinking, smoking and negative coping mechanisms.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Can stress be helpful?**

To understand whether stress can be helpful to employees we need to understand some of the models which support the concept of eustress.

**Inverted U-Model :** According to Yerkes Dodson law distress reflects the appraisal of a threat results, whereas positive stress reflects a challenge or opportunity results also. The Inverted-U model (also known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law), was created by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson as long ago as 1908. Despite its age, it’s a model that has stood the test of time.<sup>[2]</sup>

It shows the relationship between pressure (and arousal) and performance.



**Inverted-U model (also known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law)**

According to this model, peak performance is achieved when people experience a moderate level of pressure, where employees experience too much or too little pressure, their performance declines, sometimes severely.

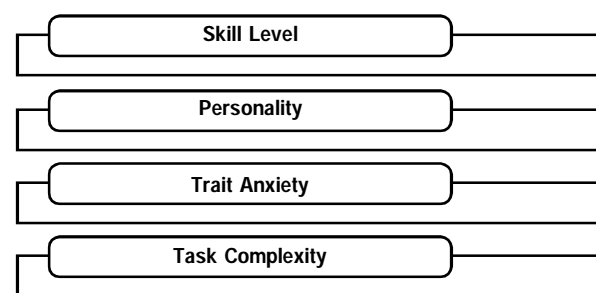
The left hand side of the graph shows the situation where people are under-challenged. Here, they see no reason to work hard at a task, or they’re in danger of approaching their work in a “sloppy,” unmotivated way.

The middle of the graph shows where they’re working at peak effectiveness. They’re sufficiently motivated to work hard, but they’re not so overloaded that they’re starting to struggle. This is where people can enter a state of “Flow,” the enjoyable and highly productive state in which they can do their best work.

The right hand side of the graph shows where they’re starting to “fall apart under pressure.” They’re overwhelmed by the volume and scale of competing demands on their attention, and they may be starting to panic.<sup>[3]</sup>

**The Four Influencers that affect Inverted-U model :**

The shape of the Inverted-U curve shown in Figure 1 is for illustration only – in reality, the shape of the curve will depend on the situation, and the individual person. There are four main “influencers” that can affect this. These are :



**Fig.2 Four Influencers**

**Skill Level** : People's levels of skill with a given task directly influence how well they perform, which is why you need to train your people intensively if you want them to cope in high pressure situations.

For instance, if they're not practiced enough to do a task, they'll feel under serious pressure, and they won't perform well. What's more, people are less able to think in a flexible, methodical way when they're under pressure, which is why they need to be able to fall back on well-rehearsed responses.

**Personality** : Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. The study of personality focuses on two broad areas : One understands individual differences in particular personality characteristics, such as sociability or irritability

For instance, some psychologists believe those employees who are extroverts are likely to perform better in high-pressure situations. Employees with an introverted personality, on the other hand, may perform better with less pressure.

**Trait Anxiety** : Trait anxiety refers to a general level of stress that is characteristic of an individual, that is, a trait related to personality. Trait anxiety varies according to how individuals have conditioned themselves to respond to and manage the stress.

**Task Complexity** : Task complexity describes the level of attention and effort that people have to put into a task in order to complete it successfully. Employee can perform simple activities under quite high levels of pressure, while complex activities are better performed in a calm, low-pressure environment.

**Transactional Model (TM)** : Individual response to stressors confronted in the workplace has been studied for almost a century. The conceptualization of organizational stress is studied under the Transactional Model (TM) (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). In this model, individuals encounter stressors as stimuli; as these stressors are encountered, they are iteratively appraised by the individual. During a primary appraisal, stressors are perceived by individuals as either a threat or a non-threat. The TM theorizes that those stimuli appraised as non-threats are no longer a source of stress. Stimuli appraised as threats undergo secondary appraisal. During secondary appraisal, the individual assesses the controllability of the threat and the resources which are available to cope with the threat. If the stimulus is controllable and can be coped with, positive stress results. If coping resources are insufficient, negative stress results.

**Preventive Stress Model (TPSM)** : The Preventive Stress Model (TPSM) attempts to explain both how stress occurs within organizations and how stress can be prevented. An alternative model to the TM, TPSM suggests that individuals respond to stressors with a holistic response that includes cognitive, affective and physiological reactions. From this response, a state of distress or eustress results, and these states predict outcomes. Primary prevention addresses stressors; secondary prevention addresses the response to stressors; tertiary prevention addresses the response to outcomes.

**EXAMPLE : Management styles based on Eustress**

**Japanese Management Style** : Stress is seemed to be a part of Japanese organization. Most Japanese employees work

harder and longer, Karoshi, or Death from overwork phenomenon gains attention from the Japanese ministry of labour<sup>[4]</sup>. While Japanese organization continue to create new form of strategies : alliances and cooperate between partners, no life-time employees, relaxation of centralizations, chief executive officers might be awareness the importance of stress<sup>[5]</sup>. The literature on business ethics shows extensive proof of the influence of nationality in determining what is considered right or wrong. For example, Nakano & Chinaki (1997)<sup>[6]</sup> found that Japanese and US managers differed strongly in their orientation. Baker and Veit (1998) compared North America and Pacific Rim (i.e., Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and Thailand) nations and found difference in the principles of management styles.<sup>[7]</sup> In the manufacturing industry, employees working in groups or teams are a key to success. The classic Japanese management style has been called the Global Organization Model. Its global strategies are based on the centralization of assets, resources, responsibilities and using eustress in order to achieve an economics of scale.

**Application of model to increase employee's performance**

: The simplest way to use these Models is to be aware of it when you allocate task to employees in an organisation. Most importantly, start by thinking about employees workloads, and about the pressure that they're already experiencing. If employees are overloaded, see if you can take pressure off them – this will help them increase the quality of their work. By contrast, if they're underworked, managers may need to keep them sharp by shortening deadlines or finding extra things for them to do. Balance need to be maintained so that employees can perform at their best.

**Self- efficacy as base for Eustress** : According to Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations." In other words, self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. Bandura described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel (1994).

Virtually all employees can identify goals they want to accomplish, things they would like to change, and things they would like to achieve. However, most employees also realize that putting these plans into action is not quite so simple. An individual's self-efficacy plays a major role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached.

**Employees with a strong sense of self-efficacy**

View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered

Develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate

Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities

Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments

**Employees with a weak sense of self-efficacy**

Avoid challenging tasks

Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities

Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes

Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities

Eustress is primarily based on perceptions. It is how you perceive your given situation and how you perceive your given

task. It is not what is actually happening, but a person's perception of what is happening. Eustress is thus related to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one's judgment of how they can carry out a required task, action or role. Some contributing factors are a person's beliefs about the effectiveness about their options for courses of action and their ability to perform those actions.<sup>[7]</sup> If an employee's has low self-efficacy, they will see the demand as more distressful than eustressful because the perceived level of what the person has is lower. When an employee has high self-efficacy, they can set goals higher and be motivated to achieve them. The goal then is to increase self-efficacy and skill in order to enable people to increase eustress.

### Factors that may increase or decrease the chances of experiencing eustress

Stress is influenced by hereditary predispositions and expectations of organisation. Thus, an employee could be at a certain advantage or disadvantage toward experiencing eustress.<sup>[8]</sup> If employees enjoy experiencing new things and believe they have importance in the organisation, they are more likely to experience eustress.<sup>[9]</sup>

Eustress is negatively related to self-directedness, or an extreme sense of autonomy.<sup>[9]</sup>

Persistence is positively related to eustress and closely related to intrinsic motivation.<sup>[9]</sup>

Employees with an internal locus of control, or high levels of self-control, have an increased chance of eustress because they believe they can increase their skill level to match the challenge.<sup>[10]</sup>

Active procrastination is positively related to eustress. By actively delaying work, the person increases the challenge. Then once the challenge is matched with the employees' high skill levels, the employee can experience eustress. Those who passively procrastinate or do not procrastinate do not have these same experiences. It is only with the purposeful procrastination that a employee is able to increase the challenge.<sup>[11]</sup>

Mindset is a significant factor in determining distress versus eustress. Optimistic people and those with high self-esteem contribute to eustress experiences.<sup>[12]</sup> The positive mindset increases the chances of eustress and a positive response to stressors. Currently, the predominant mindset toward stress is that stress is debilitating. However, mindsets toward stress can be changed.

**Conclusion :** Positive stress is an excellent way of initiating the invention and problem solving process by proving more creative solutions. It helps us to overcome the problems when we need to adjust to the stressful changes in organisational environment. Many solutions and finished tasks were achieved when employees was positively stressed. Eustress helps em-

ployees to change. Actually eustress is something that is good, productive and effective. One final note to managers about introducing challenge stressors : Don't overdo it. As I mentioned before, too much of a good thing can turn bad. Few workers can maintain peak performance indefinitely. Employees need time to recoup and recover. Managers need to recognize that using challenge stressors is not a license to overburden their employees. The inverted U- model suggests that overburdening employees with challenges will result in burnout. Managers should be judicial in their introduction of stress into their workplace, even when the stress is of a challenging nature. And most importantly we should remember that stress also has positive effects and this should not be ignored when we are trying to understand stress.

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