



STRESSMONITOR WHITEPAPER

April 2011

STRESSMONITOR

A CONTACT CENTRE STRESS SOLUTION

WHAT IS STRESS ?

Stress is caused by our perfectly natural genetically predetermined physiological response to any real or perceived threat that we face. This response is commonly known as the 'fight or flight response', although its correct medical term is the General Adaption Syndrome (GAS). We all have stress in our everyday lives; this is a fact of living, indeed in the Contact Centre a certain level of stress is often seen as positive as it drives performance.

There are many definitions of stress, we have adopted one used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and simply put this defines stress as 'our individual response to excessive pressure and demands placed on us'. All of us react differently and can cope with different levels of pressure – it is when the coping mechanisms we have each developed to deal with this pressure are overwhelmed that an adverse reaction occurs.

Each individual has their own coping mechanisms; these can be as simple as the use of humour, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, physical activity or NLP techniques etc. These can also include inappropriate ones such as drink or drugs.

Pressure itself leads to Eustress which is often referred to as "good stress" as although it places pressure on the individual, the individuals are able to cope. Eustress over time is replaced by Distress which occurs when the individuals coping mechanism can no longer cope. Distress is often called "negative or bad stress". Distress can be either acute or chronic, acute is generally in response to a single incident and if enough time is available recovery from acute stress is achieved. Chronic, however, is associated with continued distress and this is the state which most threatens individual health and performance.

WHAT IS STRESSMONITOR?

Stress was cited as the number one cause of long term and the number two cause of short term workplace sickness and absenteeism in the UK in 2009*. The Contact Centre itself had the highest levels of absence of all of the 32 sectors recorded within the survey. Given the clear connection between sickness / absenteeism levels and staff turnover in the Contact Centre, stress management should be the number one priority of all organisations operating Contact Centres. However, to effectively manage stress, you must first be able to measure it and that is exactly what the STRESSMONITOR solution has been designed to do.

As mentioned above Pressure (eustress or positive stress) in the Contact Centre is often seen as an effective business dynamic and whilst the individual within the Contact Centre is able to cope with this pressure then operational performance is maintained. When the individual is no longer able to cope with the pressure, positive stress soon turns into distress or negative stress and operational performance is impacted. STRESSMONITOR provides organisations operating a Contact Centre with a service which effectively tracks individual stress levels allowing organisation to manage these stress levels to improve the health and wellbeing of staff, thus reducing staff turnover levels and improving both operational performance and employee motivation.

Using our scientifically validated biometric STRESSMONITOR service, we can accurately evaluate an individual's stress level and determine the correct course of action for that person to ensure their performance and wellbeing remains high.

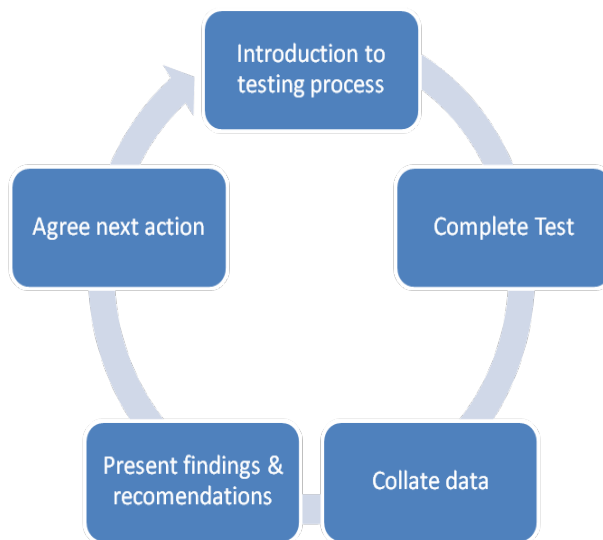
*CIPD 2009 UK sickness and absenteeism survey

HOW IT WORKS

The STRESSMONITOR is designed to perform screenings to quickly check if people have any health concerns related to their individual stress levels.

Testing Procedure

Testing is carried out at the desktop whilst the individual carries on working normally. Biometric data is collected via a wireless sensor called a *photoplethismograph* clipped to ear and transmitted to a specially designed software programme. The testing is carried out for 10 minutes and once accurate data is collated then the screening is completed and the data is available for report generation. The chart below illustrates the typical screening process.

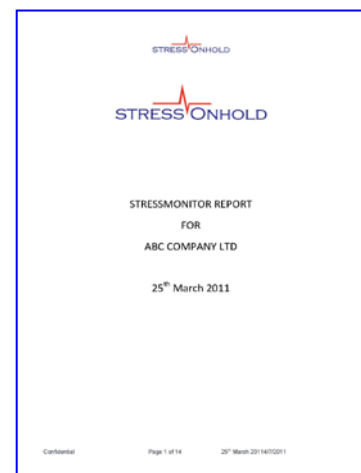


Presentation of findings

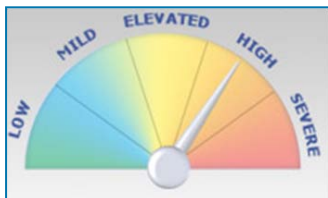
Once the assessment is complete the information collected is saved anonymously to the server location within our secure data centre. By saving the information anonymously it eliminates any risk associated with the Data Protection Act by separating the data from the employee’s personal details. The raw data collected is only available for reporting via the password protected system administrator log-in. Reports can be provided to the organisation in accordance with the level of service contracted to and can be provided in electronic or paper format as required. Once provided to the organisation the protection of this data becomes the responsibility of the organisation concerned.

Reporting can be provided on either an individual employee basis or as a generic report identifying organisation wide stress levels within the whole Contact Centre, departments or teams.

Our costs are based upon the number and frequency of staff assessed and the level of reporting required and are therefore under the direct control of the organisation who can budget accordingly based on its own specific requirements.



As part of our reporting service we are also able to make recommendations and provide advice and guidance on the practical steps to take to manage stress. In addition to the Reporting Service we are able to provide further optional software modules within STRESSMONITOR. These additional modules include programmes which enable us to work with individuals to help manage their stress levels. We can therefore allow users to improve their stress levels, measure fitness levels and calculate their biological age in comparison to their calendar age.



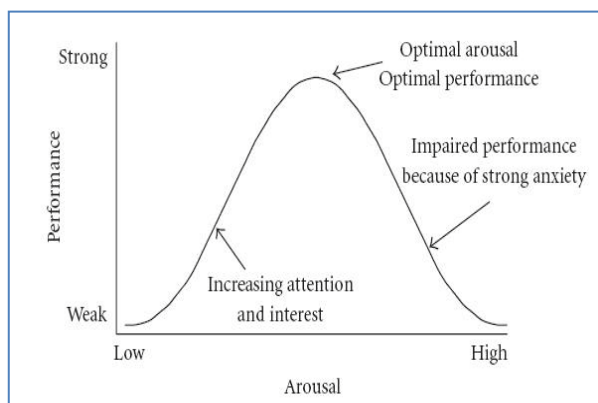
STRESSMONITOR provides a simple, easy to read graphical display clearly indicating stress levels. The algorithm used to calculate the stress level is based on Heart Rate Variation rate (HRV) calculation and is therefore far more accurate than that available through simple pulse, or heart beat monitors which whilst effective at measuring heart rate do not provide a realistic assessment of the individual's ability to cope with stress when compared to measurements of Heart Rate Variability.

Report Recommendations

As part of our report we will identify a number of basic recommendations which can be utilised to ensure that stress management best practice are adhered to within the contact centre. These recommendations will incorporate suggestions relating to possible improvements in working practices, environmental and personnel procedures. As part of our ongoing service we would also look at making specific recommendations in respect of individuals which would be aimed at better management of their individual stress management practices.

KEY BENEFITS

Improving Operational Performance



The scientific link between Arousal and Performance dates back almost 100 years when research carried out by psychologists Yerkes-Dodson established the Human Performance Curve. This identified that optimum individual performance was achieved when a state of balance was achieved. Arousal levels which are too low or high lead to increased negative stress levels and impairments in individual performance. In a Contact Centre individual performance contributes directly to overall operational performance and therefore any tool which provides visibility of individual stress levels allows the management of this overall operational performance.

Reducing Sickness, Absenteeism and Staff Turnover Levels

In the UK Contact Centre market, average staff turnover is 13% per annum* and in some Contact Centres as high as 25%. Although a level of staff turnover in the Contact Centre is inevitable the current high levels put significant additional pressure on the Contact Centre operation. Allowing management of staff stress levels will clearly result in reductions in absenteeism levels and hence will reduce staff turnover. In a Quality of Work Life exercise completed by Somerset Council in 2005 absenteeism rates dropped 23% in one year due to the focus on Stress Management. (*CCA Report 2010)

Meeting duty of care obligations

Within the UK, organisations owe a legal duty of care to provide a safe workplace. This duty of care can be applied to any work related stress and can lead to significant litigation costs where the employers has been shown to fail in meeting its duty of care obligation to its employees. Increasingly within the Contact Centre operation Stress Management programmes are being implemented to reduce this litigation and the STRESSMONITOR solution enables employers to target these often costly stress management programmes where they will be most effective and therefore provide the best return on investment.

Improve Recruitment Profiling

A necessary consequence of high levels of Staff Turnover is the need for constant recruitment drives which involve considerable Human Resources, Training and Contact Centre management time. STRESSMONITOR can be used as part of the recruitment process to validate and enhance any psychological profiling completed by further assessment of candidates ability to cope with stress. This additional feedback provided will therefore better ensure that suitable standards of candidates are recruited who have demonstrated an ability to cope with Contact Centre stress thus leading to increases in staff retention levels and a corresponding reduction in staff replacement costs.

Enhance brand awareness

Increasingly Contact Centre agents are the primary contact point between the organisations and its customers and as such have considerable scope to impact on customer's view of the organisation. Motivated staff is clearly better able to promote the company image and associated brand far more effectively than those demotivated as a result of negative stress. The improvements in staff motivation through the demonstration of the organisations commitment to the management of stress levels will lead to happier staff and within the contact centre the principal of happy staff leads to happy customers is a simple truism.

SCIENCE BEHIND THE TEST

STRESSMONITOR utilises technology developed by our US technology partners who have been a preferred provider of physiological monitoring and stress management tools in the USA and Europe since 1996. Our partners team of medical doctors with software engineering skills has developed a number of complete heart rate variability systems for the general public, biomedical, research, educational and fitness markets. Stressonhold has adapted this technology to suit the needs of the corporate environment and utilises this technology within its STRESSMONITOR solution

What is the STRESSMONITOR based on?



The STRESSMONITOR solution is based upon software designed with the contact centre employee in mind. It is based on a very professional type of scientifically validated technology. During every testing procedure it gathers heart rhythm data using a very accurate pulse wave sensor and analyses this information using our unique **Heart Rate Variability (HRV)** algorithms. The results of this analysis are evaluated by comparing them with respective predicted values taken from our large normative database, which was created in collaboration with reputable academic organisations. The assessment results give useful insight into the current state and progress of the user's health and fitness condition.



Heart Rate Variability (HRV) is the measurement of the time delay between RR-RR wave measurements within the heart rhythm as measured in an electrocardiogram. The gap is measured in milliseconds and over a typical STRESSMONITOR session between 600-1200 individual measurements is made to arrive at an accurate assessment of individual Heart Rate Variation (HRV) levels.

According to the opinion of many world recognised experts, HRV is the most reliable indicator of:

- Cardiovascular condition
- Level of physical and mental stress
- Aging process
- General health risks
- Chronic disease conditions
- Inner balance and optimum performance
- Chronic fatigue
- Various emotional states

Simply put, HRV data is an extremely accurate indicator of well-being. Our focus at **Stressonhold** is monitoring the level of physical and mental stress.

The natural mechanism of the stress response was developed by evolution as a short-term protective measure. If the effect of stress remains for a long time, the stress response mechanism goes into “exhaustion phase”. It drains all reserves of energy, vitamins and minerals, which leads to a lowering of body functions responsible for healthy stress reaction, causing extreme fatigue. It can even trigger various stress related health problems, such as cardiovascular, neurological, autoimmune diseases, cancer, asthma, digestive problems and many more. It has been found that up to 80% of health problems are stress related. It is also found that the first most likely victim of unresolved chronic stress is the immune system, and failure can lead to colds and various inflammations. That is why having information about stress levels is extremely important in everyday life to maintain good health.

OUR SERVICES

Stress Monitoring Service

STRESSMONITOR can either be used to provide a single report on individuals to identify current stress levels or as an ongoing measurement where individuals are measured at monthly (or quarterly) intervals to both indicate current stress levels and to provide comparisons with previous reports to review any reductions or increases in individual stress levels. Individual stress levels can be combined to provide team, departmental, site or business unit comparisons as required. Individual levels can also be compared against company averages. As the algorithm is based on specific analysis of heart rate variability of the cardiac intervals recorded for a short period of time we can measure as many agents as required over a relatively short period. The algorithm also contains special means for automatic adjustment of its performance to establish a method of self-learning and increasing its performance by taking into account individual physiological properties to provide a clear indication of an individual’s ability to cope with stress over time. Our costs are always based upon the number of individuals assessed and can either be completed as a one off engagement or as part of an ongoing contract where assessments are completed monthly or quarterly.

Our Stress Reduction Service

Whilst Stressonhold is not a stress management company we are able to provide advice and guidance on techniques and practices which are known to reduce stress. In addition we have a range of additional software modules that can be utilised to work with individuals to reduce their stress levels. We are also able to work alongside and as part of your organisations existing stress management programmes to complement these services and to ensure that these resources are focused on the right individuals. Stressonhold consultants are not clinically trained and should never be viewed as medical experts in the field of stress counseling and therefore should not be viewed as a replacement for any existing expert stress management programmes.



Our Contact Centre Audit Service

Stressors within a Contact Centre can be many and varied, for us to be able to address these it is vital that we first understand the business objective of your Contact Centre and assess the technologies deployed to deliver this. By completing this exercise we can identify any gaps within the technology that will impair business performance. Once completed we will provide recommendations that will enhance business performance without adding to the individual stress levels. These recommendations can cover a wide range of areas within the Contact Centre, including, environmental, technological and working practices considerations and will always take into account the best practice guidelines for stress management.

Stressonhold and the next step

Stressonhold is the creation of a number of likeminded individuals who bring together over 50 years of contact centre experience , we combine this with specialist holistic therapy experience of stress management techniques to provide our customers with a level of expertise that is unmatched within our industry. Through our UK offices in Chester & Reading we are able to provide a nationwide service which can either be provided as part of our standard assessment service or as a specific bespoke arrangement suitable for individual customer requirements. To evaluate our unique solution sign up for our free discovery day during which we will complete an initial stress assessment for upto 25 staff members and provide a free report on their individual stress levels. Break the Cycle of Stress within your organisation and contact Stressonhold now.

KEY FEATURES SUMMARY

- ✓ Non invasive biometric measurement device
- ✓ Ability to track employee stress levels over time
- ✓ Clear and concise system reporting
- ✓ Provides an instant wake-up call for someone to take action
- ✓ Improves employee health , wellbeing and motivation
- ✓ Scientifically valid indicator of calculating stress levels
- ✓ Unlimited assessment capabilities and customer secure data storage
- ✓ Additional software modules for Stress Management available
- ✓ Secure web based service
- ✓ Adheres to Data Protection best practice guidelines
- ✓ Improve recruitment success