

Joint Management and Control of Stress: The PENTAGRAM* Model

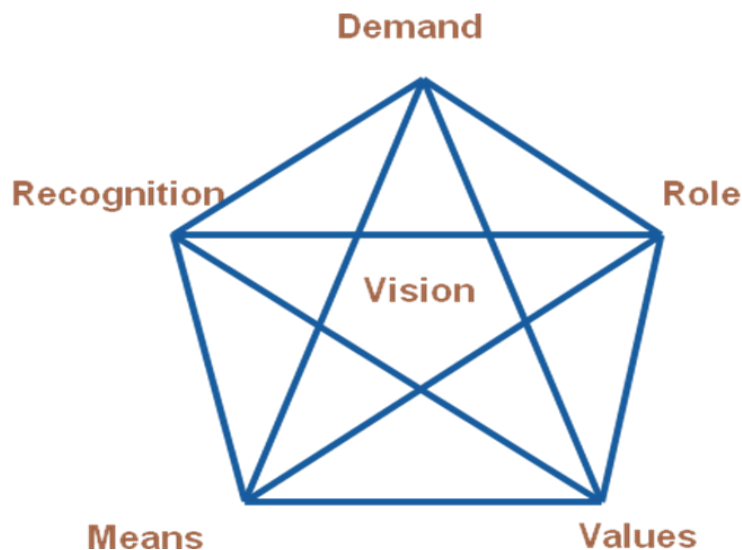
Our observation

Today companies can gain a competitive advantage from the ability of their leaders to deal with instability, complexity, and unpredictability without creating additional stress. By doing so, they have a direct impact on the performance of their teams.

We¹ have developed a model to diagnose and act on stressful situations in organizations.

The **PENTAGRAM** is a model for executives and managers who wish to understand their role as instigators or as transmitters of stress. It allows them to intervene by selecting specific drivers that optimize performance because they are also complementary.

Individuals, companies, and organizations manage their stress best when the 5 endpoints of the pentagram are balanced and in harmony to help them achieve their vision.



(*) Inspired by S. Ginger's Pentagram, 1981, 1987

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The pentagram is a systemic model that describes the situation of individuals, teams, and organizations in a changing environment.

At the heart of the pentagram is the vision, i.e. the strategy, the project, the direction that motivates us.

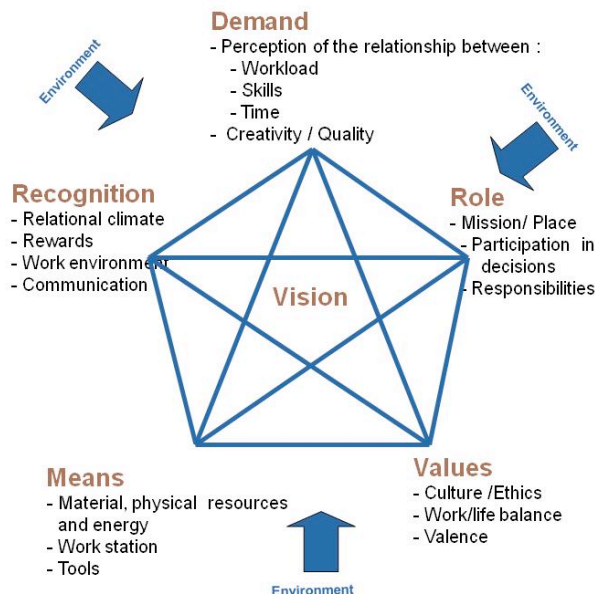
The five endpoints of the pentagram indicate relationships among the various events coming from the environment that can be identified as stress factors. They help those who use them to prioritize, assign actions, and develop their ability to respond. The five endpoints of the pentagram are both independent and at the same time interconnected; it is along this link, this tension, that leaders can act to counter or reduce stress.

- **Demand:** "psychological demand," i.e. the relationship established between the perceived workload and the resources available to meet it; the overall work capacity together with the associated productivity,
- **Role:** the perceived position, participation in decision-making, the organization, the procedures, the management of all internal flows, inputs and outputs,
- **Values:** culture, the work-life balance, ethics, ambition,
- **Means:** the tools, the job, logistical resources, information technology,
- **Recognition:** the workplace environment, communication, rewards, performance evaluation and metrics, the climate of relations between individuals.

Surrounding the pentagram there is **the environment** with which organizations are in constant interaction, whether intentionally or not. This environment impacts the balance among the 5 endpoints and can then generate stressful situations.

The definition of stress that we have adopted is as follows, "[Stress is] the body's reaction in response to changes, requirements, constraints or threats from its environment in order to adapt to them." These changes cause an imbalance among the 5 endpoints of the pentagram.

Dealing with stress is therefore finding an optimal balance among these five endpoints to take advantage of changes in the environment. There is an optimal level of stress that does not mean an absence of stress and that is linked to performance.



• This constantly involves finding the optimal balance among these 5 endpoints (stressors) to take advantage of changes in the environment

• Acting on only one of these endpoints is rarely enough to find the balance or performance desired

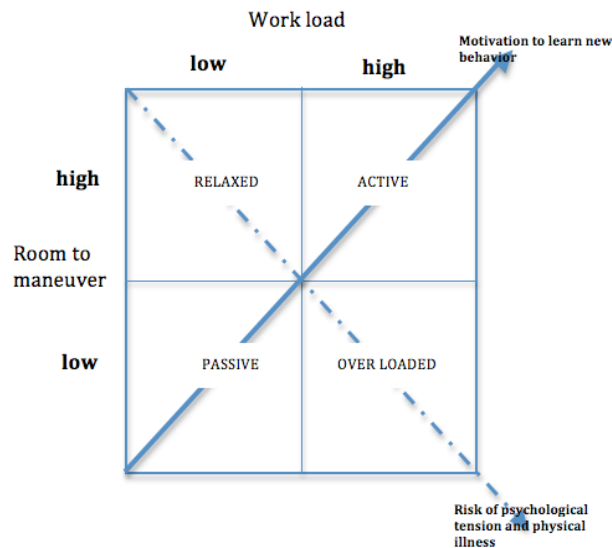
We shall now provide a detailed description of the contents of each of these 5 endpoints.

DEMAND

Definition

This is the perception of the work requested, in terms of quantity and quality; of the perceived relation between workload (quantity and expertise) and room for maneuvering (time, independence, and control). This psychological demand may be experienced as coercion or positive involvement.

Karasek's² model of psychological demand describes four professional situations:



It is important to determine one's position in the model and whether this position is or is not a source of stress.

The factors that generate stress on this endpoint and the symptoms

- 1) The loss of vision or meaning makes the short term or the task become the objective and the end in itself. The strategy is then executed blindly and without understanding. The environment is no longer taken into account, and the individual or the organization puts on blinders and loses all lucidity. The scope of experience becomes more limited.

² Elisabeth Grebot, *Stress et Burnout au travail*, Ed. Eyrolles. p. 36

→ Some symptoms: the inability to step back and take a calm, objective view of the situation; confusion, short-sightedness, the inability to listen, obsession with the wrong objective, the inability to distinguish what is important from what is urgent.

2) A limited perception of one's talents and skills reduces the perception of one's room to maneuver in a given situation.

→ Some symptoms: expressions of frustration vis-à-vis others as well as oneself; the feeling that one is no longer master of one's fate or one's work; a request becomes a requirement or conversely, excessive zeal develops which allows one the illusion of being in control; the word "impossible" appears and so does apathy, along with the feeling of not producing or being underworked; loss of interest in those around one, in any social life; little attraction to novelty, one finds reassurance in what is familiar and loses one's creativity.

The benefits expected from focusing on this endpoint

The objective is to achieve a harmonious integration between the perceived workload and room for maneuvering that will enable the individual or organization to feel in command, in control, whatever their position in the Karasek model.

The focus of work will be done at two levels:

1. Improving one's understanding of the objectives and workload:

- a. a better understanding of the issues will help to release the creativity, courage, strength and daring to better seize the opportunities in the environment. Less information will then be needed to make decisions;
- b. a better understanding of the meaning will also enable the individual or organization to anticipate, and thus to act more quickly and with fluidity.

2. Identifying factors that can increase the perceived room for maneuvering:

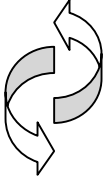
- a. being aware of one's talents and intellectual, emotional, and physical skills helps one to draw on those skills and increases one's sense of control;
- b. relying on one's own self-confidence in order to trust the efforts of fellow employees;
- c. developing situational intelligence: using one's intellectual and emotional know-how as an anchor for one's **relational intelligence**. This is done to get out of the one-dimensional and move towards a multi-disciplinary attitude and refine one's judgments.

The results and the levers of the transformation

Attention to this endpoint can "turn the situation around" to the individual and to the organization's advantage by transforming the pressure from a psychic DEMAND into healthy DISTANCING.

That is to say:

- By rediscovering one’s emotional and relational capabilities, new room to maneuver is created intelligently;
- Each person’s internalization of meaning, vision, and objectives enables him or her to position him or herself as a bold and confident player.

Find room to maneuver		To put one’s I.Q. at the service of one’s E.Q. ³ to be in touch with oneself and others, and with one’s talents and skills
Assign meaning and have a vision		To step back and put events back in their context in order to transform “crises” into learning opportunities

In conclusion, by working on stepping back and better self-knowledge, this endpoint allows people to build confidence in each person’s ability to meet the organization’s challenges.

³ Emotional Quotient

ROLE

Definition

This is the perception of the position held and of its interactions within the organization. This perception is measured on three dimensions:

- a) Evaluation of the position
 - Job Description,
 - Perception of the position's importance and contribution within the organization,
- b) Modes of decision-making associated with the position
 - Degree of independence, levels of delegation, accountability, and control,
 - Participation in decisions
- c) Interactions within the organization
 - Who does what, in what type of environment - hierarchical or matrix organization?
 - Procedures and management of all internal flows, inputs and outputs (customer-supplier communication),
 - Social interaction between colleagues.

The factors that generate stress on this endpoint and the symptoms

- 1) The partial or total lack of benchmarks in the job definition and responsibilities is a source of possible role conflict among the various coworkers. Conversely, excessive detail can give the impression of a loss of free will, which can lead to a feeling of loss of confidence.
 - Some symptoms: Forgetfulness, decisions not made, errors in judgment or performance; self-denigration and loss of self-confidence: "I'm not/no longer good enough." The position becomes a kind of protection and it is presented as a shield: "that's not my job"; excessive identification with the position by overinvesting in accountability; the role replaces one's identity, the individual exists only through the organization and not as a person.
- 2) The partial or total lack of participation in making decisions that are then perceived to be imposed.
 - some symptoms: Disempowerment, lack of motivation, avoidance behavior, and isolation. Loss of responsiveness, a feeling of drowsiness or rigidity.
- 3) Deteriorated types of interaction within parts of the organization:
 - Some symptoms: creation of silos, internal competition, neglecting customer needs through too many procedures, turf wars, errors due to inadequate consideration of one another's space; overlapping roles: boundaries are blurred: people no longer know who does what. Feedback is experienced as criticism.

The benefits expected from focusing on this endpoint:

The aim is for employees to have a clear understanding of their jobs and of their interaction with the rest of the organization in order to develop a more committed and motivated method of involvement with the system. The organizational framework of the organization becomes a means of supporting their development.

1. Changing the perception of the employee’s responsibility by making him aware of his place in the system and of the connections between his role and those of others. This is particularly important and effective in situations with organizational complexity (indirect management and transversal project management). He feels committed to the company and accepted in his role, and perceives himself as legitimate.

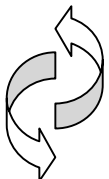
2. Increasing the empowerment of employees can reduce stress by allowing employees to make decisions within a defined and protective framework. Within this framework, mistakes are accepted and risk-taking is allowed. The employee participates in decisions, decides, and helps to define his duties. This helps to build confidence.

The results and the levers of the transformation

Attention to this endpoint can "turn the situation around" to the individual and of the organization’s advantage by moving from responsibility associated with a ROLE to "RESPONSIBILIZATION" embodied in the person. Rather than simply holding a job, the employee brings his whole person, the qualities associated with **who he is** in addition to his qualities of **what he does**:

- He takes his place without feeling trapped.
- He is aware of the different dimensions of his role
- He is connected to the rest of the organization

This involves becoming familiar with the dimension of **interdependence**.

Embody one’s place		Experience all the dimensions of one’s role in a responsible manner. Recognize the added value of this place within the system.
Being connected		Create connections and nourish them by healthy aggressiveness. Face up to one’s own responsibilities and manage one’s relationships as a result.

In conclusion, roles defined by their unique contributions within an organization will no longer be perceived as limiting boundaries to be defended (a source of stress), but as the backbone for the development of quality human relationships.

VALUES

Definition

This endpoint represents the moral and social references of a group at a given time. It contributes to the internal and identifying core of a person or organization. This endpoint is measured on three dimensions:

- a) The culture⁴ in its various components: corporate culture, professional culture, and job culture.
- b) The importance assigned to a certain number of values:
 - Work-life balance,
 - Equity, i.e. the sense of what is "naturally" owed
 - Valence⁵: the importance assigned to one value relative to others.
- c) Codes of Conduct:
 - Professional Ethics (rules of proper conduct constituting the morality of a profession),
 - Personal Ethics (rules of personal conduct based on one's principles and one's morals).

The factors that generate stress on this endpoint and the symptoms

- 1) A culture marked by intolerance, where values and beliefs are transformed into certainties and exclude others (ostracism), where it is difficult to integrate differences, such as newcomers to the organization or generational differences (sectarianism)
 - Some symptoms: the existence of strong dualities in the company, for example after a merger, when groups are mutually exclusive; identification to the extreme: "my business, my project, my work...." Conversely, it can also be dissociation, loss of pride in belonging.
- 2) Ambiguity about values and lack of boundaries between personal and professional spheres. Values are manipulated and used to force support (hidden insistence on loyalty), replacing the requirement of competence; judging exclusively according to one of the company's values.
 - Some symptoms: ambition turns into an addiction to one's professional commitment ("I must, I have to"); lack of perspective on events and their impact; too many regulations or no code of conduct.
- 3) Inconsistency between values and conduct: performing tasks on behalf of corporate values or culture that do not correspond to one's values or personal ethics (value conflict). Difference between stated values and *de facto* values, between what is displayed and what is experienced.
 - Some symptoms: withdrawal or even vetoing when personal values are ignored;

⁴ <http://www.creg.ac-versailles.fr/spip.php?article176> : *La culture d'entreprise*.

⁵ Kurt Lewin, 1926. The field theory. Each element perceived in the environment by the subject is considered to be significant or not, and invested with a positive charge or not, which he calls a valence. The valence depends on the element's ability to satisfy the need. Source: Gestalt Review 6, p. 57.

inconsistency in the decision-making process, conducted either in accordance with company values or consistent with one's own values.

The benefits expected from focusing on this endpoint:

Working with an identity that is anchored and consistent can bring people together and resist breakdowns (crises) and stress. The bulk of the work will be performed on two levels:

1. Building a sense of belonging within the professional circle without encroaching on personal life⁶:

- a. Facilitating the integration of others, all others (age, types of contracts, professions, different cultures),
- b. Gathering together and developing group cohesion with a view towards a collective implementation that respects personal life.

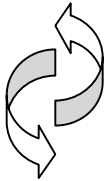
2. Explicitly stating the sense of values and being exemplary and fair in implementing them:

The values must be consistent on the one hand with the culture,⁷ i.e. with the history of the organization and its ways of thinking, and, on the other hand, with ethics and the law. The challenge is to manage to align the values with daily management actions.

The results and the levers of transformation

Attention to this endpoint can create unity or separation, or even rejection within the organization; it can "turn the situation around" to the individual or organization's advantage when one moves from VALUES to the VOLITION to open.

It is about creating a **dynamic of inclusion and openness**.

Summon up values		What are my dreams? What are my loyalties? What are their limits?
Develop acceptance		Accept growth (one's own and that of others) Accept limitations (one's own and those of others)

In conclusion, this is not about accepting or resigning oneself in a Manichean spirit (binary and a source of stress) but about questioning one's ability to accept, i.e. remaining open to others while remaining focused on oneself at the same time.

⁶ http://www.uquebec.ca/edusante/sociale/imp_sentiment_appartenance.htm See definitions and characteristics, in particular those of Pierre Dubois: 1/ Respect and consideration. 2/ Quality and customer service. 3/ Clearly defined duties. 4/ Stimulating duties. 5/ Information, 6/ Administrative efficiency.

⁷ Elliot Jacques, in *Pouvoirs et valeurs dans l'entreprise*, Michel Juffe, EKSA editions, 1996.
www.cnam.fr/lipsor/dso/articles/fiche/pouvoirsvaleursesets.doc

MEANS

Definition

Means include the material and physical resources and energy needed for action and which will enable the person to respond to the perceived Demand:

- a) The workstation: ergonomics, comfort,
- b) Working conditions: travel time, schedule (flexible, part-time, full-time), contracts (open-ended, limited-term etc.),
- c) Physical energy and ability to renew it (breaks, vacations),
- d) Tools: logistical resources, information technology, and assistance. Anything that will allow the effective use of time so as to ensure that value is added,
- e) The staff.

The factors that generate stress on this endpoint and the symptoms

- 1) A lack of clarity about the means available to meet demand and a failure to take into consideration or to listen to one's physical fitness.
→ Some symptoms: Difficulty seeing the limits of one's resources, only the objective counts, energy is seen as inexhaustible, the employee is bulimic with respect to action, in "always more" mode. Conversely, due to a lack of energy, apathy, exhaustion and drowsiness occur, motivation decreases and gives way to discouragement.
- 2) Means are either not provided or are inadequate
→ Some symptoms: resistance to carrying out duties; expressions of fear and fear of not succeeding; tools are not used, dysfunctional, or sabotaged.
- 3) The introduction of new resources without taking users into account or having them participate in needs analysis can be seen as a lack of respect and a lack of confidence
→ Some symptoms: confusion between Recognition and Means that could lead to a risk of manipulation when the tool or the project are sold as recognition; the employee then no longer feels he is taken into consideration or supported, and he feels he is being sacrificed for the sake of a larger objective.

The benefits expected from focusing on this endpoint:

The aim is to build up employees' support, both in terms of quality and energy, for the entity or projects requiring new resources. The bulk of the work will be performed on three levels:

- 1) **Developing a sense of security** associated with the availability of appropriate means in order to enable employees to calmly understand environmental changes and novelty, which will enable them to be more daring,

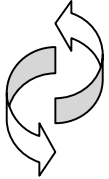
- 2) **Facilitating the rapid adoption of transformation projects** so as to enable each employee to find a meaning for the tool. More effective deployment of new technologies or projects is ensured when tools are seen as means to an end and not as challenges to be mastered,
- 3) **Creating dynamic work environments** that allow everyone to renew his energy faster.

The results and the levers of the transformation

Attention to this endpoint can help to "turn the situation around" to the individual or organization's advantage when everyone moves from the MEANS available to the MOTORS available.

From then on, providing oneself with necessary means is to allow the renewal of energy in an "ecological" manner.

This is a new driver for management: **energy management**.

SUPPORT		Everything is done to support the task and facilitate the effort.
ECOLOGY		Where is pleasure to be found? Manage the flows of energy (emotional / mental / physical)

In conclusion, it is just as beneficial to support the energy required to accomplish the task, as it is to provide support to the task itself.

RECOGNITION

Definition

This is the explicit recognition that we seek: to be seen, known, and to exist by the Other, in the broadest sense. There are two aspects to recognition:

- a) The affective dimension: The atmosphere, the climate of relationships between individuals (affect), the room for communication,
- b) Performance appraisal: the metrics, objectives, rewards, and how they are communicated.

The factors in this endpoint that generate stress and the symptoms

- 1) A type of managerial presence that is highly polarized: either barely present, lacking openness and dialogue, or overly present through misunderstood micro-management that prevents the development of confidence,

→ Some symptoms: A dependence on recognition leading to “acting out”: high turnover, sick leave, clocking time, rumors, mistrust, angry outbursts, self-criticism and isolation; work organized and directed to only gain recognition, to the possible detriment of the company’s business; a feeling of no longer meeting professional expectations, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, pessimistic attitude, and reduced productivity.

- 2) A lack of alignment between the position and the indicators of recognition

→ Some symptoms: Overconfidence resulting in a) a feeling of omnipotence: the failure to take into account or the underestimation of risk, professional and relationship errors, willingness to follow through to the end (I don’t know why I’m doing this, but I’m measured on it); b) isolation: internal tension, hidden conflicts, deadlocks, lack of connection and lack of communication.

- 3) A poorly set up framework for recognition

→ Some symptoms: sanctions resorted to either too abruptly or without explanation, the absence of sanctions or recognition that leads to feelings of indifference.

The expected benefits of focusing on this endpoint:

Recognition is at the heart of motivation: it creates a “virtuous circle” of reward / positive energy that benefits the entire environment.

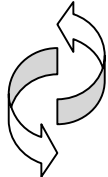
1. **Providing the assurance** to act with determination by recognizing work that has been accomplished,
2. **Increasing one’s availability to others and to events** by managing emotion, taking into account those rhythms and rituals that make it easier to step back.

- Implement management style that is more focused on listening**, so as to allow the expression and confrontation of different points of view.

The results and the drivers of the transformation

Attention to this endpoint "turns the situation around" to the individual or organization's advantage by moving beyond RECOGNITION to one's REASON FOR BEING. This means to enable employees to not depend only on external recognition, so that they learn to give themselves their own recognition by knowing how to evaluate their work and learn from it.

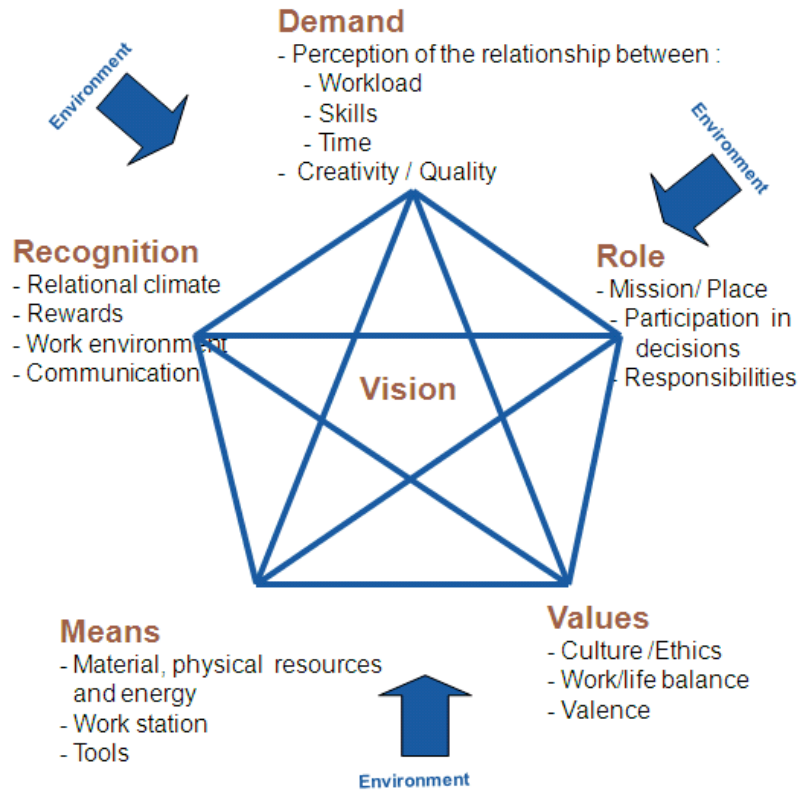
The management tool is to work on **closure**.

Externally		How does the outside world feed my self-confidence? What is my ability to "receive"?
Internally		Self awareness, - What are my struggles? - What are the risks and how are they important? - What are my priorities?

In conclusion, to grow from one's experiences is to be able to take the time to close and take in, to enrich oneself internally; to know how to put one's experiences in perspective by knowing how to establish priorities and develop an awareness of others.

APPENDIX

The pentagram *



(*) According to S Ginger's Pentagram, 1981,1987