# Chapter 10
# Stress and Its Relationship to Leadership and a Healthy Workplace Culture

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## ABSTRACT

*Every organization needs to be driven by effective leaders. In higher education, many leadership courses are designed to transfer knowledge and critical thinking. Other professional development workshops, seminars, and conferences in leadership also offer leadership training and development to assist individuals to understand human capital, and create an organization free from toxicity. A toxic working environment can lead to low morale, disruption in productivity and motivation, high rate of absenteeism, individuals using sick days when they are not sick, cause emotional and physical health issues, and even submitting derailed projects beyond deadlines. When there is an upsurge of stress in the workplace within employees and administrators, the organization will struggle. Negative information dynamics affect health and contribute to stress. Stress management capacity is the ability to manage stress and is vital in the prevention of a negative impact of stress. Stress management can be improved for leaders and organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Stress impacts all levels of employees within an organization. Organizational stress is situational, based upon diverse perspectives of the employees and individuals who hold titled positions. Leaders in modern global organizations sustain increased levels of stress (Campbell, Baltes, Martin, & Meddings, 2007). Campbell, Baltes, Martin, and Meddings (2007) reported 88% of leaders indicated work is the main

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cause of stress. High amount of stress can impact the ability to make good decisions and formulate sound judgments. When the stress response is triggered, cortisol is released into the blood, this elevated cortisol level is associated with impairments in a host of cognitive processes including decision making, memory, and attention (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004). Decision making involves emotional intelligence (EI) since leading others involves human interaction (Doty & Fenlason, 2013); this interaction may lead to stressful conditions and affect productivity and morale levels.

Leadership is a broad term that more recently encompasses both intelligence quotient (IQ) and EI (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013). Emotional intelligence is the ability to read the emotions of others, adjust to situations, understand different perspectives, and build relationships with people (Doty & Fenlason, 2013). It is the responsibility of the organizational leadership to help others adjust to stressful situations by encouraging others to think creatively and preparing for the future by guiding towards personal and organizational change (Goffee & Jones, 2006; Goleman, 2004). The leaders who use a combination of analysis and intuition are better decision makers, therefore helping others to cope with organizational stress (Huang, 2012). Awareness of IQ and EI are important for leaders (Thompson, 2007, 2010; Yadav, 2014). Yadav (2014) claimed by EI, people within organizations can learn how to manage emotions to improve productivity. Counseling sessions and psychological development programs can help employees to better understand work-related behaviors (Yadav, 2014). In addition, courses that teach leadership and decision making through simulations can provide another avenue to help employees manage relevant working conditions within the organization, such as teamwork, productivity, and understanding the behavior of others (Thompson, 2010).

The plasticity of human brain and cognition continues through life; the human brain influences the way people process information (Zhou & Fischer, 2013). According to Thompson (2007), if a leader experiences stress, neurotransmitters and hormones are released and the leader may experience a short period of increased focus and reaction time. But if the stress exists for a long enough period of time, there will be negative consequences. Characteristics of these negative behaviors include (a) lack of listening, (b) over analysis, (c) failure to make decisions, and (d) erratic, fearful or angry emotional decisions. Thompson contended that the release of neurotransmitters and hormones affect the prefrontal cortex (PFC) and the amygdala. Successful leadership necessitates both the PFC and the amygdala. The PFC is associated with cognitive functions that control logic, analysis, and decision making. The amygdala is considered the emotional response to stimuli. High amounts of stress impair the function of the PFC, which results in decreased cognitive ability while the amygdala increases, resulting in a heightened emotional state. Leaders can experience temporary paralysis in their decision making and the inability to function as a leader (Thompson, 2007). Thompson measured a group of leaders under normal conditions and then under simulated stressful situations, and found a decrease in EI.

The two types of decision-making processes (i.e., emotional, cognitive) are impacted by different factors. Emotion-based decisions are affected by egocentric factors, but cognitive-based decisions are impacted by allocentric factors (Haas, Anderson, & Filkowski, 2015). The success of social relationships and survival is based on the ability to see the cause of another person's emotional reaction (Haas et al., 2015). Haas et al. (2015) conducted a study to investigate the behavioral and brain functions involved in emotion attribution decisions. Sixteen adults were given an Interpersonal Reactivity Index to note differences in making emotional and cognitive decisions. Then participants had a magnetic resonance imaging while making the emotion attribution decisions. The neuroimages indicated a dual process model during decision making. Higher scores of stress were associated with faster emotional decisions

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