

# Stress & Workplace Stress Management

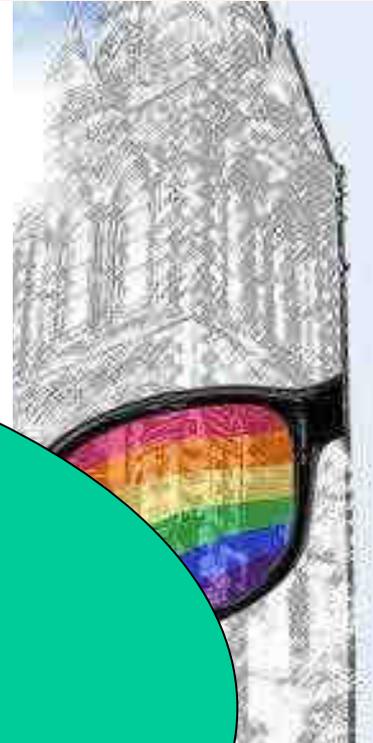
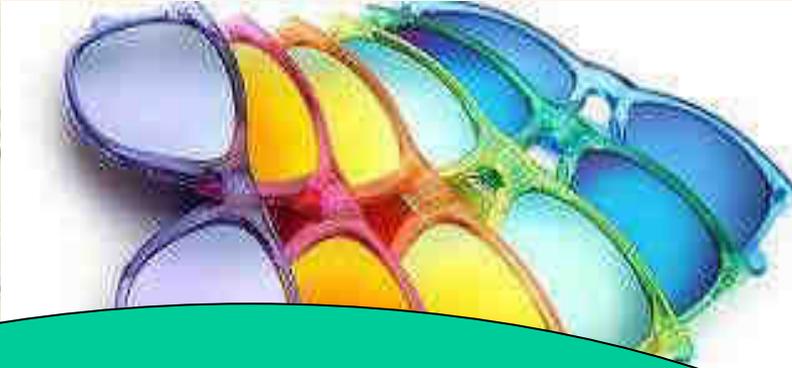
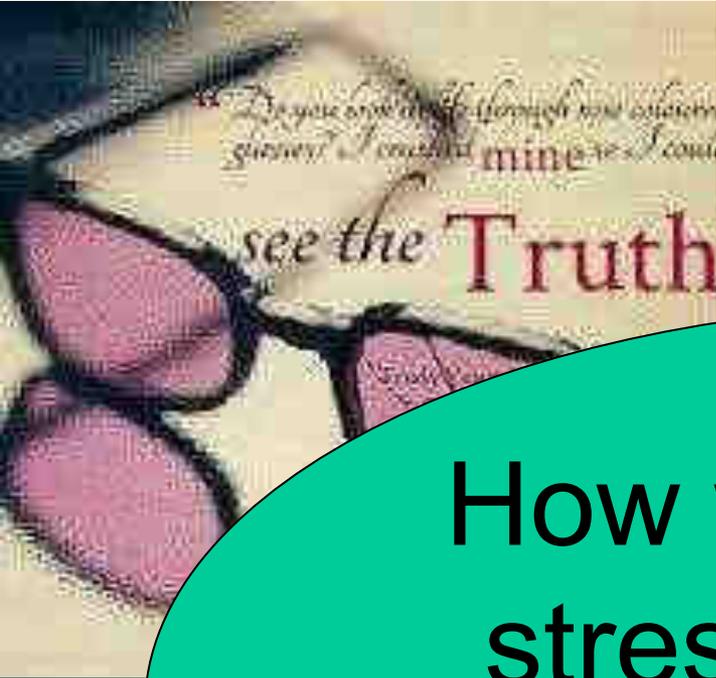
**AIRM April Seminar 2016**

Dr. Jan de Vries, Trinity College Dublin

Camden Court Hotel

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How we understand stress depends on the glasses through which we see it.



# What is stress .....

**Stress:** is a mental and physical condition which results from pressure or demands that are straining or exceeding an individual's capacity or perceived capacity to adapt.

# What is a stress reaction?

A **stress reaction** is essentially a physiological reaction that allows the body to respond and adapt to the stressors and pressure present

- Our environment always challenges us .....
- Our environment may not always meet our needs .....
- It is good that we have the ability to switch into a **'higher gear'**

How do we move into a higher gear  
.....?

Our nervous and endocrine system do  
that for us

..... **whether we like it or not!!**

..... **whether it is appropriate or not!!**

(Examples: near miss in traffic or at work,  
sudden changes, conflict, mean boss,  
general pressure to perform, etc. ....)

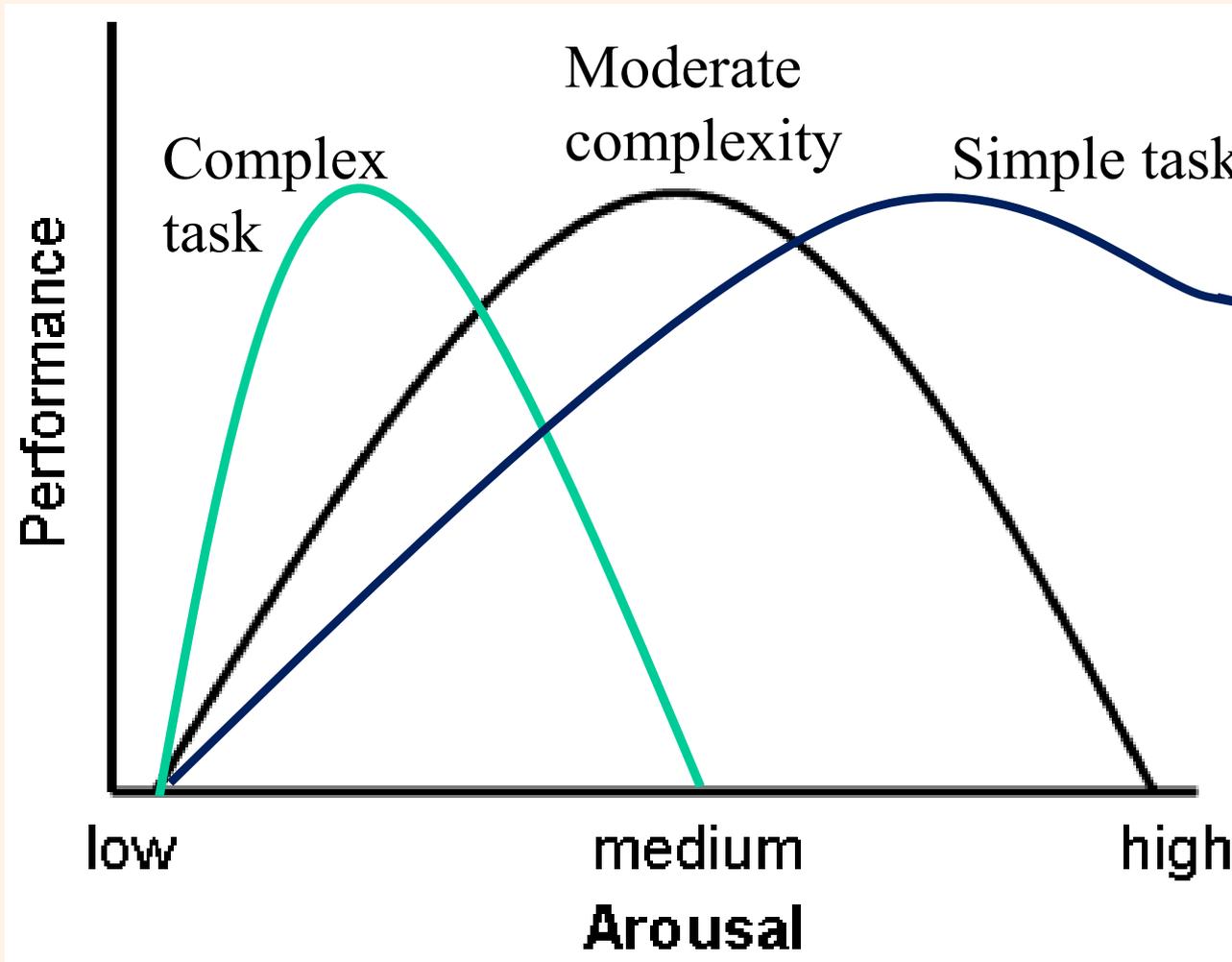
# Model 1: General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) (Selye, 1956)

- This model captures a continuum of bodily reactions to prolonged stress. Occurs in three stages:
  - **Alarm Reaction:** Body resources are mobilized to cope with added stress (fight-flight)
  - **Stage of Resistance:** Body adjusts to stress but at a high physical cost; resistance to other stressors is lowered now (long term response)
  - **Stage of Exhaustion:** Body's resources are drained and stress hormones are depleted. Results might be:
    - loss of health
    - physical and mental collapse; Burnout (Maslach, 2004)
    - work performance reduced; accident risk increased



# The impact of stress on work performance

Yerkes-Dodson (1908)  
Inverted U-Hypothesis



# Concerns from an occupational stress perspective

- Risk of long term stress on health
- Impact of stress on work performance

# Apply model 1: relate stress and risks in this hospital?

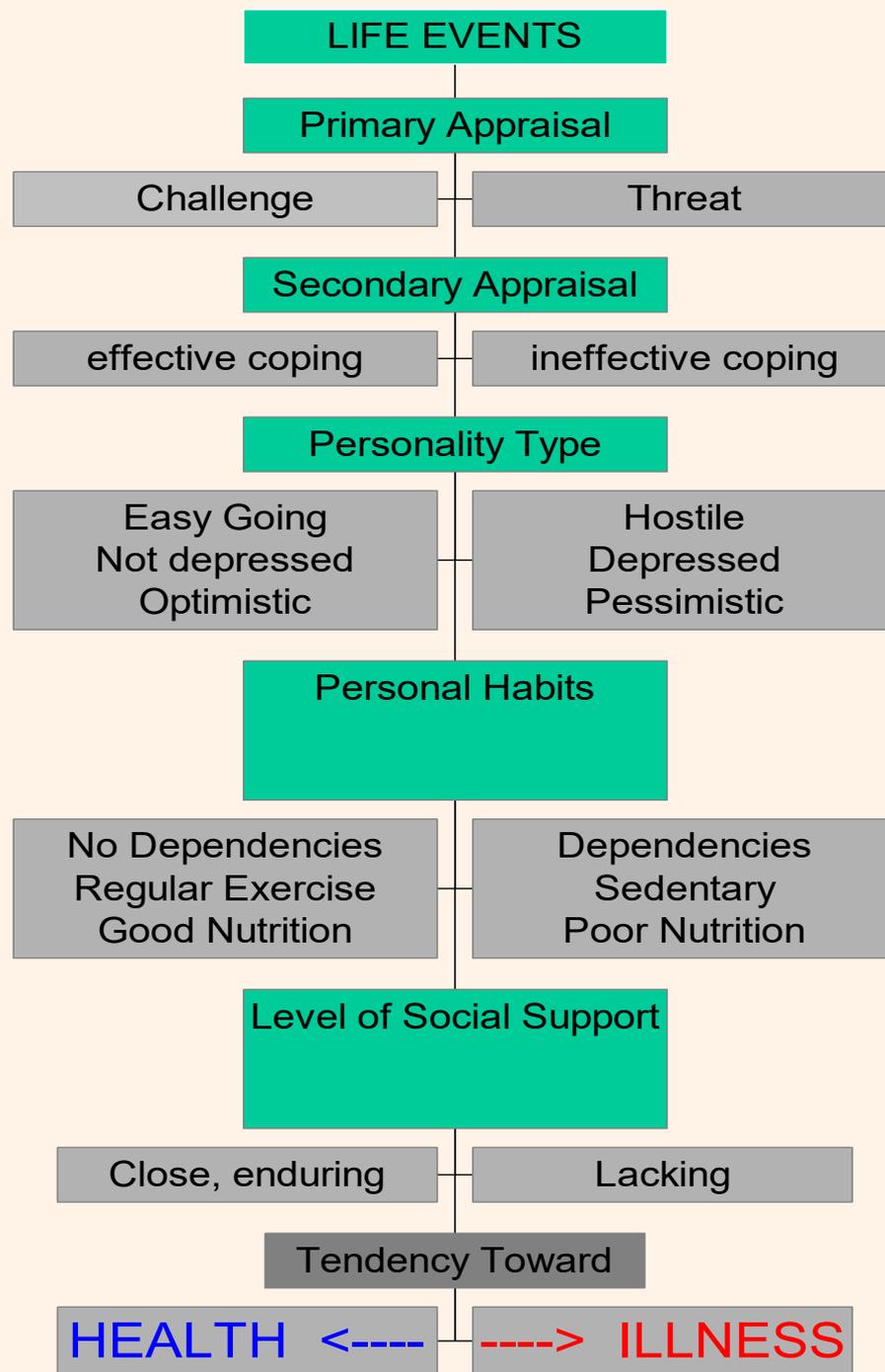
Since the new management took over a year ago, things are not the same. Cost cutting has led to lay offs, longer shifts, and a new system of shifts has been introduced. Average sick days per month have doubled. The hospital used to be outside of the town. Now it is absorbed by suburbia in an area with a rapidly growing population. The hospital is building a new wing to accommodate to the changing situation. Furthermore, since the new shopping centre next door opened, there are constant traffic jams.

so far we've emphasised the  
physical side ... but there is  
more to it

- How we think about or **appraise** events
- How well we've learned to **cope** with stress provoking situations
- Our **personality** and **resilience**
- Our **personal habits**
- Our **social support**

# Model 2: Stress Management

(Lazarus and  
Folkman 1984;  
Myers, 2004)



# Apply model 2: which person's health is most at risk?

## **Anne (38) mother of 5 children**

Anne is optimistic and feels that she can cope with most of the problems of running a household. Nonetheless, she has been putting on weight lately and does not have time to exercise. She misses her sister who helped out, but moved abroad. Her husband is busy and away a lot.

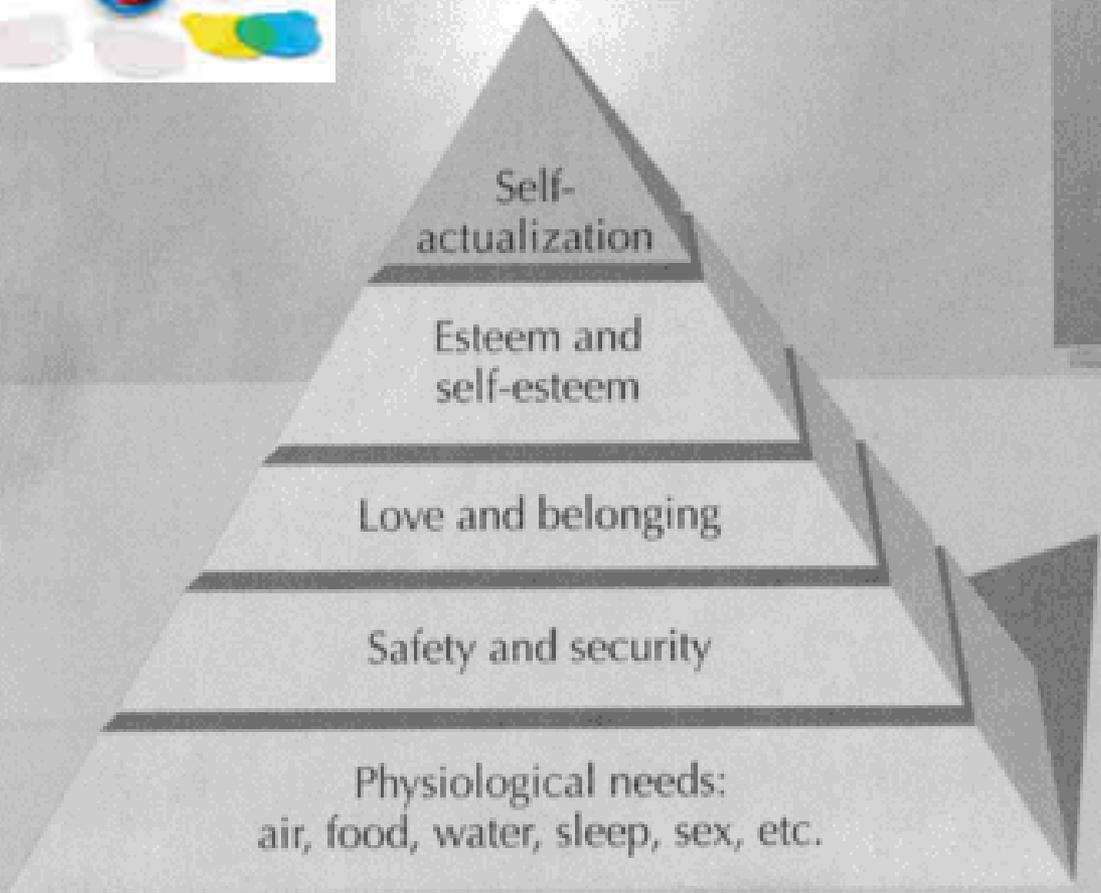
## **John (46) risk / safety manager**

John tends to worry that he will misjudge an inspection and overall feels he can barely cope with the pressure. He worries a lot and drinks more than is good for him. He has a few good friends and plays soccer with them twice a week. His colleagues describe him as easy going

We could also emphasise that stress is the result of how hard it is for us to fulfil our needs

- Basic needs (air, water, food, sleep, sex)
- Safety and security
- Love and belonging
- Esteem and self-esteem
- Self-actualisation (making a difference, using your talents, growing as a person etc.)

# Model 3: A holistic way of looking at stress



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

## Growth Needs

- Self-actualization as expressed through meta-needs:  
wholeness, perfection, completion, justice, richness, simplicity, aliveness, beauty, goodness, uniqueness, playfulness, truth, autonomy, meaningfulness

## Basic Needs

- Esteem and self-esteem
- Love and belonging
- Safety and security
- Physiological needs

# Apply model 3: which factors could contribute to stress?

At a building site inspection you find very few hazards. However when you are talking with some workers, they point out several aspects of the work that makes them feel unsafe. They also complain that they keep coughing when they get home, even though they wear safety masks when performing tasks that generate dust. One of the supervisors complains that the workers are lazy and accident prone unless they are closely supervised. When you confront him with the complaints you heard, he says that there is no merit to them. In turn he complains that the company does not take him seriously. He has not had a raise in years and there is no chance of promotion.

# At its most basic, stress is the result of demands that are higher than the resources

## Resources

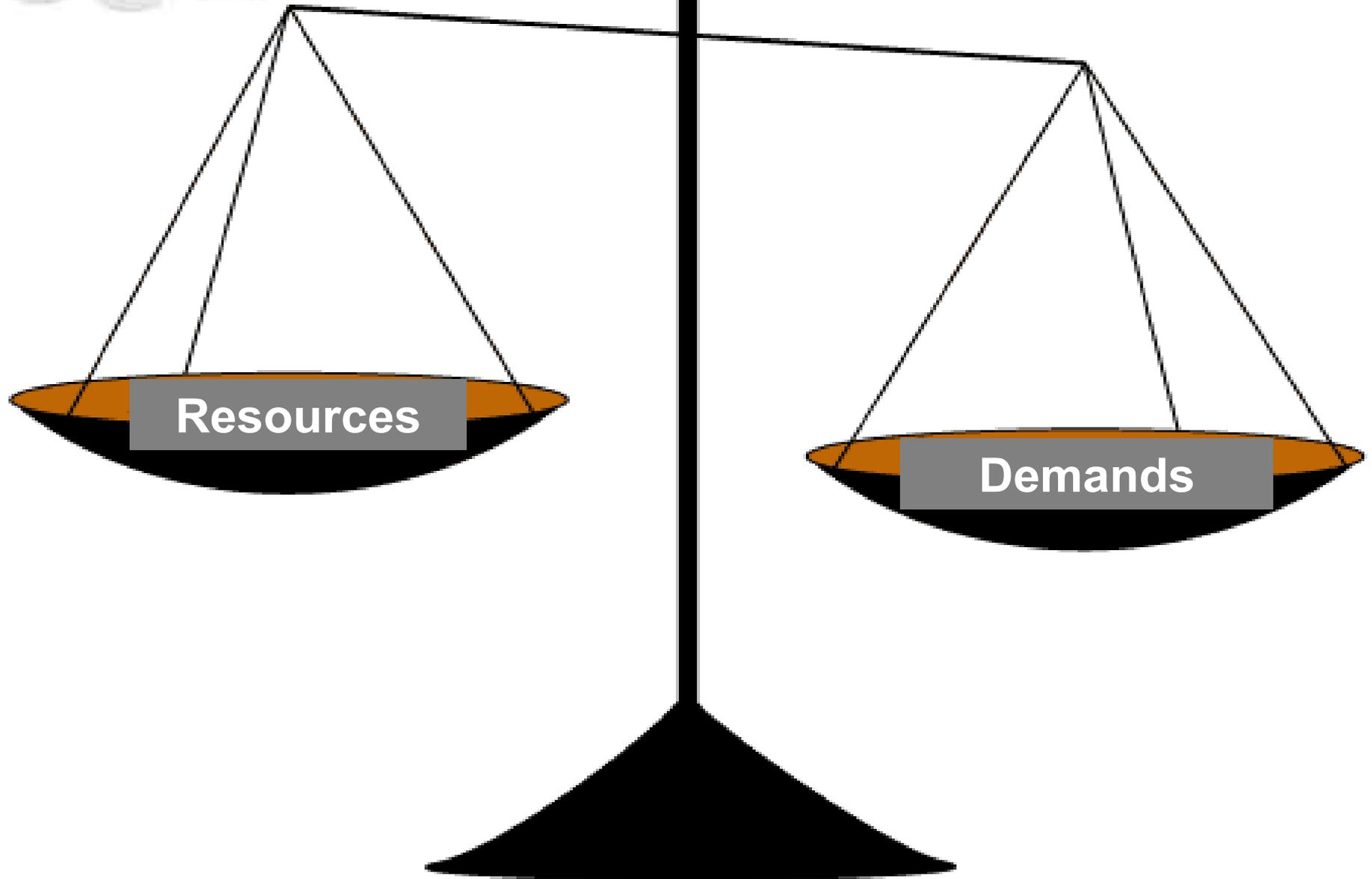
- health
- education/training
- finances
- enough staff
- company safety culture

## Demands

- work pressures
- deadlines
- home pressures
- crises, threats, conflict
- change
- threats

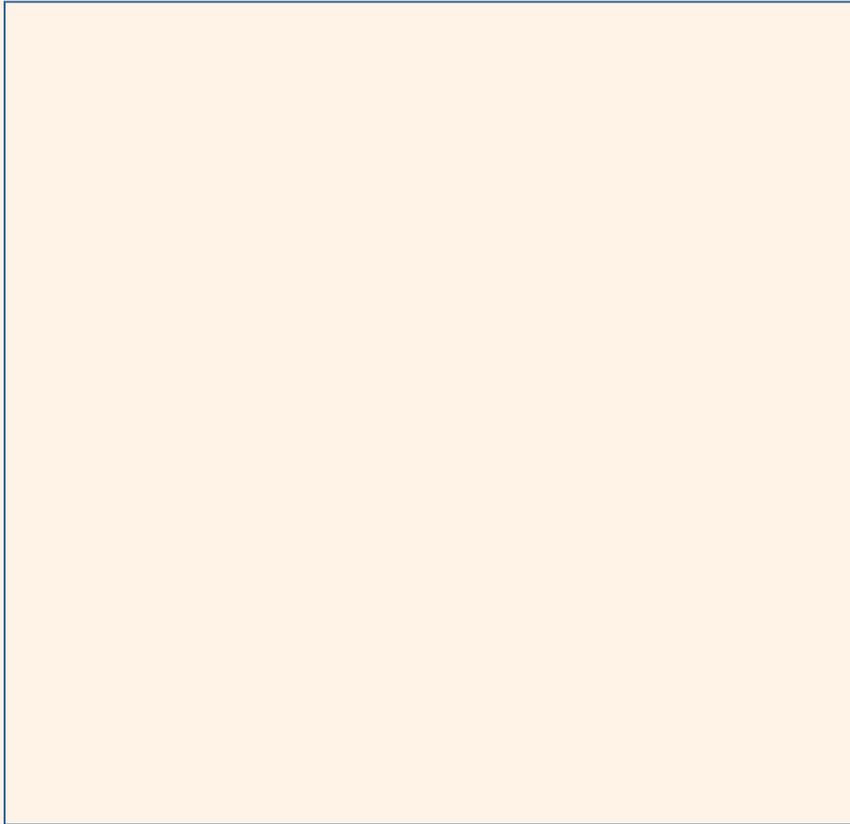


# Model 4: Stress and Balance (Cannon, 1924)

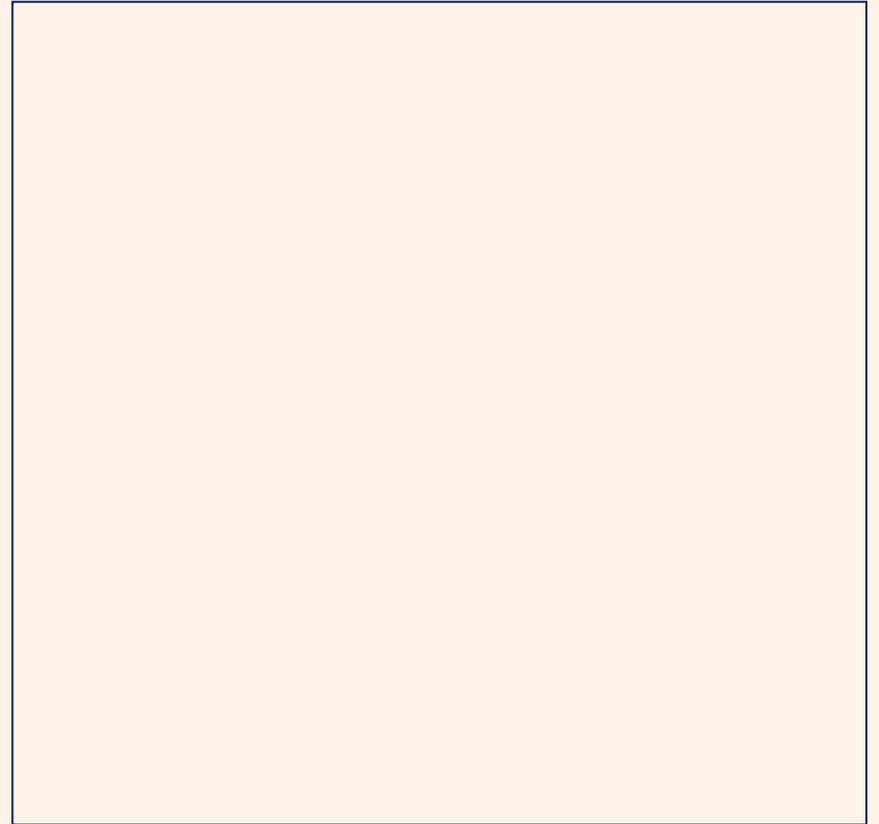


# Apply model 4 to your own work: are resources/demands in balance?

**Your resources**



**Your demands**



# Implications for stress management in the workplace

- Model 1: realise that prolonged stress will translate into increased absence from work and possible burnout: avoid the domino effect
- Model 2: people have an individual responsibility to managing their stress but the company can facilitate this or make it hard
- Model 3: consider worker's basic needs, but also belonging, respect, and long term satisfaction
- Model 4: consider how to balance or rebalance resources and demands

# Implications for risk management

- establish contributing factors to stress levels at an individual and organizational level
- establish possible impacts of stress on health, performance and risk of accidents
- ask questions and read between the lines
- use these four models to look at stress impact from a variety of perspectives
- realise that intense long term stress can have very costly implications for an organisation

# **Apply all four models to the following scenario? Outline stress and cost.**

Jack (32) and Jill (29) are working together. Jill is always punctual and ensures that the work gets completed. Jack is often sick and seems hardly able to complete any work without Jill's support. Recently Jack received a raise in salary but Jill did not. She has not complained about this. However, both Jack and Jill complain about other things. In the mean time the company is undergoing significant changes after it has been taken over by a multinational. They have appointed a new manager who takes Jill to task over the limited output of their joint activities. At this point in time a major order was missed because of this. Jill and the manager have a conflict which leads to a shouting match and Jill refuses to taking orders from him. The company dismisses Jill who takes the company to court for unfair dismissal. She is not replaced. Jack is given another raise as an incentive, but no other co-worker.

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