Recognizing Factors that Trigger Pressure

**Experiencing pressure**
Pressure can be defined in different ways. It can be a compelling or constraining influence that affects your thought processes or willpower. Pressure can manifest itself as an urgent claim or demand that can arise in business situations. Targets and deadlines can create pressure. A person may feel pressurized to perform. Another definition of pressure is the state of physical, mental, social, or economic distress that can arise in stressful situations.

The feeling of being under pressure is often linked to an individual's desire to be or to do something more. A new employee may feel the pressure of wanting to make it onto the management program or a person may want to exercise more as part of a healthy lifestyle. The need that drives both these examples can create pressure.

One factor that can cause pressure is the fear of embarrassment associated with failure. The pressure that you may experience from a fear of failure has two sources: internal and external. The internal source is the anxiety that you generate inside yourself, and the external source is the unfamiliar task or environment that you face.

**When pressure becomes stress**
Often, people say that they perform well under pressure. Or that they can't reach optimum performance without some element of pressure. It's true that pressure can be both energizing and invigorating. However, pressure can have a seriously negative impact when it isn't properly managed.

Poorly managed pressure in the workplace leads to excessive stress. This can be triggered by high profile events and situations. But it can also arise from the relentless daily grind of dealing with minor issues. When someone experiences too much pressure, too often and without a chance to recover, this can lead to negative stress. Just as pressure is felt differently by individuals, so is work-related stress. How a person experiences stress depends on the person's personality and how that person manages pressure.

Stress can lead to negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression. These emotions result in several stress-related outcomes that can disrupt a person's ability to perform at work:

- the person loses focus – Stress can lead to a person losing focus because the pressure the person was experiencing has ceased to be energizing or invigorating. The positive energies have been replaced by negative thoughts that preoccupy or distract the person from the task at hand.
- the person is unable to make decisions – Stress affects a person's ability to make the right decisions. To make a decision, a person uses cognitive and emotional intelligences. Stress greatly reduces a person's ability to use these capacities, with the result that the wrong decision is often made.
the person is unable to perform under pressure – When people experience stress, it's likely that any additional pressure they may feel will become negative and turn to stress also. This can lead to a paralyzing circle for those who are stressed. They inadvertently use their energies to undermine their own abilities because they feel overwhelmed. Instead of looking for positives, they can only see the negative side of their situation.

A pressurized work situation can quickly become stressful because of uncertainty. When you have control over an event and there's a high level of predictability regarding its outcome, you are more relaxed about it. This is because a controlled and predictable event or task can be prepared for. However, when an unpredictable event occurs, you may begin to feel pressure. Having to operate outside your comfort zone and deal with unfamiliar factors increases the chances of stress. This type of stress is anxiety-related. Doubts may begin to undermine your confidence. Questions such as "Will I get this done?" or "Will it be right?" raise levels of self-doubt and turn pressure into excessive stress.

**Situations that trigger pressure**
Everyone reacts differently to pressure. And everyone's pressure trigger is different. There are four work-related factors that can trigger pressure:

1. time pressure
2. work overload
3. relationship strain
4. the necessity of balancing competing interests

Feeling under *time pressure* is usually a result of tight deadlines imposed by demanding schedules, and feeling underprepared for tasks. The pressure to meet deadlines can be very intense. This is particularly true in situations where other people or functions are depending on the work being completed on time. If a person is given an important task, pressure may be triggered by the feeling of not being prepared because there isn't enough time.

*Work overload* is the second main trigger of job pressure. A person faced with a lot of work to do will naturally feel under some pressure. There are two different kinds of work overload:

- quantitative – A quantitative workload occurs when there's a large quantity of work to do.
- qualitative – A qualitative workload involves work that requires close attention to detail and is time consuming. It differs from a quantitative workload because the emphasis isn't on the scale of the work. The quality of the work is what's important.

The third triggering factor is *relationship pressure*. Working relationships are very important but can be complicated. Dealing with difficult colleagues can lead to pressure because a person's role in the workplace can be undermined and made harder if a colleague is hostile, uncommunicative, or uncooperative. The desire to please is another aspect of relationship pressure. A person may feel shy or insecure and want to be accepted in the workplace. In addition to the person's working duties, this desire to please brings added pressure.

The necessity of *balancing competing interests* is the fourth factor that can trigger pressure. This could involve a conflicting work role such as wanting to satisfy an employer and a customer.
Pressure can be energizing or invigorating, but without proper management it can cause excessive stress. Too much stress can lead to diminished focus, impaired judgment, and reduced ability to perform under pressure. Causes of pressure vary between individuals but there are four factors that are common causes of pressure in the workplace. These are time pressure, work overload, relationship strain, and having to balance competing interests.

### Complimentary Resources

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Organizational and Talent Development

- Leadership Development
- Team Development
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http://www.sanjac.edu/org-talent-development

✔ Register for Leadership Discussion Groups via SPARK Learning – Item # ODHR 5431

✔ Need information on how to navigate SPARK? Search SPRK 1000 in the catalog to access the on-line training course: Spark LMS: Getting Started and General Navigation

SPARK support available @ (281) 998-6399 (ext. 6399) or sparksupport@sjcd.edu

For additional Organizational and Talent Development support, email the OTD department at otd@sjcd.edu