

Evaluation of Workplace Stress Management Training: Don't Have a Cow: Understanding Stress



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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Purpose/Rationale for Evaluation

Periodically evaluating workplace stress management trainings is an integral part of ensuring that employees can participate in trainings and workshops that are delivering effective stress identification and management techniques in a manner that is both satisfactory to the needs of the organization as well as the employees. This evaluation is aimed to serve as feedback which will be used by the organization to gauge if employees are gaining stress management skills that are relevant to their positions and identifying areas of the training's content or delivery that may be improved. These factors will be considered as part of the decision-making process for making a value judgment on the investment of the organization according to the ability of the training module to demonstrate a positive impact on employee performance, morale, and their translation into client satisfaction.

Description of Instructional Product

The instructional product that has been evaluated, Don't Have a Cow: Understanding Stress, is designed to help employees develop tools and strategies for effectively identifying and responding to common workplace stressors. The product itself is broken down into three modules, each aimed at a specific component:

- Module 1: Defining the differences between stress and eustress, exploring the fight or flight response, and identifying individual levels of stress.
- Module 2: Positive techniques for coping with chronic and acute stressors, raising awareness of negative coping skills.
- Module 3: Overview of stress model, harmful effects of too much stress, taking ownership of stress.

Description of Organization

The evaluation was conducted in conjunction Family Services & Children's Aid which is a non-profit agency focusing on reducing substance abuse and supporting child welfare by implementing community-based awareness initiatives and providing counseling services. The organization is composed of approximately 100 employees with varying levels of education and is structured into four major departments: prevention education, substance abuse treatment, child welfare and adoption, administration/support.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Questions

The primary questions that were addressed in the evaluation are as follows:

1. Did the training increase employees' knowledge and understanding of stress and how it can negatively or positively affect workplace performance?
2. Have employee attitudes and perceptions regarding the importance of effective stress management changed in a way that reflects an alignment with the strategies and techniques discussed in the training modules?
3. Has participation in the training resulted in a positive change in how employees conduct their day-to-day functions in the workplace?
4. Have employees been able to engage with the training in a way that they consider it to be an effective use of their time?
5. Did the training have a positive impact on the key performance indicators used to evaluate employee performance? (staff morale, client interactions, productivity)

Participants

A total of 32 employees at almost all levels of the organization, ranging from interns to executive management, which helped ensure an unbiased representation of the organization as possible. Initially, many more employees had expressed interest in participating but scheduling conflicts among several departments and the instructor became a limiting factor as many of the organization's departments are preparing for an upcoming audit and accreditation process.

Context/Setting for Evaluation

An in-person workshop was scheduled for the employees whose work schedules and locations will allow them to participate. Taking these factors into consideration, the workshop was formatted to review the core concepts and activities of the stress management training within a window of approximately 60-90 minutes.

Data Sources

To address both qualitative and quantitative data concerns, participants completed a pre and post training survey (appendix A and B respectively) to measure their level of confidence in using the stress management techniques (qualitative) as well as their ability to identify common triggers of stress (quantitative).

Upon completion of the training, participants were asked to complete a personal interview (appendix C). The interview was composed of several open-ended interview questions designed to gather more detailed information on their overall feelings regarding the usefulness of the workshop and how it might be improved in future iterations.

Data Collection Procedures

Approximately 1 week before the start of the workshop, the pre-survey was sent to participants via email (appendix A) which was evaluated using a standard Likert scale (very confident, confident, unsure/neutral, unconfident, very unconfident). At the conclusion of the training, participants were sent the post-survey along with the personal interview questions which they were asked to send back within 1 week to begin data analysis procedures.

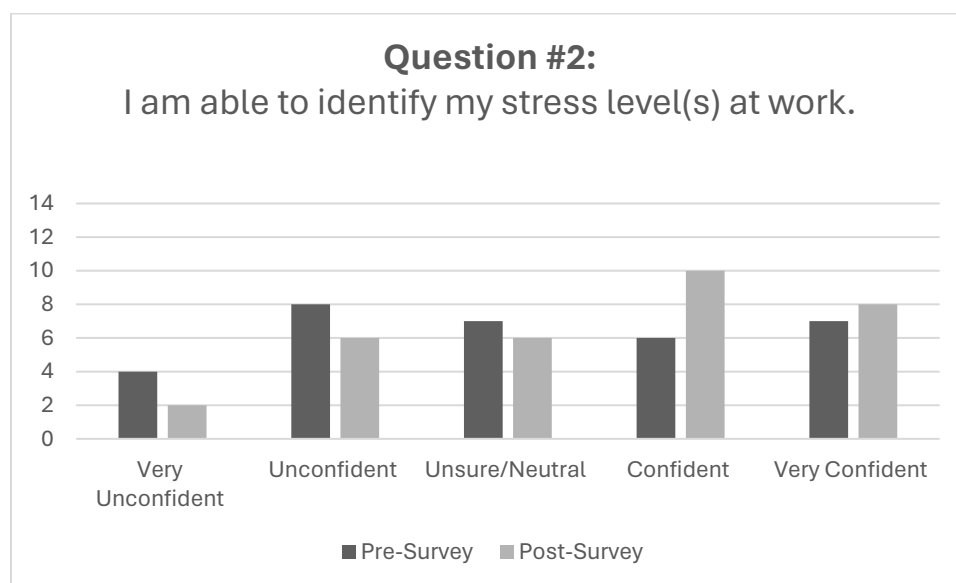
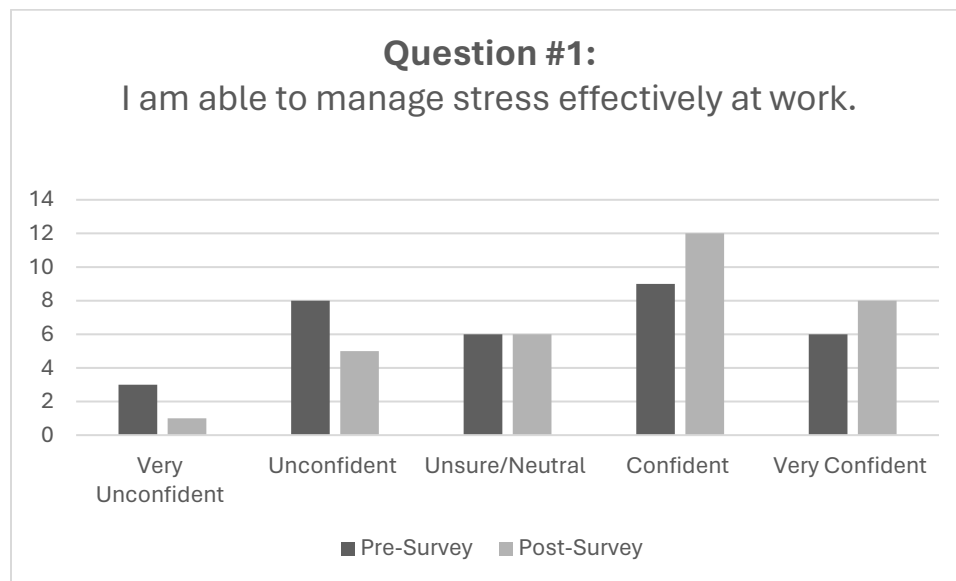
Data Collection Timeline

Activity	Completion Date
Send information email to participants	February 19, 2024
Schedule conference room	February 26, 2024
Send out pre survey	March 7, 2024
Conduct training	March 14, 2024
Send out post survey/interview	March 14, 2024
Review/Organize survey/interview results	March 21, 2024
Begin evaluation report	March 25, 2024

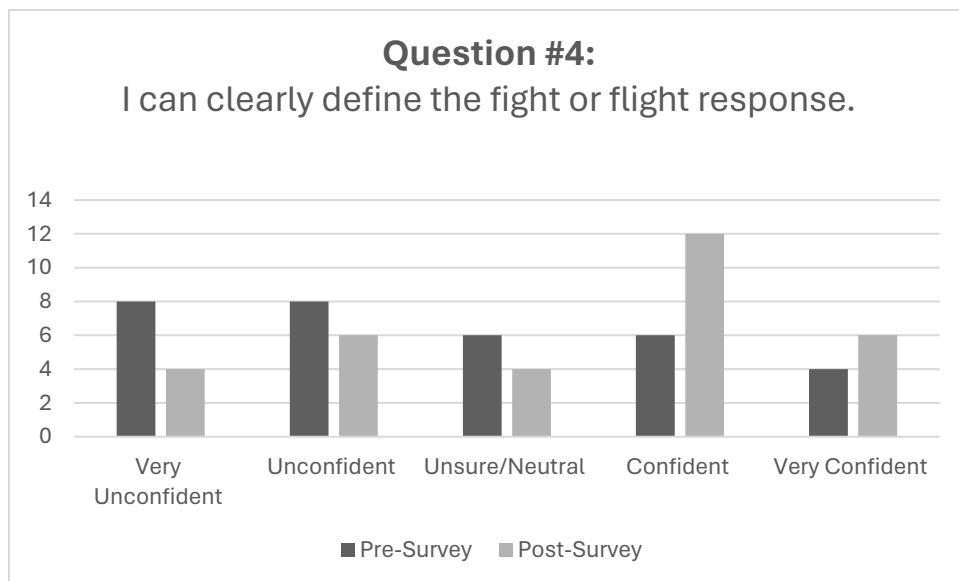
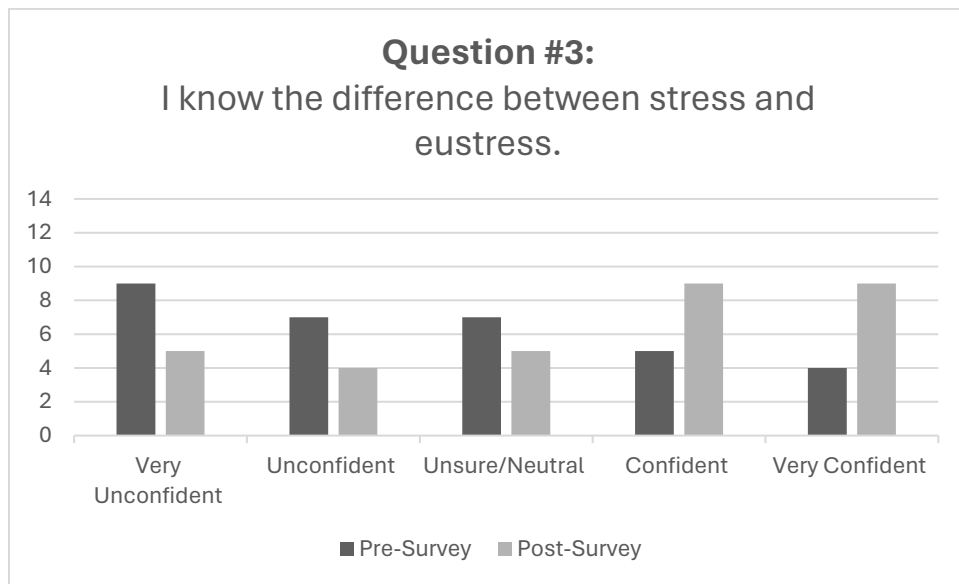
Data Analysis Procedures

The combination of survey comparison results in combination with the personal interview questions served as a foundation for identifying successful aspects of the material and potential areas of improvement which were able to be expanded upon in support of the findings and recommendations.

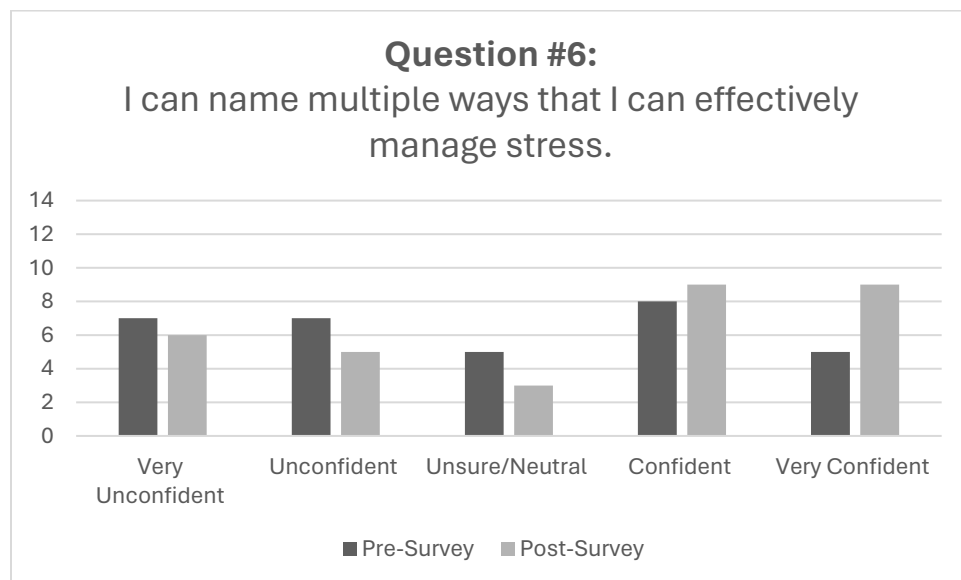
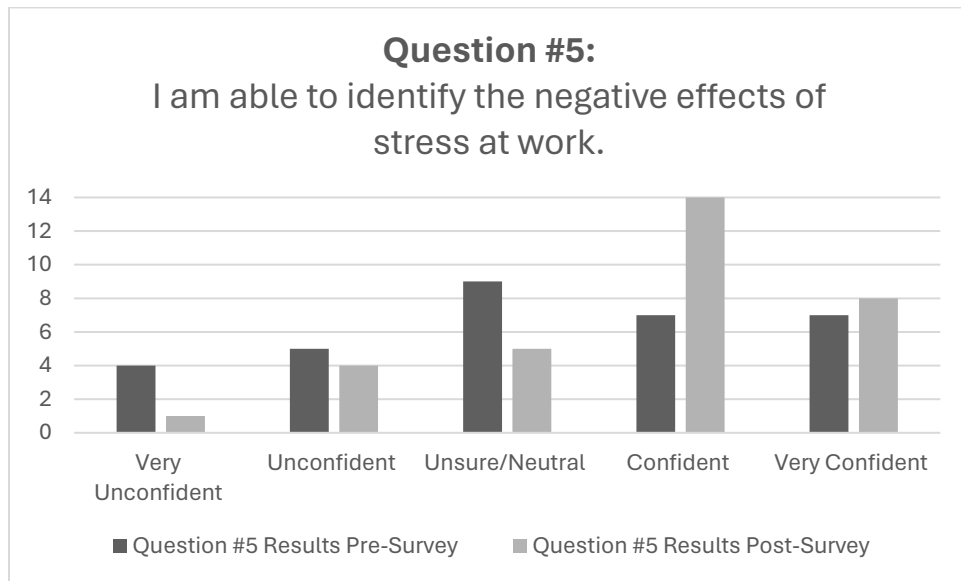
Pre/Post Survey Results



Pre/Post Survey Results Cont.



Pre/Post Survey Results Cont.



Post-Survey Personal Interview Results

After completing the training, participants were asked to complete a short list of interview questions (appendix C) intended to allow participants to provide more qualitative and personal feedback to identify any patterns with the survey results as well as any topics or comments that were not explicitly addressed by the survey.

Question #1: How has your understanding of stress and its effects on your workplace performance changed now that you have completed the stress management training?

- Most participants commented that they felt the training had a positive impact on their awareness and understanding of stress and its' effects on workplace performance.
- The most noted change in terms of understanding of stress concerned the section of the training that detailed the differences between stress and eustress and how they play a part in a person's overall levels of stress and product

Question #2: Do you feel that you have more control over your stress?

- This question had the largest consensus among all the questions in the interview. All the participants said that the training provided them with a more formal set of guidelines which helped them connect with stress management strategies they felt were most appropriate for them.

Question #3: Has your perception of stress management techniques changed in any way?

- One participant noted that they felt the section on the fight or flight response to stress could be reframed by thinking of stress as a challenge to be overcome rather than a threat to one's mood and productivity. They went on to note that they perceived the concept of "fight" to mean building resilience and rising to a challenge, this feedback would be valuable in future iterations of the training in terms of augmenting its overall theme.

Question #4: Can you describe a specific situation during your typical workday where you could apply one or more of the stress management techniques discussed in the training?

- Many of the participants that are social workers gave examples of how the information from the training would be beneficial in managing client interactions by helping them be mindful of monitoring their stress levels as well as their clients.

Question #5: Do you feel this training was an effective use of your time? Why or why not?

- The majority participants responded positively by stating that this training was more interesting to them because it is markedly different from the standard stress management training that many of them have completed in previous years with the organization. They noted that they enjoyed a wider scope of information in terms of the defining of different types of stress, their underlying causes, and suggested strategies “seemed less canned” than the current training used by the organization.

Question #6: Do you believe the skills you have learned in the workshop will have a positive effect on your work and the organization in terms of your morale, client interactions, and productivity?

- One participant commented that their most useful takeaway for them was the training’s stress model which detailed how stress levels (boredom, eustress, stress) and productivity can be balanced which can result in a zone of optimal productivity.

Question #7: Do you have any suggestions regarding information, strategies, or activities that you feel would improve the training in the future?

- Several participants commented that they would like to see more scenarios that directly applied to their role as they felt some of the information was too broad in terms of the suggestions for managing stress.

Findings

Knowledge and attitudes

An increase in the overall knowledge and understanding of common causes of workplace stress and effective strategies is supported by a comparison of the pre and post survey results. Looking at survey question #2 (appendix B) which focuses on participants being able to identify their own stress levels, I noted an increase from 6 to 10 participants that felt confident in this regard which represents a 66% increase.

The most notable findings derived from the survey were questions #4 and #6 (appendix B) with respectively dealt with defining the fight or flight response and effectively managing workplace stress. Considering the confident and very confident responses, the training was able to more than double confidence levels in these aspects of the training.

Daily performance

The survey (appendix B) and personal interview results (appendix C) indicated that there was an overall feeling that participation in the training will result in employees being more capable of producing high quality work and positive outcomes for clients and stakeholders. In terms of reframing negative aspects of stress to increase performance, interview question #3 provided insight into how the training can reshape employee perspectives to view some stressful events as challenges which if overcome, can result in the development of a more positive mindset for employees as well as help create learning activities in future iterations of the training.

Effectiveness and engagement

Interview questions #6 and #7 (appendix B) highlight both strengths and potential areas of improvement to increase the effectiveness of the material and engagement levels of future participants. Regarding question #6, a review of the stress model was helpful in conceptualizing how different forms of stress exist and how they might be used to help employees enter a zone of optimal productivity. Question #7 provides a line of inquiry in the sense that more research is needed to represent the range of jobs more accurately within the organization.

Recommendations

Utilize scenario-based learning

Feedback from the personal interview suggests that the bulk of the participants would have liked to see more specific examples of workplace stress as this would increase both knowledge retention and engagement. As noted earlier, many of the participants are social workers and thought that having more realistic representations of daily events. To that end, I would suggest that future iterations of the training utilize employees in a subject matter expert capacity to more accurately reflect the types of environments and challenges that employees are likely to face.

Reframing of training theme

As highlighted by interview question #3 (appendix C), the concept of reframing stress as an avenue for changing employees' perceptions and attitudes towards workplace stress is an area that may unlock the potential for reducing negative bias by focus the attention of the training on the positive aspects of effective stress management and result in a greater sense of agency and motivation on the part of the employees. I would recommend that the design team look for opportunities where they can foster a "growth mindset" by demonstrating how employees can frame challenging or potentially negative situations into exercises in increasing resilience and mindfulness.

Expanding on the stress model

When asked about how the training might be made more engaging, many participants stated that they found this training to be more engaging than their usual training provided by the organization. This can potentially be attributed to confirmation bias as employees may be simply engaging more with the training on the basis that it is something different, but several employees also noted that they thought the depth of information provided by concepts such as the stress model discussed in the training did genuinely increase their level of interest and engagement as it seemed more applicable to their own experiences with stress. To support this idea, I would suggest that more attention be given to exploring how the relationship between stress and eustress can be integrated in helping employees understand the zone of optimal productivity.

Appendix A: Pre/Post Training Survey

Directions: Please complete this training approximately 1 week before you are scheduled to participate in the stress management workshop. Once up have completed the workshop, another copy of this survey will be sent to your email. Please answer as honestly as possible to increase the quality of your feedback.

Survey Statement	Very Unconfident	Unconfident	Neutral/Unsure	Confident	Very Confident
I am able to management stress effectively at work.					
I am able to identify my stress level(s) at work.					
I know the difference between stress and eustress.					
I can clearly define the fight or flight response.					
I am able to identify the negative effects of stress at work.					
I can name multiple ways that I can effectively manage stress.					

Appendix B: Survey Results

Question #1 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	3	1
Unconfident	8	5
Unsure/Neutral	6	6
Confident	9	12
Very Confident	6	8

Question #2 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	4	2
Unconfident	8	6
Unsure/Neutral	7	6
Confident	6	10
Very Confident	7	8

Question #3 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	9	5
Unconfident	7	4
Unsure/Neutral	7	5
Confident	5	9
Very Confident	4	9

Question #4 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	8	4
Unconfident	8	6
Unsure/Neutral	6	4
Confident	6	12
Very Confident	4	6

Question #5 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	4	1
Unconfident	5	4
Unsure/Neutral	9	5
Confident	7	14
Very Confident	7	8

Question #6 Results		
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Very Unconfident	7	6
Unconfident	7	5
Unsure/Neutral	5	3
Confident	8	9
Very Confident	5	9

Appendix C: Personal Interview Questions

1. How has your understanding of stress and its effects on your workplace performance changed now that you have completed the stress management training?
2. Do you feel that you have more control over your stress?
3. Has your perception of stress management techniques changed in any way?
4. Can you describe a specific situation during your typical workday where you could apply one or more of the stress management techniques discussed in the training?
5. Do you feel this training was an effective use of your time? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe the skills you have learned in the workshop will have a positive effect on your work and the organization in terms of your morale, client interactions, and productivity?
7. Do you have any suggestions regarding information, strategies, or activities that you feel would improve the training in the future?