



VNIVERSITAT  
ID VALÈNCIA

## ‘Stress buffers’ sessions:

1. Coping with stress and conflict
2. Meaningfulness at work

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**WOP-P**  
**MASTER IN WORK,**  
ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONNEL PSYCHOLOGY

With the support of the  
Erasmus+ programme  
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# Coping with stress and conflict

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# What do we mean by stress?



CHALLENGES  
**DREAMS**  
ENTHUSIASM  
ADVENTURE

RESPONSIBILITY  
**CONFLICT** MONEY  
**STRESS**  
UNCERTAINTY  
MANAGING PEOPLE



# HARMFUL EFFECTS OF STRESS

**Stress** can be costly (even deadly) and can jeopardize health, well-being, and company success.

## For **individuals**:

- Burnout, low performance, depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc.

## For the **economy**:

- The estimated cost of work-related stress ranges worldwide from US \$221 million to \$187 billion annually.  
(from \$17 to over \$1200 per employee; Hassard et al., 2017).
- General Motors has spent more on healthcare (including providing health insurance) than on steel  
(e.g. Appleby & Carty, 2005; Levine, 1992).

# WHAT IS STRESS?

- A **stressor** is any situation or set of demands that requires the organism to expend resources to adapt or cope with its circumstances.
- Examples in the work setting:
  - *A lack of social support from people at work.*
  - *Working on your business at the expense of home life.*
  - *Having to take risks.*
  - *Having to work very long hours.*
- **Stress** is the subjective experience one has when demands exceed one's ability to cope.

- Commonly studied **workplace stressors**:
  - Role stressors
  - Workload
  - Interpersonal conflict
  - Organizational constraints
  - Perceived control
  - Work-family conflict
  - Layoffs, job insecurity
  - Emotional labor



# THE WAY WE APPRAISE STRESSORS IS KEY

I. Is it ...

... harmful or threatening?



or

... benign?



Not a stressor

# THE WAY WE APPRAISE STRESSORS IS KEY

1. Is it...

... harmful or threatening?



... benign?



or

2. Do I have resources  
to deal with it?

YES



NO



Not a stressor

**POSITIVE STRESS ('EUSTRESS')**

**NEGATIVE STRESS ('DISTRESS')**



# THE WAY WE APPRAISE STRESSORS IS KEY

1. Is it...

... harmful or threatening?

LACK OF  
SOCIAL  
SUPPORT

YES

NO

2. Do I have resources  
to deal with it?



**POSITIVE STRESS ('EUSTRESS')**

**NEGATIVE STRESS ('DISTRESS')**

# THE WAY WE APPRAISE STRESSORS IS KEY

1. Is it ...

... harmful or threatening?

CONFLICT

**Intragroup conflict:** the process emerging from perceived incompatibilities or differences between group members (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; De Wit et al., 2012).

2. Do I have resources to deal with it?

YES



NO



**POSITIVE STRESS ('EUSTRESS')**

**NEGATIVE STRESS ('DISTRESS')**

# THE WAY WE APPRAISE STRESSORS IS KEY

1. Is it ...

... harmful or threatening?



**Intragroup conflict:** the process emerging from perceived incompatibilities or differences between group members (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; De Wit et al., 2012).

2. Do I have resources to deal with it?

YES or NO?

**Resources:**

Things, money, talents, helping hands

**Coping strategies...**



**POSITIVE STRESS ('EUSTRESS')**

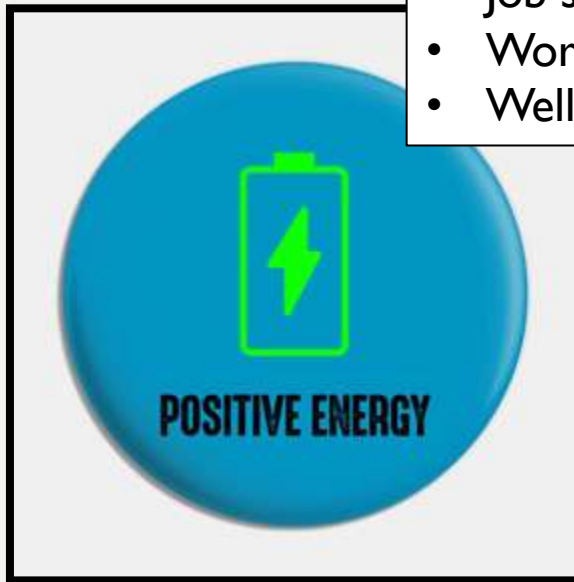


**NEGATIVE STRESS ('DISTRESS')**

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

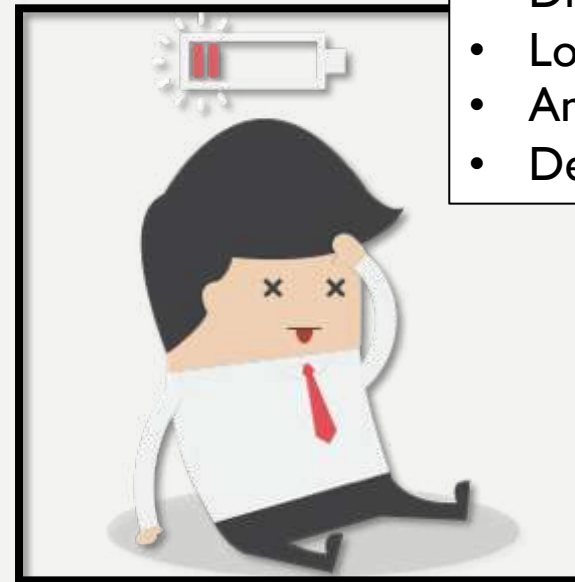
## POSITIVE STRESS ('EUSTRESS')

- Work engagement
- Job satisfaction
- Work performance
- Well-being



## NEGATIVE STRESS ('DISTRESS')

- Burnout
- Dissatisfaction
- Low performance
- Anxiety
- Depression



# COPING WITH STRESS

*“Cognitive and behavioral efforts to master, reduce or tolerate the internal or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction” (Folkman, 1984, p. 843).*

Coping depends on perceived availability of social, personal, economic, and organizational resources, and one’s level of control over the situation.

# Coping with Stress

## Active coping

- I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem.
- I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it.
- I do what has to be done, one step at a time.
- I take direct action to get around the problem.

## Planning

- I try to come up with a strategy about what to do.
- I make a plan of action.
- I think hard about what steps to take.
- I think about how I might best handle the problem.

## Suppression of competing activities

- I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this.
- I focus on dealing with this problem, and if necessary let other things slide a little.
- I keep myself from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities.
- I try hard to prevent other things from interfering with my efforts at dealing with this.

## Restraint coping

- I force myself to wait for the right time to do something.
- I hold off doing anything about it until the situation permits.
- I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon.
- I restrain myself from doing anything too quickly.

## Seeking social support for instrumental reasons

- I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did.
- I try to get advice from someone about what to do.
- I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.
- I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.

## Seeking social support for emotional reasons

- I talk to someone about how I feel.
- I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.
- I discuss my feelings with someone.
- I get sympathy and understanding from someone.

## Positive reinterpretation & growth

- I look for something good in what is happening.
- I try to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
- I learn something from the experience.
- I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience.



# Coping with Stress

## Acceptance

I learn to live with it.  
I accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed.  
I get used to the idea that it happened.  
I accept the reality of the fact that it happened.

## Turning to religion

I seek God's help.  
I put my trust in God.  
I try to find comfort in my religion.  
I pray more than usual.

## Focus on & venting of emotions

I get upset and let my emotions out.  
I let my feelings out.  
I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot.  
I get upset, and am really aware of it.

## Denial

I refuse to believe that it has happened.  
I pretend that it hasn't really happened.  
I act as though it hasn't even happened.  
I say to myself "this isn't real."

## Behavioral disengagement

I give up the attempt to get what I want.  
I just give up trying to reach my goal.  
I admit to myself that I can't deal with it, and quit trying.  
I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem.

## Mental disengagement

I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things.  
I go to movies or watch TV, to think about it less.  
I daydream about things other than this.  
I sleep more than usual.

## Alcohol–drug disengagement

I drink alcohol or take drugs, in order to think about it less.

# COPING WITH STRESS

Coping strategies:

- **Problem-focused** coping strategies

vs.

- **Emotion-focused** (palliative) coping strategies

Which are  
more  
effective?



# EXAMPLE: SPIRITUAL-RELIGIOUS COPING



- Research shows that spiritual-religious coping:
  - is particularly important for stressful, largely **uncontrollable** situations.
  - is **often related to positive coping outcomes** even after accounting for the influence of nonspiritual coping methods.
- Spiritual and religious coping methods most related to **positive outcomes** include:
  - the perception of a **spiritual relationship** with a trustworthy and loving God or another transcendent experience.
  - activities such as **prayer or meditation**.
  - religious reappraisal promoting **meaningfulness** and the sense that **growth** can come from stressful events.
  - **receiving support** from fellow members of a religious congregation.
- However, the personal and social impact of religion and spirituality coping **can also be negative**:
  - it can create or worsen stressors when the person **interprets a stressor in a spiritual way that prevents helpful coping**.
  - it includes **self-blame**, a view of a harsh and **severe deity**, and **lack of support** from one's religious congregation.

# COPING WITH STRESS

## Collective coping

Collective coping refers to actions carried out by the whole organization, or by some of its members on behalf of it, aimed at preventing, eliminating, or reducing the stressor, re-interpreting it, or relieving its harmful effects (Peiro & Rodríguez, 2008).

Please, indicate whether the following measures have already been adopted by **the management team** in order to prevent occupational psychosocial risks.

1. Create a good work environment to promote dialogue and knowledge-sharing.
2. Participative management and leadership.
3. Organize work in a more efficient way.
4. Provide training in coping skills for teaching staff
5. Promote social relationships to improve communication.
6. Search for support on occupational health from professionals (e.g., medical).
7. Promote good relationships with parents and stimulate involvement of the parents' association.
8. Provide support to improve the conditions and functioning of the class.
9. Provide pedagogical support for the students.

Please, indicate whether the following measures are adopted by **the teachers** in order to prevent occupational psychosocial risks.

10. Improve the coordination of tasks and work.
11. Increase disciplinary measures for students who misbehave at school.
12. Carry out training action to control stress (social skills, speech training, etc.).
13. Carry out recreational activities to improve social relationships, communication, and cohesion among the teaching staff.
14. Promote peer social support and cooperation.
15. Provide professional support from psychologists and physicians.
16. Promote shared sense-making to reappraise stressful situations and redefine the role of teaching in society.
17. Promote collective actions to detach or recover from stressors.

# COPING WITH STRESS

## Collective coping

Collective coping refers to actions carried out by the whole organization, or by some of its members on behalf of it, aimed at preventing, eliminating, or reducing the stressor, re-interpreting it, or relieving its harmful effects (Peiro & Rodríguez, 2008).

Why should collective coping be a preferred coping option in organizations?



# COPING WITH STRESS

Collective coping (Rodriguez et al., 2018):

- The **increase in collective problem-focused coping** is associated with a **decrease in most facets of the organizational stress climate** and in **individual stress appraisal**.
- Results suggest that **collective problem-focused coping is more effective** in reducing employees' stress appraisal and organizational stress climate **than individual or co-active problem-focused coping**.



Now it's your turn

...

Any questions?





# TEAM CONFLICT AND HAIR CORTISOL

- Interpersonal conflict is an important work stressor.
- Physiological effects of interpersonal conflict increase over time.



Long-term conflict in startup teams is related to hair cortisol concentration (HCC).

*Kozusznik & Euwema, PNEC, 2020*

# ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

- Traditionally:
  - conflict was seen as a negative process.
  - it increases absenteeism and destroys the atmosphere of teams.
- More recently:
  - conflict has been seen as an inevitable process, especially in high-performance teams.
  - it is not necessarily negative.
  - it can be a driving force for development (it promotes creativity, communication and interest, and prevents stagnation).
- To maximize the positive effect of conflict, we need good conflict management that leads to moderate levels of conflict.



# FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF CONFLICT



1. It increases motivation and energy.
2. It forces people to clarify and defend their positions.
3. It increases internal cohesion while maintaining common goals and identity.
4. It generates innovation from different points of view.
5. It enables the discovery of new ways of working.
6. It focuses attention on necessary changes.
7. It generates functional changes in leadership and the allocation of resources.
8. It enables individual skills to develop.
9. It is an antidote to groupthink.



1. It produces tension and stress outcomes in those involved.
2. It generates hostility and frustration because it blocks aspirations.
3. It can lead to an inefficient distribution of resources.
4. It shifts energy and goals toward non-organizational ones.
5. It entails a loss of energy that leads to lower performance.
6. It affects communication, collaboration and cohesion; it blocks activity, causes delays and reduces collaboration.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

- **Definition:**

- There is conflict between two (or more) parties (individuals or groups) if at least one of them is offended or feels bothered by the other (Van de Vliert, 1997; Wall & Callister, 1995).
- The traditional view sees conflict as opposing interests involving scarce resources, goal divergence, and frustration (Pondy, 1967).
- **Conflict as incompatible activities** sees one person's actions as interfering, obstructing, or in some way getting in the way of another person's actions (Deutsch, 1973) (conflicts can also occur when people have common goals but disagree about the best way to achieve them).

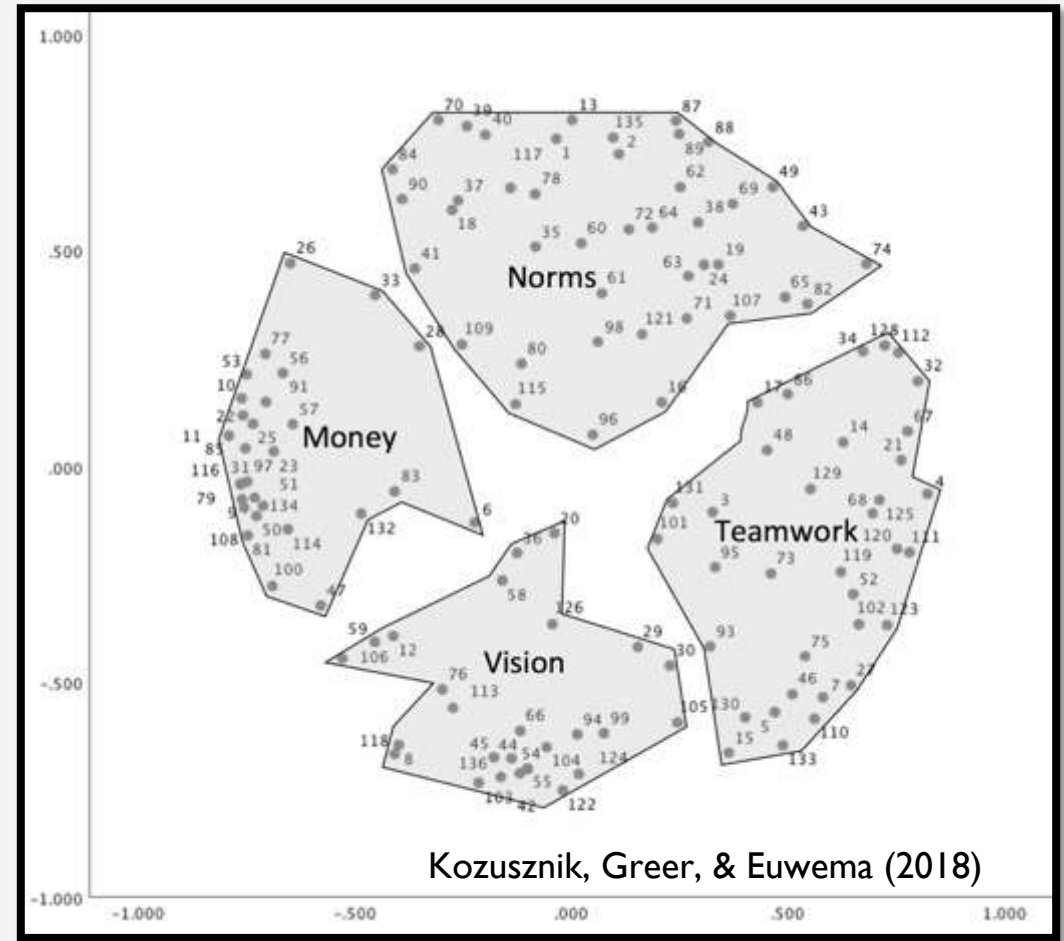
- The conceptualization of conflict implies:

- the **interdependence of activities**
- **common resources**
- the perception by any of the parties of a certain **incompatibility** in the motives, objectives, interests and interaction between the parties.
- Conflict is a **personal** and **subjective** experience.
- It can be **unidirectional**.



# CONFLICTIVE ISSUES IN STARTUP TOP TEAMS

- **Money**
  - dealing with financial problems, setting up agreements on money-related startup strategy, equity issues and dividing shares.
- **Teamwork**
  - negative attitudes of the top team members, individual differences in temperament, and not feeling valued or respected by others.
- **Norms**
  - role division, communication procedures and individual effort.
- **Vision**
  - Shared vision, mission, and values.



# TYPES OF TEAM CONFLICT

Jehn (1995); De Wit, Greer, &  
Jehn (2012);  
Bendersky & Hayes (2012)

- **Task conflict**

- This refers to different opinions on content.
- E.g. conflict over the distribution of resources; procedures and policies; judgment and the interpretation of facts.

- **Relationship conflict**

- This refers to ‘interpersonal incompatibility’.
- E.g. conflict over personal taste, political preferences, values, and interpersonal style.

- **Process conflict**

- This refers to *how* tasks should be accomplished.
- E.g. disagreements over logistic and delegation issues.

- **Status conflict**

- This refers to conflict over one’s relative position in one’s group’s social hierarchy.



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- This refers to conflict over one's relative position in one's group's social hierarchy.

**Which of these types will be the 'best' and which will be the 'worst' for the team?**



# TYPES OF TEAM CONFLICT

Jehn (1995); De Wit, Greer, &

## Task conflict

**Cognitive disagreements.**

Are often are most beneficial for team effectiveness and performance (De Dreu, 2008; Tjosvold, 2008)

## Relationship conflict

**Interpersonal disagreements;** a threat to one's personal identity.

Negative for team outcomes (de Wit et al., 2012)

**Which of these types will be the 'best' and which will be the 'worst' for the team?**



# CONFLICT ISSUES IN STARTUP TOP TEAMS

Kozusznik, Greer, & Euwema (2018)

**Money**  
( $\alpha = .879$ )

- ... over the division of shares in the company.
- ... when comparing money received to the work carried out.
- ... when having to share real money.

**Norms**  
( $\alpha = .908$ )

- ... over who takes the final decisions.
- ... over task interference by co-founders.
- ... over the perceived relative efforts of each co-founder.

**Teamwork**  
( $\alpha = .899$ )

- The disrespectful behavior of another co-founder.
- A lack of trust in the top team.
- The resistance and rigidity of another top team member when taking decisions.

**Vision**  
( $\alpha = .831$ )

- Failure of all co-founders to share the vision for the startup (e.g. in relation to the product, clients).
- An unrealistic startup vision of some co-founders.
- Failure of all co-founders to share the same sense of mission.

coco		Excellent fit						
	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	Chi2	df	p	
4-dimensional	.066	.98	.97	.04	78,67	48	0,0034	
Unidimensional	.23	.68	.61	.13	472.14	54	<,001	

COCO global alpha = .926

# CONFLICT: PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Conflict is analyzed at the individual level.
- Great importance is attached to individual characteristics in conflict management.
- **Cognitive Dissonance Theory** (Festinger, 1957)
  - Two elements are in dissonance if they are incompatible when they occur.
  - When this dissonance occurs, a person will tend to avoid or reduce it and therefore - manage the conflict.
- Criticism of this perspective:
  - It omits the importance of the social context in conflict management (thus impeding analysis of intergroup conflicts).



# TYPES OF CONFLICT

- Types of conflict (by level of conflict):
  - **intrapersonal** conflict
    - This occurs within a single person, affects the functioning of the individual, and refers to an internal psychological process.
  - **interpersonal** conflict
    - This takes place in the interaction processes between two or more individuals.
  - **intragroup** conflict
    - This is a cognitive (or task), affective (relationship) or procedural (process) conflict within the group.
  - **intergroup** conflict
    - This is between members of different groups, units or departments operating within the same organization.
    - It is one of the most common types of conflict.
    - It is related to the division of functions, tasks and responsibilities, the differentiation of objectives, and the allocation of resources between departments.
  - **intraorganizational** conflict
    - This takes place within the organization.
  - **inter-organizational** conflict
    - This occurs between different organizations with conflicts of interest.



# MODELS OF CONFLICT

- **Van de Vliert's conflict escalation model (1998)**
  - Potential **determinants** of conflict are:
    - **the preconditions** (organizational, individual and relational characteristics).
    - **conflicting issues** (conflicts of interest due to lack of resources, disagreements about procedures, and emotional conflicts).
  - Behaviors can intensify or weaken conflict:
    - **De-escalation behaviors** reduce the probability that the other party may become frustrated. They resolve the conflict or reduce its escalation.
    - **Escalating behaviors** seek opposite results.
  - These behaviors can be:
    - **spontaneous** or **unintentional**.
    - **strategic** or **planned**.

# HOW CAN WE KNOW IF THE RESULT OF CONFLICT SOLVING IS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

- Have the parties hindered each other?
- Has the frustration increased?
- Has the atmosphere or the climate worsened?
- Has an ideal solution been reached?
- Have the positions come closer?
- Has a common solution been found?
- Have the ideas been analyzed together by all involved parties?

# COPING WITH CONFLICT: CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

- **Conflict behavior:**
  - **behavioral response** to the experience of conflict (Van de Vliert et al., 1995)
  - one party's **reaction** to the perception that one's own and the other party's current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously.
- **Dual-Concern Model** (De Dreu et al., 2001)
  - The way in which parties handle conflicts can be described and is determined by two concerns: concern for **self** (one's own interests) and concern for **others**.
  - One of the most shared categorizations of conflict behavior.
  - **5 strategies:**
    - **Problem solving/integrating**
    - **Forcing**
    - **Accommodating**
    - **Avoiding**
    - **Compromising**

Conflict behaviours are key to obtaining the most positive conflict outcomes possible.

# COPING WITH CONFLICT: CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

- Dual-Concern Model

- Forcing

- Defending one's own interests and ideas, even if they go against those of the other party.
    - It involves constant pressure
    - It involves a non-participative style.
    - It involves confrontational behaviors, accusations, aggressive approaches and using one's position of power.

Is it appropriate  
or not?



# COPING WITH CONFLICT: CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

- Dual-Concern Model

- **Forcing**

- Defending one's own interests and ideas, even if they go against those of the other party.
    - It involves constant pressure
    - It involves a non-participative style.
    - It involves confrontational behaviors, accusations, aggressive approaches and using one's position of power.
  - **It is appropriate** when:
    - the outcome is **important** for one party but **trivial** for the opponent.
    - **fast** decision making is necessary.
  - **It is inappropriate** when:
    - the issues are **complex**.
    - both parties are **equally powerful**.
    - there is **enough time** to make a collective decision.



# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model

### – Avoidance

- One party aims to stay away from confrontation with the other.
- The conflict issue receives little attention.
- Behavior is indirect and non-cooperative.
- It is one of the least effective types of conflict behavior.



Is it appropriate  
or not?



# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model

### – Avoidance

- One party aims to stay away from confrontation with the other.
- The conflict issue receives little attention.
- Behavior is indirect and non-cooperative.
- It is one of the least effective types of conflict behavior.

### – Avoidance may be **appropriate** when:

- the benefits of resolving the conflict are not worth confronting the other party (the problem is trivial), no good solutions are available yet, or more time is needed.

### – Avoiding is **inappropriate** when:

- the issues are important to one of the parties, the parties cannot wait, or immediate action is required.



# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model

### – Accommodating/Yielding

- This involves giving in and going along with the other party's ideas, wishes and needs.
- It results from a low concern for one's own conflictive interests combined with a high concern for the interests and needs of the other party.
- It is often related to a strong need for harmony or to sensitivity to the other party's needs.
- It avoids escalating the conflict but prevents the objectives of at least one of the parties from being achieved.



Is it appropriate  
or not?

# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model



### – Accommodating/ Yielding

- This involves giving in and going along with the other party's ideas, wishes and needs.
  - It results from a low concern for one's own conflictive interests combined with a high concern for the interests and needs of the other party.
  - It is often related to a strong need for harmony or to sensitivity to the other party's needs.
  - It avoids escalating the conflict but prevents the objectives of at least one of the parties from being achieved.
- Accommodating is **appropriate** when:
- a party is unfamiliar with the issues involved in the conflict.
  - the opponent is right.
  - the issue is much more important to the other party.
  - one wishes to build or maintain a long-term relationship.
  - it is done in exchange for future consideration when needed.
- Accommodating is **less appropriate** when:
- the issue is of great concern.
  - it causes frustration.
  - it reinforces dynamics of exploitation.

# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model

### – **Compromising**

- This involves searching for a middle ground that satisfies the interests of both parties.
- Each party makes several concessions.
- It may prevent a creative solution to the problem.



Is it appropriate  
or inappropriate?

# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

## Dual-Concern Model

### – **Compromising**

- This involves searching for a middle ground that satisfies the interests of both parties.
- Each party makes several concessions.
- It may prevent a creative solution to the problem.
- Compromising may be **appropriate** when:
  - forces are balanced and the goals of the parties are mutually exclusive.
  - it leads to a democratic solution.



# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR



## Dual-Concern Model

### – Problem solving/integrating

- This is a win-win strategy aimed at “*optimizing rather than satisfying the parties*”.
- It seeks to **satisfy** the objectives of each party.
- It emphasizes **cooperation**.
- It searches for **creative solutions** to the problem.
- The **needs** of all the parties involved are considered.

Is it appropriate  
or not?



# CONFLICT BEHAVIOR



## Dual-Concern Model

### – Problem solving/integrating

- This is a win-win strategy aimed at “*optimizing rather than satisfying the parties*”.
- It seeks to **satisfy** the objectives of each party.
- It emphasizes **cooperation**.
- It searches for **creative solutions** to the problem.
- The **needs** of all the parties involved are considered.

### – Problem solving is **appropriate** when:

- the issues involved are **complex**.
- parties need to **share skills**, information and other resources to redefine the problem and formulate alternative solutions.

### – Problem solving is **inappropriate** when:

- the task is **simple** or **trivial**.
- there is no time.

# CONGLOMERATE CONFLICT BEHAVIOR (CCB)

EUWEMA & VAN EMMERIK (2007)

- The CCB framework assumes that **individual reactions** to conflict typically are **complex** and consist of **multiple components of behavior**.
  - These behavioral components may occur **simultaneously** or **sequentially**.
- The main reason why people combine different behaviors is because **conflicts are often mixed-motive situations**:
  - Situations that pose a conflict between securing **immediate benefits through competition** and **pursuing benefits for oneself and others through cooperation** with other people.
  - A person's behavior in a conflict episode is viewed as a **combination** of several of the **five forms of conflict behaviors**.

# HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICTS CONSTRUCTIVELY

- The need for **trust**
  - Trust is a belief or expectation about the benevolent motives of others during a social interaction.
  - Mutual trust is an important antecedent as well as a consequence of cooperation in conflicts.
- **Constructive controversy**
  - This is an open-minded discussion of conflicting perspectives for mutual benefit. It occurs when the protagonists express opposing ideas that, at least temporarily, obstruct resolution of the issues.

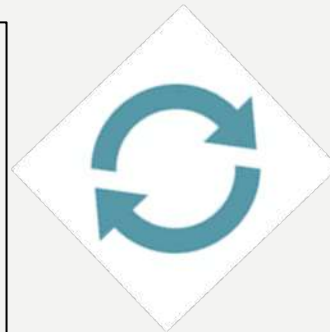
# HOW TO PREVENT CONFLICT ESCALATION

**Under what circumstances may constructive conflicts in startups turn into destructive ones?**

How can startups constructively cope with experiencing conflict at work?

## Task conflict

**Cognitive disagreements** between team members about the task. They are beneficial for team effectiveness and performance (De Dreu, 2008; Tjosvold, 2008)



## Relationship conflict

**Interpersonal disagreements** are a threat to one's personal identity. They are negative for team outcomes (de Wit et al., 2012)



Task conflict often transforms into relationship conflict, leading to destructive conflict escalation (Greer et al., 2008)

# HOW TO PREVENT CONFLICT ESCALATION

## Coping with stress & conflict behavior

- **Coping** with stressors: 'the **cognitive and behavioral efforts** to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them' (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980, p. 223).
- **Conflict behavior**: the **behavioral response** to the experience of conflict (van de Vliert et al., 1999)

**Problem-focused,  
Problem solving**



**Detachment,  
Avoidance**



# HOW TO PREVENT CONFLICT ESCALATION

The relationship between task and relationship conflict **is amplified** when avoidance conflict behaviors and disengagement coping strategies are used.



N = 102 startup team members (Flanders, The Netherlands, Germany) 63% male; Mean age: 29.40 years,  $SD = 6.63$  Mean age of startup: 2.95 yrs ( $SD = 2.02$ ) Mean startup size: 5.9 ( $SD = 4.49$ ) members

Kozusznik, Aldering & Euwema, *IJCM* (2020)



# HOW TO PREVENT CONFLICT ESCALATION

Problem-solving conflict behavior and problem-focused coping **protect** task conflict from turning into relationship conflict.



(-) Problem-focused coping  
(-) Problem-solving conflict behavior



Task  
conflict

x

Relationship  
conflict

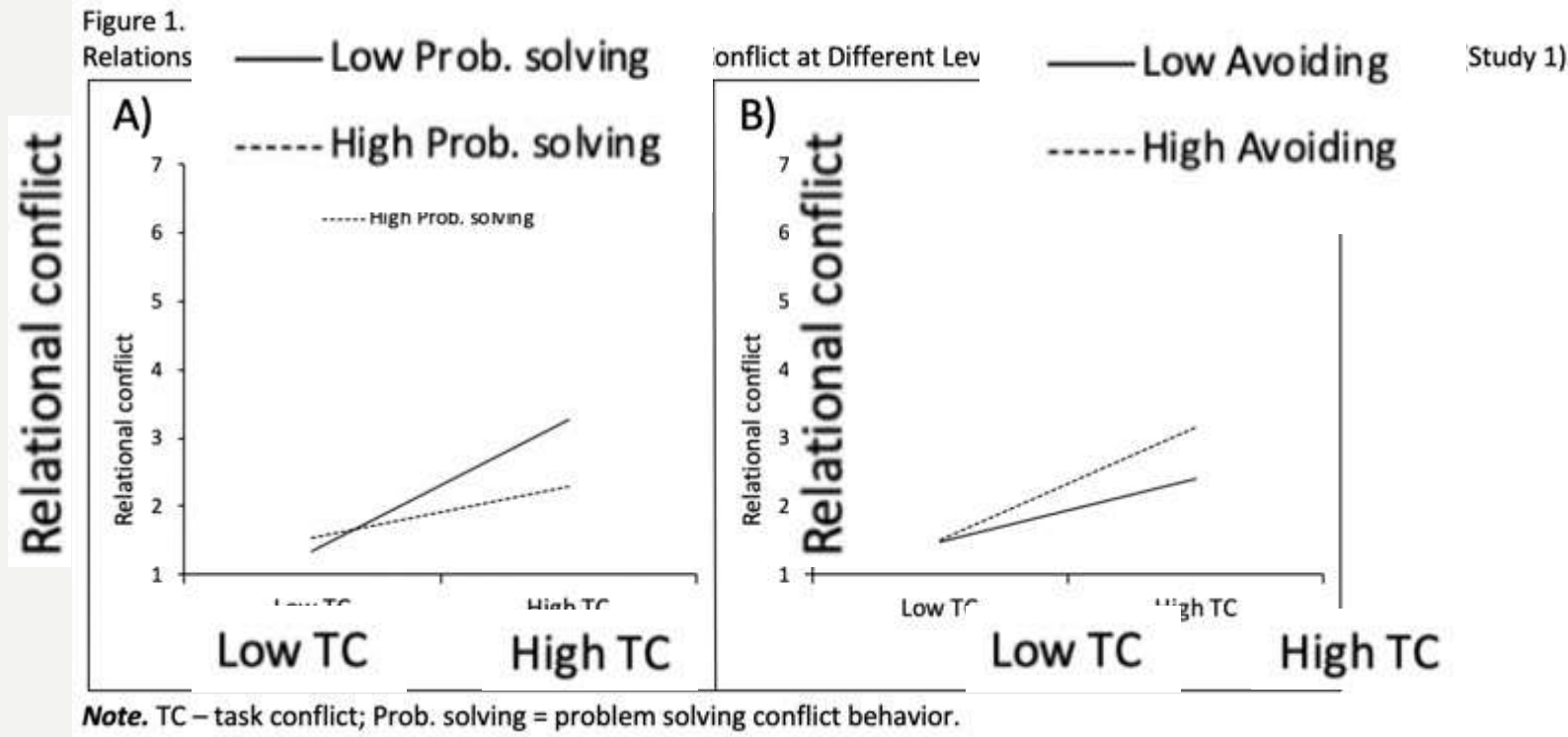
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Kozusznik, Aldering & Euwema, *IJCM* (2020)

# RESULTS

(Est. = -.25, IC 95% [-.40; -.11])

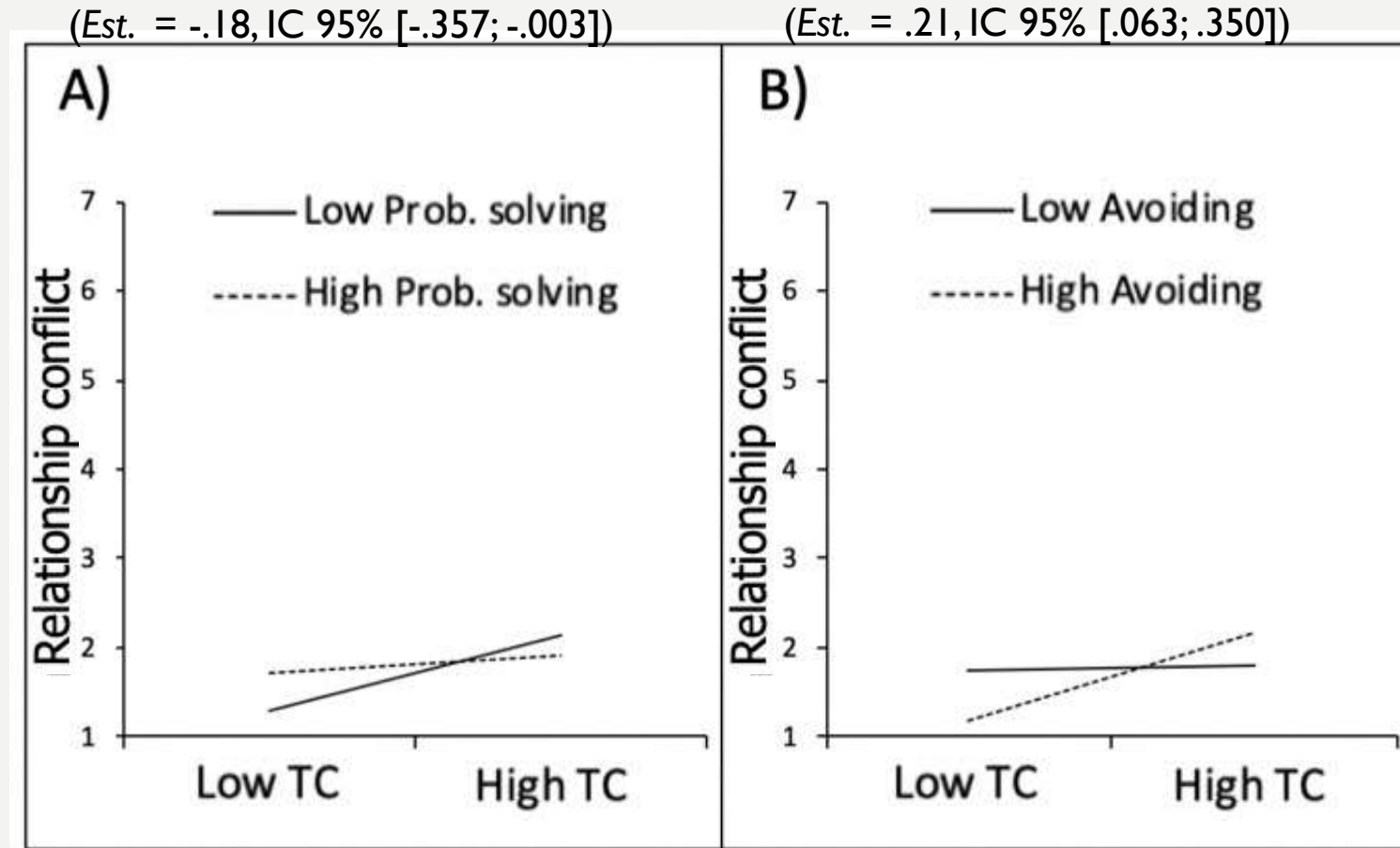
(Est. = .11, IC 95% [.02; .20])



Kozusznik, Aldering & Euwema, *IJCM* (2020)

# RESULTS

N = 75 startup team members  
(Flanders, Belgium)  
Mean age of startup: 1.72 years  
Average startup size: 6.60 members



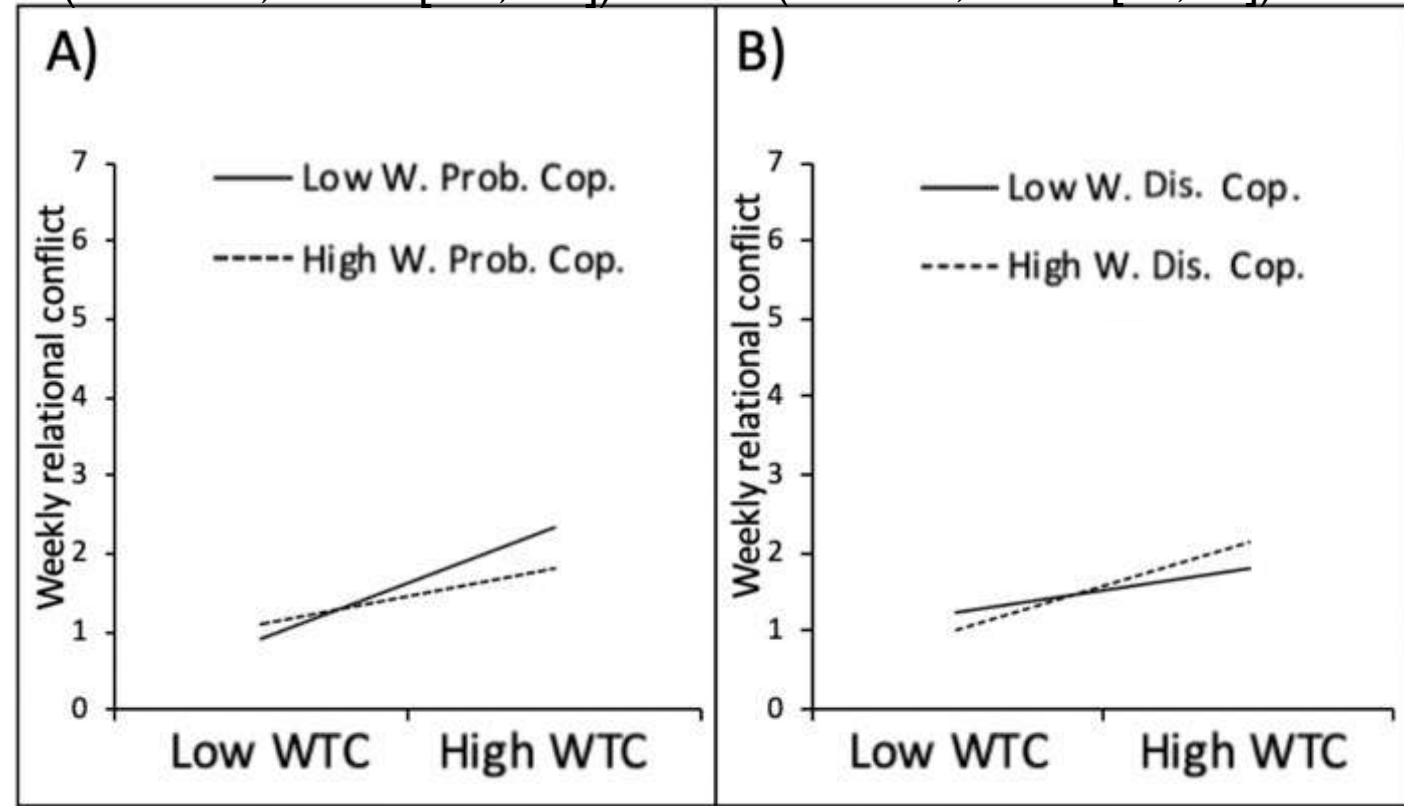
Kozusznik, Aldering & Euwema, *IJCM* (2020)

# RESULTS

N = 75 startup team members  
(Flanders, Belgium)  
Mean age of startup: 1.72 years  
Average startup size: 6.60 members  
Weekly questionnaires, 11 weeks

(Est. = -.13, IC 95% [-.19; -.07])

(Est. = .07, IC 95% [.03; .12])



Kozusznik, Aldering & Euwema, *IJCM* (2020)

- **Negotiation**
  - A process in which the parties attempt to **jointly create an agreement** that resolves a conflict between them.
  - The parties involved have sufficient power to try to agree on a solution.
  - It requires preparation, information management and knowing the phases to arrive at an optimal solution.
- **Mediation**
  - A process by which **a third party facilitates** constructive communication among disputants, including decision making, problem solving and negotiation, in order to reach a mutually acceptable agreement.
- **Conflict coaching**
  - A conflict coach ('conflict expert') works with a party to: (a) **analyse** and **understand** the conflict, (b) **identify** the preferred direction, and (c) **develop skills** to implement the preferred strategy.
- **Arbitration**
  - **A third party provides** a final and binding or voluntary **decision**.
  - Parties agree to accept arbitration.
- **Decision making by authorities**
  - **Imposing** solution by **ruling**.
  - Authority intervenes in the conflict.

- **Conflict is an important work stressor (Dijkstra et al., 2005; 2006).**
- **We can employ general coping strategies with stress (Carver et al., 1989).**
- **They can be individual and collective and have different outcomes (Rodriguez et al., 2018).**
- **We can employ targeted conflict behaviors to deal with conflicts (De Dreu et al., 2004).**
- **These behaviors can be undertaken alone or as a conglomerate (Euwema & van Emmerik, 2007).**
- **Coping strategies and conflict behaviors are key for the positive outcomes of stress and conflict and can help to prevent coping escalation.**

# STRESS AND CONFLICT LOSS SPIRALS

Can conflicts in startups deteriorate into loss spirals from one day to the next?

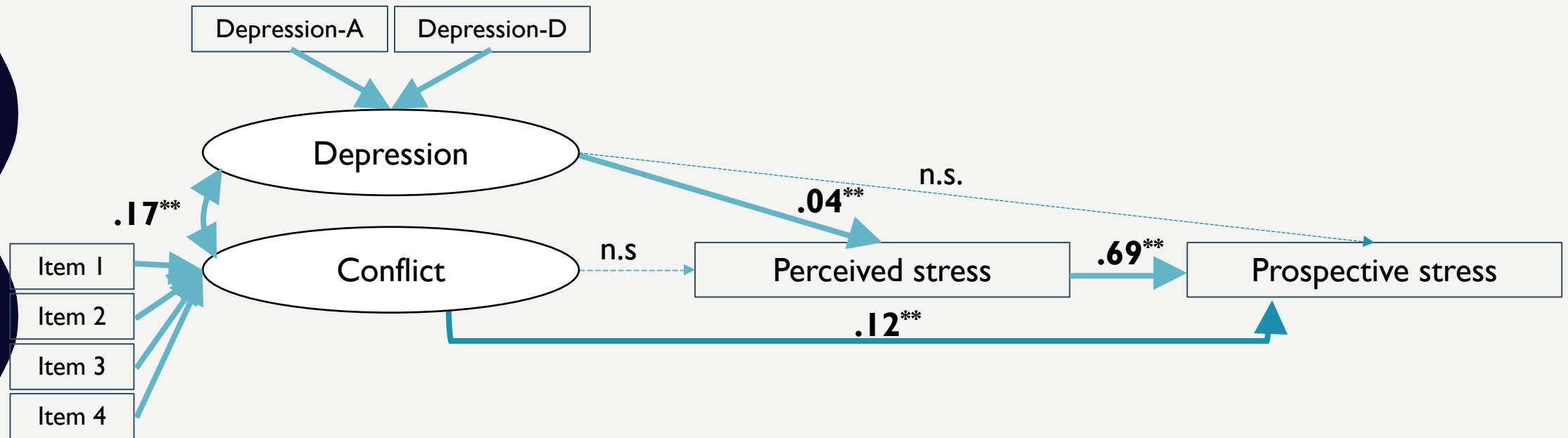


This is relevant when it comes to startups, which are:

- At odds with **sleep**.
- Fertile ground for **stress**.

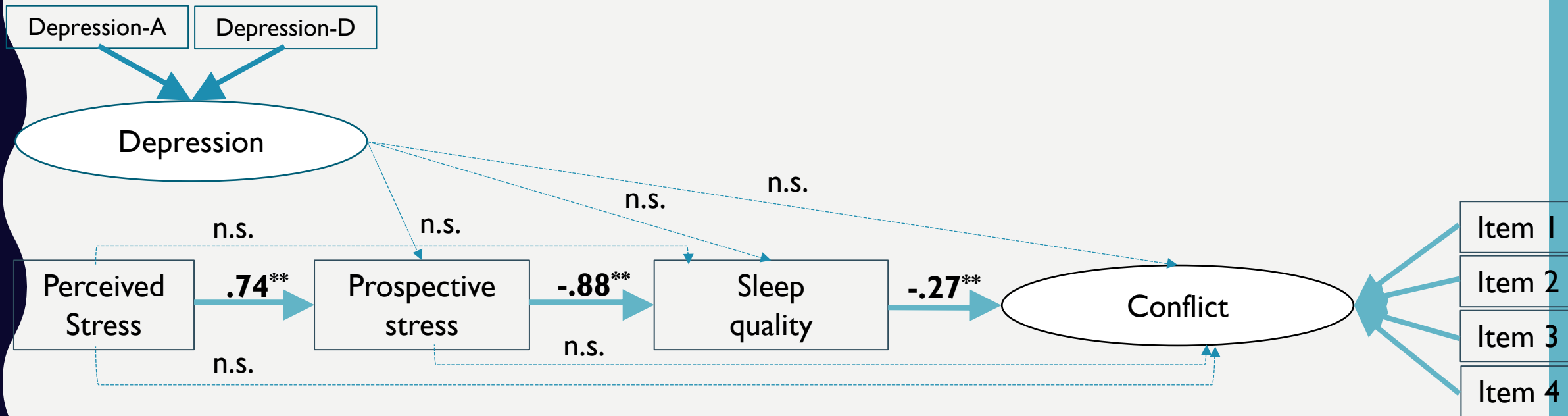


# RESULTS



- Bayes MSEM good fit and convergence (PPP=.361 [LL= -27.494 ; UL=39.512]; PSR=1.002) (Gelman & Rubin, 1992; van de Schoot et al., 2014).
- Significant Montecarlo test of mediation for DEPR-STRES-ANTICIP chain, Sig. 95% [LL=.01156; UL = .05279]

# RESULTS



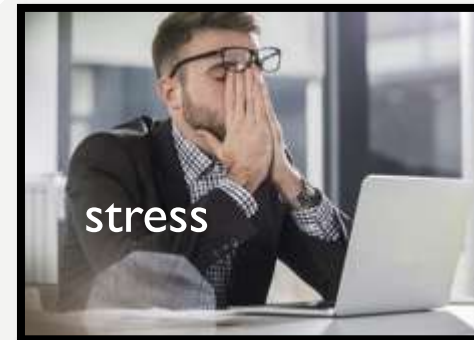
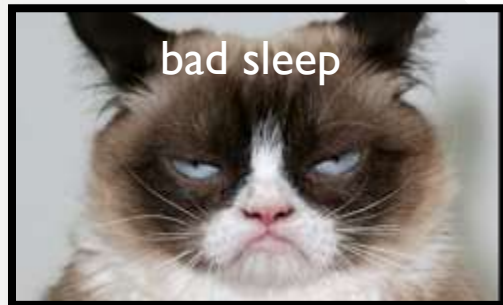
- Bayes MSEM good fit and convergence (PPP=.152 LL=-18.358 ; UL=57.896); PSR = 1.007) (Gelman & Rubin, 1992; van de Schoot et al., 2014).
- Significant Montecarlo test of mediation (90% confidence interval: LL=.01678;UL=.3858).

# STRESS AND CONFLICT LOSS SPIRALS



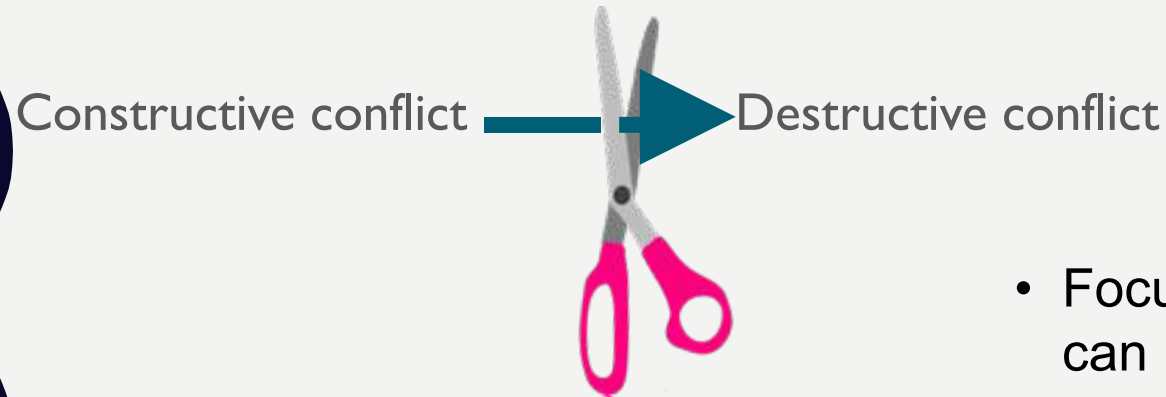
41 startups  
115 startup members  
Age (M = 29 years)  
70% men, 30% women

Series of questionnaires  
(baseline + 1/day for 14 days)



- Conflict, prospective stress and bad sleep can turn into a loss spiral.
- This loss spiral can be further exacerbated in people who suffer depression.

# BREAKING LOSS SPIRALS

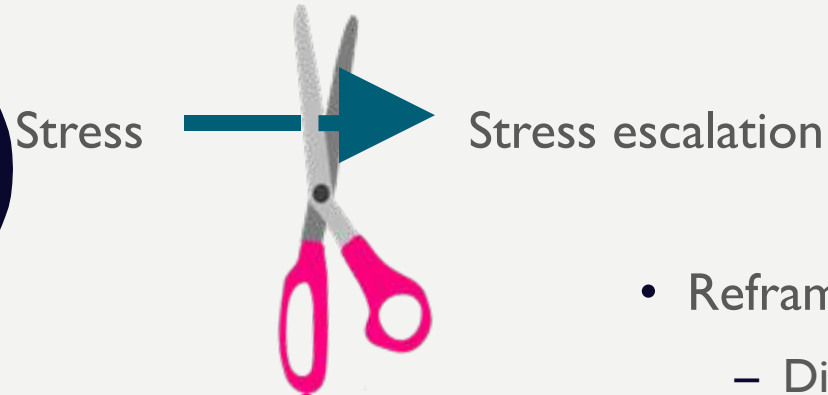


- Focus on **solving the problem**. Disagreements can lead to creative solutions.
- **Don't avoid conflicts**. Talk.

- **Constructive controversy:**

- Is an open-minded discussion of opposing views for mutual benefit.
- Is a productive exchange of expertise among group members.
- Challenges biases and assumptions to develop a more complete understanding of the situation.
- Strengthens relationships in teams, prevents escalation and personalized conflict, and increases the quality of decisions while ensuring good psychological health.

# BREAKING LOSS SPIRALS

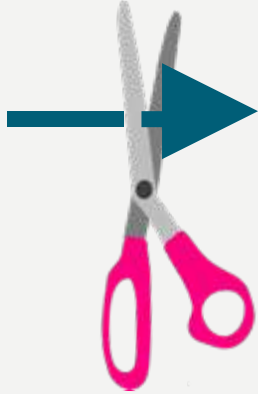


- Reframe how you see stress:
  - Difficulties are not threats but **challenges** and **opportunities to grow**.
  - **Look for meaning in your activities**.
- See yourself capable of facing the challenge:
  - **List your resources** (things, money, talents, helping hands).
- Cope wisely:
  - **In control?** Identify the source of problems and act during the day.
  - **Not in control?** Work on your emotions (mindfulness, sports, yoga, relaxation, quality time, laughing).

# BREAKING LOSS SPIRALS



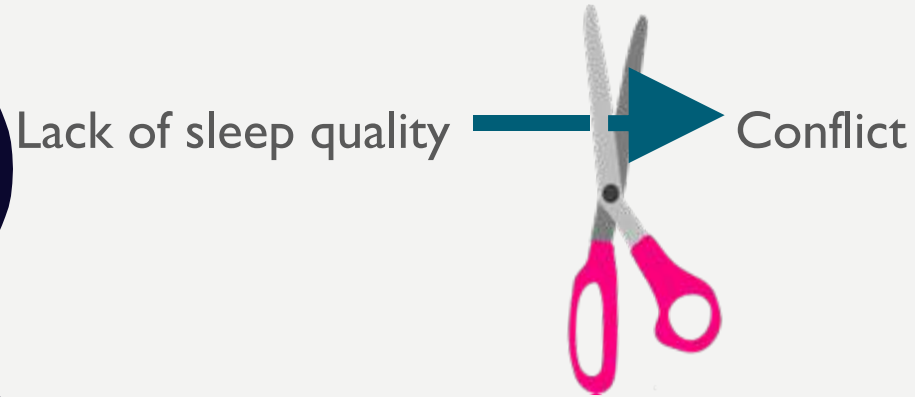
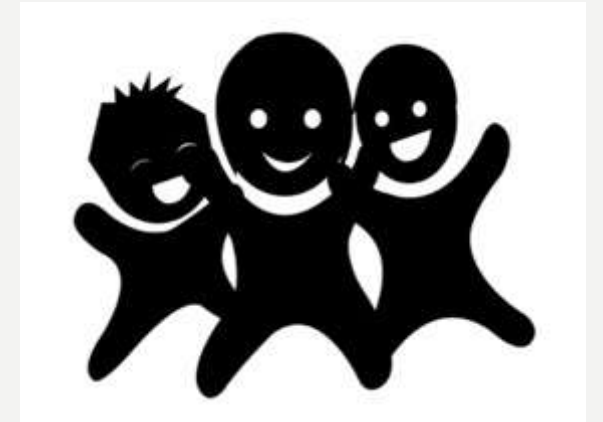
Stress



Lack of sleep quality

- **Sleep hygiene:**
  - Respect recovery time: no emails after dinner.
  - “The night is the beginning of a new day”.
- Do you ruminate?
  - Repetitive stressful thoughts? Seek distraction, have sex.
  - **Worrying is only an illusion of having control.**

# BREAKING LOSS SPIRALS

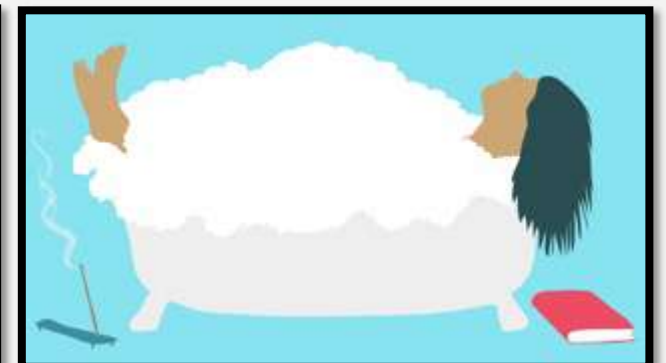
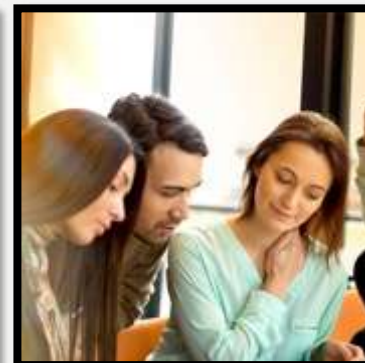


- **Self-awareness** is half of the success.
  - Observe your energy levels.
  - Notice your irritation.
- **Communicate** with your team.



# CONCLUSIONS

- Conflicts can be good, so use them as such.
- Conflict, stress and sleep are interrelated.
- To prevent loss spirals and conflict escalation, consider:
  - the role of positive appraisal of **challenges and opportunities**.
  - the role of **sleep** and **stress management**.
  - the importance of **problem-focused coping** and **problem-solving**-targeted conflict behavior.



Now it's your turn ...  
Any questions?





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## ‘Stress buffers’ sessions:

1. Coping with stress and conflict
2. Meaningfulness at work

Gosia Kozusznik, PhD.

IDOCAL, University of Valencia

O2L, KU Leuven

[gosia.kozusznik@uv.es](mailto:gosia.kozusznik@uv.es)

**WOP-P**  
**MASTER IN WORK,**  
ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONNEL PSYCHOLOGY

With the support of the  
Erasmus+ programme  
of the European Union





VNIVERSITAT  
ID VALÈNCIA

## 2. Meaningfulness at work

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- In organizations, psychologists have often tried to promote employees' well-being and performance; this can be achieved through **various pathways**.
- The **happy-productive worker thesis** (Cropanzano & Wright, 2000):
  - 'Happy' workers perform better than 'unhappy' ones.

However, most studies have focused on **hedonic** well-being rather than the person's **eudaimonic** experience.

**What makes a  
great day at  
work?**

Employees' experience of **feeling good** and of their fulfillment and **purpose** (Sonnentag, 2015), understood as having both **pleasurable** and **meaningful** components (Dolan, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001), is based on different philosophical traditions:

- the **hedonic** view

- pleasure.
- peoples' positive evaluations of their lives, which includes positive emotion, engagement and satisfaction (Seligman, 2002).
- experience of positive affect (e.g. Diener, 2000).

- the **eudaimonic** view

- well-being as personal growth and the sense of meaning (Ryff, 1995; Seligman, 2002).



**Hedonism:** a philosophical doctrine that states that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life (Merriam-Webster).

**Hedonic well-being:** the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain (Angner, 2010).

- It entails a subject's balance of pleasant over unpleasant experience (Eid & Larsen, 2008).
- Different dimensions:

Job satisfaction

Positive emotions at work

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- Different dimensions:

#### Job satisfaction

- a “positive evaluative judgment one makes about one’s job or job situation” (Weiss, 2002, p. 175).
- satisfaction with several work facets, such as pay, promotion opportunities, the job itself, supervision or co-workers (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969).
- extrinsic vs intrinsic satisfaction (Wernimont, 1966).

#### Positive emotions at work

**Hedonism:** a philosophical doctrine that states that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life (Merriam-Webster).

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Job satisfaction

Positive emotions at work

- experience of positive affect (e.g. Diener, 2000).
- transient or 'state' affect, which may include positive emotions (e.g. Kaplan et al., 2009).
- experience of pleasure (e.g. 'state' positive emotions) while carrying out different work activities (Dolan et al., 2011; White & Dolan, 2009) is generally believed to represent the core of well-being.

**Aristotle** “considered hedonic happiness to be a vulgar ideal, making humans slavish followers of desires [and] posited, instead, that true happiness is found in the expression of virtue – that is, in doing what is worth doing” (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 145).

- **Eudaimonia**: “the feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of, and consistent with, one’s true potential” (Waterman, 1984, p. 16).
- **Daimon, the ‘true self’** (Norton, 1976) is an ideal in the sense of excellence towards which one strives and the meaning given to one’s life.
- **‘Worthwhileness’** (Dolan et al., 2011; White & Dolan, 2009), **personal growth** and a **sense of meaning** (Ryff, 1995) associated with one’s activities.
- Living a happy life requires one to **live in accordance with one’s values** (Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005).
- Living **true to one’s inner self** ensures one has a meaningful life (Seligman, 2002).

# WHAT MAKES YOUR LIFE MEANINGFUL?



Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 48 57 71 2



# ***Orientations to Happiness Theory*** (Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005)

- The pursuit of well-being can be carried out in several complementary ways:
  - the pursuit of pleasure: individuals with a more **hedonic** orientation to happiness (“**Don’t worry – be happy**”).
  - the pursuit of meaning: a more **eudaimonic** orientation (“**Be all that you can be**” or “**Make a difference**”).
  - a combination: the pursuit of **engagement**: reach well-being by being highly focused on activities that are engrossing and absorbing (Schueller & Seligman, 2010).
- These orientations influence the individual’s **exposure to experience** of well-being at work.
  - Each orientation to happiness separately predicts life satisfaction from small (pleasure) to moderate (engagement, meaning) degrees.
  - However, **the combination** of the three orientations predicts more life satisfaction than expected when the individual components are treated separately (Peterson et al., 2005).
- ‘**Full Life**’ is achieved by scoring near the top in all three orientations to happiness.



		very much unlike me				very much like me
<b>1</b>	Regardless of what I am doing, time passes very quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2</b>	My life serves a higher purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3</b>	Life is too short to postpone the pleasures it can provide.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>4</b>	I seek out situations that challenge my skills and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>5</b>	In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether it will benefit other people.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>6</b>	Whether at work or play, I am usually “in a zone” and not conscious of myself.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>7</b>	I am always very absorbed in what I do.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>8</b>	I go out of my way to feel euphoric.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>9</b>	In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether I can lose myself in it.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>10</b>	I am rarely distracted by what is going on around me.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>11</b>	I have a responsibility to make the world a better place.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>12</b>	My life has a lasting meaning.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>13</b>	In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether it will be pleasurable.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>14</b>	What I do matters to society.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>15</b>	I agree with this statement: “Life is short – eat dessert first.”	1	2	3	4	5
<b>16</b>	I love to do things that excite my senses.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>17</b>	I have spent a lot of time thinking about what life means and how I fit into its big picture.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>18</b>	For me, the good life is the pleasurable life.	1	2	3	4	5

very much  
unlike me

very much  
like me

**SCORING:**

Add up the following items IN EACH CATEGORY:

- Life of meaning: add items 2, 5, 11, 12, 14, 17

- Life of pleasure: add items 3, 8, 13, 15, 16, 18

- Life of engagement: add items: 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10

- 1 Rega
- 2 My li
- 3 Life i
- 4 I see
- 5 In ch
- 6 Whe
- 7 I am
- 8 I go
- 9 In ch
- 10 I am
- 11 I hav
- 12 My li
- 13 In ch
- 14 Wha
- 15 I agre
- 16 I love
- 17 I hav
- 18 For me, the good life is the pleasurable life.

1 2 3 4 5

very much  
unlike me

very much  
like me

## SCORING:

Add up the following items IN EACH CATEGORY:

- Life of meaning: add items 2, 5, 11, 12, 14, 17

- Life of pleasure: add items 3, 8, 13, 15, 16, 18

- Life of engagement: add items: 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10

## SHARE YOUR RESULTS:



Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 59 94 73 2

1 2 3 4 5

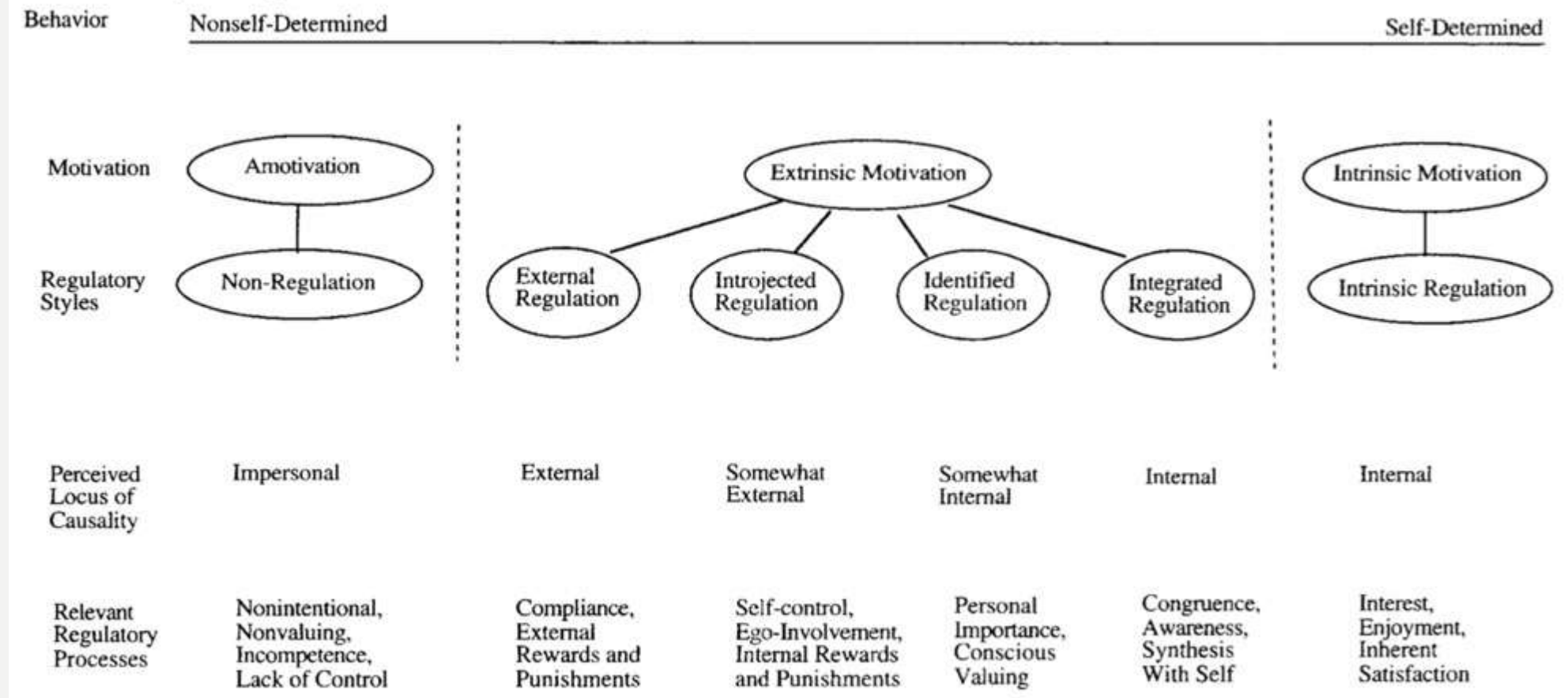
# Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

- To have purpose, your goals (in life, at work) must align with personal sources of meaning (Schnell, 2010).
- The basis for self-determination theory is that **goals that help create meaning** satisfy the following basic psychological needs:
  - **Autonomy**: the need to exercise free will and feel volition in your behavior.
  - **Relatedness**: the need to feel close and connected to valued others.
  - **Competence**: the need to feel effective and competent in your behavior.
- Being blocked from fulfilling these needs makes you **extrinsically** motivated, likely to be **unhappy**, and want to **leave** your workplace (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007).

# Self-determination theory

**Figure 1**

*The Self-Determination Continuum Showing Types of Motivation With Their Regulatory Styles, Loci of Causality, and Corresponding Processes*



**Internalization** = people's "taking in" a value.

**Integration** = the further transformation of that regulation into their own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self.

- Source: Ryan & Deci (2000)

***Meaning of work***

***Meaningfulness at work***

***Activity worthwhileness  
at work***

## JOB ORIENTATIONS

(Wrzesniewski et al. 1997, J. res. Pers. 31, 21-33.) used as Webster et al., 2019, JOB 10.1016/j.jvb.2019.02.010

YES NO

- 1 I find my work rewarding.
- 2 I am eager to retire.
- 3 My work makes the world a better place.
- 4 I am very conscious of what day of the working week it is and I greatly anticipate weekends. I say, "Thank God it's Friday!"
- 5 I tend to take my work with me on vacations.
- 6 I expect to be in a higher level job in five years.
- 7 I would choose my current work life again if I had the opportunity.
- 8 I feel in control of my work life.
- 9 I enjoy talking about my work to others.
- 10 I view my job primarily as a stepping stone to other jobs.
- 11 My primary reason for working is financial – to support my family and lifestyle.
- 12 I expect to be doing the same work in five years.
- 13 If I was financially secure, I would continue with my current line of work even if I was no longer paid.
- 14 When I am not at work, I do not think much about my work.
- 15 I view my job as just a necessity of life, much like breathing or sleeping.
- 16 I never take work home with me.
- 17 My work is one of the most important things in my life.
- 18 I would not encourage young people to pursue my kind of work.

<b>JOB ORIENTATIONS</b> (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997, J. res. Pers. 31, 21-33.) used as Webster et al., 2019, JOB 10.1016/j.jvb.2019.02.010		<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>1</b>	I find my work rewarding.	1	0
<b>2</b>	I am eager to retire.	0	1
<b>3</b>	My work makes the world a better place.	1	0
<b>4</b>	I am very conscious of what day of the working week it is and I greatly anticipate weekends. I say, “Thank God it’s Friday!”	0	1
<b>5</b>	I tend to take my work with me on vacations.	1	0
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<b>18</b>	I would not encourage young people to pursue my kind of work.	0	1



**S**



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## • ***Meaning of work***

- general beliefs, values, and attitudes about work
- the **individual interpretation of what work signifies**, or the role employees' work plays in their life (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003).
- Work orientations shape the meaning people make of work (Baumeister, 1991; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997):
  - work as a **job** (i.e. a necessity to support life, one's family, etc.).
  - work as a **career** (i.e. an opportunity for personal growth).
  - work as a **calling** (i.e. fulfillment of higher values in life).
- work meanings may be positive, negative, or neutral (Brief & Nord, 1990; Wrzesniewski, 2000).
- the fact that work means something does not necessarily imply that it is meaningful (Rosso et al 2010).

- ***Meaningfulness at work***

- This refers to **the *amount of significance attached to work*** (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).
- It stems from what individuals envision as the desired end states and their motivation.
- Seeing **congruence** between one's work activities and their self-concepts can boost the experience of meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Rosso et al 2010; Shamir, 1991).

- *Meaningfulness at work can fluctuate:*

**I feel that the activities I have been carrying out  
in the last week ...**

	Not at all						Very much
<b>... are worthwhile and meaningful</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>... are useful to other people</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>... help me achieve important goals</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code 15 35 20 9

## ***Activity worthwhileness at work***

- Experienced **states** of eudaimonic well-being (or meaningfulness at work): momentary subjective emotions and cognitive-affective appraisals.
- Evaluation of one's activities as meaningful, important for others, and helping to attain important personal goals (White & Dolan, 2009).
- The experience of 'worthwhileness' of the activities can fluctuate daily (Kozusznik, Peiró, Soriano, 2019).
- There are discrepancies between the activities people find 'pleasurable' and those they consider 'rewarding'.
  - time spent on a difficult but meaningful task for one's career = more rewarding than pleasurable.
  - time spent working in a comfortable and modern-design office = more pleasurable than rewarding.
  - A happy life: one that contains lots of positive daily sentiments of pleasure and purpose.



**Why do some people develop strain, but others do not, when confronting the same adversities?**

“He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.”

Viktor Frankl (1963), *Man's Search for Meaning*

- Frankl (1963)
  - described prisoners in concentration camps who died shortly after giving up on life.
  - concluded that the difference between those who lived despite their wasted and afflicted bodies and those who perished was essentially one thing: **meaning, some real or imagined purpose for living** (Glazer et al., 2014).



- Research has demonstrated that stress has important adverse effects on individuals:
  - Stress is related to the development of **health problems** such as cardiovascular, endocrine, and psychological disorders (e.g. Hammen, 2005; Kelly & Ismail, 2015; Steptoe & Kivimäki, 2013).
  - The Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis and its end product, the hormone **cortisol** (‘the stress hormone’) has been considered one of the **main factors that may explain the relationship between stress and health problems** (e.g., Staufenbiel et al., 2013).

- There is considerable evidence associating higher scores on **purpose in life** with **better health**.
  - The probability of developing stress-related disorders such as cardiovascular, endocrine, psychological, and all-cause mortality is lower (e.g., Cohen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Czekierda et al., 2017).
  - People who lack meaningfulness in life are more prone to substance abuse, think about committing suicide, feel less in control of their lives, and feel disengaged, depressed, disconnected, alienated, burned out (Debats, Drost & Hansen, 1995; Mascaro & Rosen, 2008; Newcomb & Harlow, 1986; Pines, 2004b).

- Surprisingly, despite the link between acute stress and cortisol, an association between the perception of overall stress and diurnal cortisol secretion in a healthy population has been observed in some studies but not in others.
  - The **negative effect of stress does not occur in all individuals** (Garrido, 2011; Ouanes et al., 2017).
  - It is possible, therefore, that **certain factors play a protective role** against the negative effects of stress and increases in cortisol levels.

- Having more purpose in life can **mitigate the deleterious effects of stressors**:
  - Studies of community-dwelling older adults indicate that a sense of **purpose, meaning, and engagement** in life may play a **protective** role and facilitate resilient adaptation to life events such as:
    - **socioeconomic** adversity (Chen et al., 2012; Lachman et al., 2010).
    - the **death** of a loved one (Ong et al., 2011, 2010).
    - the onset of a **major illness** (Costanzo et al., 2009; Pudrovskaya, 2010).
- People with higher levels of meaning in life are **less susceptible to strain** than people whose lives are meaningless (Czekierda, Banik, Park, & Luszczynska, 2017; Glazer, Kozusznik, Meyers, & Ganai, 2014).
- Meaning in life can play a **protective role** against the negative effects of stress (Cohen, Bavishi, & Rozanski, 2016).

- Meaningfulness is a complex phenomenon that involves:
  - **Value-related** aspects (i.e. the perception of one's current activities as valuable and important) (Scheier et al., 2006).
  - **Directedness-related** aspects (i.e. having goals and a sense of excitement about one's future) (Glazer et al., 2014; Ryff, 1989).
- People who perceive their life **activities to be valuable and important** show a **healthier secretion of cortisol** in stressful periods (Pulopulos & Kozusznik, 2018).

# MOTIVATIONAL THEORIES SUPPORTING THE BUFFERING ROLE OF MEANINGFULNESS

- Theoretical considerations that help to explain why people who have higher levels of purpose in life are **less susceptible to strain** than those whose lives are meaningless:
  - The self-determination theory
  - The values theory
  - The conservation of resources theory
  - The theory of *sense of coherence*

# Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

- Organizational contexts are able to foster the internalization and **integration of organizational values in the organization's employees.**
- This internalization and integration **increase commitment, effort, effectiveness, creativity, volitional persistence, and assimilation within the social group** (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).
- If individuals perceive their work activities to be **personally meaningful** or congruent with their values and needs, they are likely to be intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000), give more of themselves, become more engaged in them (Kahn, 1990) and **endure despite difficulties.**

# Values theory

- A happy and meaningful life requires one to live **in accordance with one's values** (Peterson et al., 2005) and **true to one's inner self** (Seligman, 2002).
- Two dimensions of human values (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000):
  - Self-enhancement – transcendence // Openness to change – conservation

## Self-enhancement

Power, achievement, hedonism.

The pursuit of self-interest, social status, prestige, control and dominance over resources and people.

The fulfillment of personal desires.

The end goal of achievement is personal success by demonstrating competence according to social standards.

## Self-transcendence

Concern for the **welfare** and interest of others, **beyond the self**, connecting with the work, guided by **principles** (e.g. justice, equality, protecting the environment).

Viewing the world and your own **purpose** in relation to other human beings.

A belief that you can have an **impact** on the world beyond geographical boundaries.



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## Openness to change

**Self-direction** (e.g. choosing one's own goals).  
**Stimulation** (e.g. exciting life) and hedonism.  
**Self-interest:** the pursuit of a varied, exciting, and independent life and enhanced individual quality of life without considering how those pursuits affect others.

## Conservation

**Security** (e.g. national and family security, social order, a sense of belonging), **Conformity** (e.g. politeness and honor), and respect for **tradition**.  
Attempts to conserve one's place in the group without destabilizing the *status quo* and routine.  
The goal of stability and coherence may be conducive to fostering **meaningfulness** in life since they require **connection** with the emotions and circumstances of others.

# The conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2001)

- This theory explains why meaningfulness is important to maintaining well-being under stress.
- There are three types of **resources**:
  - objects (e.g. home, car).
  - personal characteristics (e.g. optimism).
  - conditions (e.g. a good marriage, financial security).
  - energies (e.g. time, knowledge, **meaningfulness** in life).
- Psychological resource gains **improve well-being**, health, and functioning (Gorgievski & Hobfoll, 2008).
- People “strive to obtain, retain, foster and **protect those things they centrally value**” (Hobfoll, 2011, p. 117) in order to maintain meaningfulness in life **when facing threats**.
- Imposing meaning onto events can **protect people against work stressors**.
- Having purpose in life can be one of the **psychological resources** that can serve as building blocks for **stress resilience**.

Meaningfulness in life: a precious energy resource that should be preserved.

# Terror management theory

- The Terror Management Theory (TMT) provides a different perspective on meaning in life. It views the ability to find meaning as central to coping with frightening realities (Pyszczynski, Solomon & Greenberg, 2002). TMT suggests that human abilities to think causally, to anticipate events, and to take the self as an object of attention increase the awareness of the inevitability of death and the ever-present potential for pain and aversive experience (Greenberg *et al.*, 1992). We focus here on the similarities between TMT and meaning in life. According to TMT, two psychological mechanisms might be implemented to manage terror. First, individuals might try to understand and give meaning to the world by defending, affirming, and justifying their cultural worldview to keep their world meaningful and predictable. This approach can help a person gain a sense of value and the promise of symbolic immortality. Second, individuals might try to live up to the standards and values set by one's society and culture, thus increasing self-esteem. Living up to societal standards fulfills a fundamental need for psychological security, which is engendered by humans' awareness of their own vulnerability (Landau *et al.*, 2004). When facing an existential threat, people whose self-concept is, in part, reinforced by an enduring collective identity are likely to feel greater security and less psychological distress (e.g. anxiety; Routledge & Juhl, 2010). In other words, high meaningfulness buffers against the effects of demands (perceived as threats) on strains.
- In the framework of TMT, having meaningfulness in life can help someone mitigate anxiety associated with thoughts of death (Simon *et al.*, 1998). This is because individuals become more connected to a cause, mission, and meaning that can persist and confer a sense of symbolic immortality. Similarly, we anticipate that meaningfulness can help mitigate work-related anxiety associated with thoughts of job insecurity. Like in COR theory, however, losing this sense of meaningfulness will likely exacerbate feelings of inevitable peril, as opposed to its presence facilitating pursuit of life. This type of negative affect has implications for the workplace. For example, Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield (1999) showed that negative affect accounts for 3–5% of variance in deviant organizational behaviors.

# Theory of sense of coherence (SOC)

## (Antonovsky, 1987)

- *Sense of coherence* (SOC) = a pervasive, enduring, though dynamic, feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected.
- Individuals with a strong SOC are characterized by three coping resources:
  - *Comprehensibility*: perceptions of experiences as predictable, understandable, and ordered.
  - *Manageability*: perceptions that you have the resources (personal and social) to cope with the demands.
  - ***Meaningfulness***: feelings that the demands you face in life are challenges worthy of energy investment and engagement (=purposeful).

An **important aspect of coping** with stress (Danvers et al., 2016) that can help to maintain health despite the stress = **mitigate strain** (Strümpfer, 2003).

- Sense of coherence enhances **one's ability to make cognitive sense of the situation**, perceive experiences as **challenges**, and make emotional and motivational sense of demands (Strümpfer, 1995).

- **Resilience**

- The capacity to **get over adversities and recover** from exposure to stressors (Rutter, 1985).
- The capacity to **see the silver lining** in difficult situations.
  - Resilient soldiers were less likely to develop disorders following the experience of life-threatening stressors compared to soldiers with low tolerance for stressors (Maddi, 2005).
- Virtuous circle:
  - A belief that you can learn from stressful experiences and grow builds your resilience (Bonanno, 2004).
  - Appraising stressors as challenges increases resilience (Kozusznik et al 2012).

- **Self-efficacy**

- One's beliefs that one has the power and ability to produce an intended effect or **make a difference** (Bandura, 1977).
- Individuals with high self-efficacy set **high goals** (Lunenborg, 2011).
- Seeing that you can have an **impact** can provide you with the motivation to overcome **challenges** that are important for others, thus providing a **sense of meaning** (Gecas, 1991).

- **Locus of control (LOC)**

- This is a relatively **stable personality trait**, a person's belief about what causes the successes and failures in their life (Ng, Sorensen & Eby, 2006).
- **Internal LOC** = belief that you are solely responsible for what happens to you in life, that you are the **master of your fate** and in **control** of your destiny.
- Meaningfulness requires the feeling that you have the **personal power to act on goals**.
- When individuals feel they are **in control of their destiny**, they can create meaning in life (Frankl, 1963),
- Research shows:
  - Internal LOC positively relates to **purposefulness in life** (Thompson, Coker, Krause & Henry, 2003).
  - Compared to Hungarian nurses with an internal LOC, US nurses with an internal LOC had significantly **less job stress**.

**Great ideas about how  
we can boost  
meaningfulness at  
work, but ...**

**... are we the only ones  
responsible for that?**





# Creating meaningfulness in the workplace

Opportunities at the **job design** level:

- increase **skill** variety, **task** significance (intrinsic motivation), task stimulation, **autonomy**, empowerment.
- offer **resources** people need to get their jobs done.
- **Leadership:**
  - **Clarify goals** for subordinates to fulfill their goals. Engage in practices that focus on creating organizational culture and **identity**.
  - Inspire subordinates to pursue more **complex goals**, foster trust, and create opportunities to **grow**.
  - Develop a belief that you are working for the **greater good** of your team (mission) and that your efforts are being **valued**.
- **Social:**
  - Strengthen **team relationships**; build organizational community with **family-like** dynamics.
- Emphasize the organization's **corporate social responsibility** by providing service for general welfare.

Now it's your turn ...  
Any questions?

