

Pressurised Situation Profiling Tool

Please note, appropriate training is highly recommended before using this tool and the associated solution generation options.

This tool is designed to help people identify and deal with pressurised situations at work that have a negative impact on them. It can be used by individuals or by managers, coaches and practitioners to facilitate discussion and action planning.

The most important action is the development of **Pressurised Situation Profile**, unique to the individual, which summarises and prioritises those situations at work, which have the most negative impact. Thereafter, a range of approaches (practical and psychological) can be used to promote individual resilience and minimise the risk of stress.

The tool has individual, team, management and coaching/therapy applications:

- **Individuals** can use the tool to help them clarify which situations have the greatest impact on them. They then use the follow-up approaches to generate preventive solutions and action plans.
- **Teams** can use the tool as a framework to facilitate discussion around pressurised situations and develop agreed action plans by consensus. The use of an independent facilitator will help maximise the effectiveness of this approach where there are tensions and conflicts.
- **Managers** can use the tool to help them better understand the perspective of individuals (and teams) regarding pressurised situations (demands) at work. They can utilise the follow-up approaches to facilitate action planning and solution generation.
- **Coaches, therapists and practitioners** can use the tool when discussing stress-related situations with clients. The tool will help clarify which situations are having the greatest impact on clients and why. This helps facilitate meaningful discussion and enables clients to prioritise and generate effective solutions to their problems.

Notes for completing a Pressurised Situation Profile

This has 3 stages:

1. 'Brainstorming' examples of Pressurised Situations
2. Ranking your examples
3. Completing your Pressurised Situation Profile

1. 'Brainstorming' examples of Pressurised Situations

The first task is to complete the **Pressurised Situation Examples Table**. The aim of the exercise is to 'brainstorm' or generate as many examples as possible, writing them down as they come to mind, without analysing or evaluating them. There are no right or wrong examples.

This first stage involves the identification of both *Pressurised Situations* and *Pressure Points*. These terms are explained overleaf.

Pressurised Situations

By 'Pressurised Situation' we mean a situation or event that has (or could have) a negative impact on you personally. By 'negative impact' we mean something that makes you feel bad or experience negative emotions e.g. feel down, anxious, stressed, frustrated, angry or upset.

This could be a negative situation or event that:

- *currently* happens e.g. a stressful situation at work;
- *has* happened (where you are concerned it may happen again), or;
- *may* happen in the future (e.g. where you are worried or stressed about the situation occurring and/or how you will cope)

It's important to note that the Pressurised Situation does not need to *actually happen* in order to have a negative impact on you.

Pressure Points

Often Pressurised Situations occur at a particular time (or times). This might be because of some deadline, the way your work is structured or scheduled, or perhaps because of some budgetary time-lines that have to be kept to. For each example you come up with, please write down when the situation typically occurs. If it is something that happens on a regular basis, include something about how frequently (e.g. every month). If it's something you feel happens all the time, write that down too.

So, to summarise, what we would like you to do is: write down in the Pressurised Situation Example Table any/all Pressurised Situations that occur to you and (where possible) when those situations occur.

2. Ranking your Examples

Once you have completed this task, and only when instructed to do so, rank the examples in order of importance as you see them. The *most* important will be the Pressurised Situation that has *the most negative impact on you*. For this example, write the number '1' next to it on your Pressurised Situation Examples Table. The second most important would have the number '2' and so on.

Those Pressurised Situations with the highest ranking (numbers 1,2 etc) are the ones most likely to cause both short and longer term problems, such as illness, absence and poor performance at work.

3. Competing your Pressurised Situation Profile

Once you have ranked the examples in order of importance, you are now in a position to complete most of your Pressurised Situations Profile. Place the information about the highest ranked (most negative impact) Situation in the first row, the information about the second highest in the second row and so on.

There is one additional element you now need to consider; the impact. For each of the Pressurised Situations, we would like you to assess the negative impact on you by giving it a score out of 10, where 10 would be a *severe* negative impact (very severe stress, very upsetting on an ongoing basis, affecting every aspect of your life, causing major wellbeing issues including regular sleep problems); 5 or 6 would be a *moderate* negative impact, and; 1 would be *little or no* impact on you.

Pressurised Situation Examples Table

Pressurised Situation or Event (that has a <i>negative</i> impact)	Pressure Point (when it occurs)

Pressured Situations Profile (Individual)

Rank	Pressurised Situation description: Please describe the situation or event that has (or could have) a negative impact on you. What happens, where, who is involved?	Impact? (out of 10)	Pressure Point: When does (or would) this occur? How frequently?
1 greatest, <i>most</i> <i>negative</i> impact)			
2			
3			
4			
5			
Others?			

Solution Generation Options

Please note, appropriate training is highly recommended before using the solution generation options covered below.

The development of a Pressurised Situation Profile is a vital stage in tackling stress. It should be much clearer now:

- What the individual identifies as pressurised situations
- Which of these are most important and have the greatest impact on them
- How severe that impact may be on them, and;
- When/how frequently these situations occur (or may occur)

There are many approaches that could be taken as next steps to developing solutions or strategies that help to minimise stress and enable the individual to move forward more positively.

The tables on the following pages provide two different types of approach:

1. **Prevention and If-Then Planning** is a more practical, action planning approach. As such, it is probably easier for managers to use this approach when working with individuals or teams.
2. **The ABCDE form** is a more psychological/therapeutic approach in based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Managers should therefore exercise care when using this type of approach with individuals – managers are not therapists. However, an understanding the approach will help managers understand, and respond appropriately to, the negative attitudes or beliefs that people have (including their own).

Using the Prevention and If-Then Planning Form

The idea here is that you write down summaries of the most important pressurised situations in the second column of the form and utilise the right hand column for solution generation. (By all means adapt the form if you require more space e.g. you could have one page for each Pressurised Situation with much more space for preventive and if-then plans.) This approach includes two ways of looking at the pressurised situation to minimise its impact: Prevention and If-then Planning.

Prevention

Firstly, what could you do *proactively* to prevent this situation from occurring (e.g. what steps could you take to avoid this situation developing? What supports could you put in place beforehand to minimise its impact? How could you plan things better - could you reorganise or restructure things or reallocate resources?

Of course, often you can't completely prevent pressurised situations, but there may be things you can do to prevent elements of the situation from occurring.

If you're a manager, this preventive aspect is really important as you may be in a strong position to do something constructively to prevent stress. Wherever possible involve individuals or teams in decisions around the development and implementation of any preventive plans.

If-then planning

The second approach, if-then planning, is based on a powerful psychological approach called **Implementation Intentions**. This has been found to be particularly helpful for reducing anxiety.

If-then plans have the form:

IF [Scenario/Situation] **THEN** [Plan]! (The exclamation mark is important)

The idea is that the individual (or team) thinks through exactly what they will do if/when the Pressurised Situation occurs. The planning part can have both practical and psychological elements. For example, this could include practical steps (which may be agreed within a team or with the manager) to reduce the demands on the individual or team at that point. But there could also be planning around using appropriate coping strategies or self-calming to reduce the stress impact.

The benefits of if-then planning

There are two important benefits of this approach. Firstly, it's a good idea to have a plan, where we know what's going to happen and how we're going to do to deal with a Pressurised Situation. That's plainly sensible management and good planning.

However, the second and most powerful benefit is psychological. Talking through and developing an *Implementation Intention* or if-then plan helps to reduce the anxiety or 'dread' about the event occurring, so minimising its psychological (stress) impact. It's important to remember that very often the stress that people experience is not related to the event itself but from worries or concerns about the event occurring.

There are four keys to increasing the stress management capability of Implementation Intentions or if-then plans:

1. They must be **written down**.
2. If more than one person is involved, they must be **agreed** e.g. within the team, between the manager and the individual.
3. The person or people affected by the situation must be **involved** in the development of any solutions. (Managers may have an important role of course, but their role should be facilitative, not prescriptive.)
4. They need to be **mentally rehearsed** to become truly effective in anxiety or stress reduction. That is, those involved need not just to agree and write down the if-then plan, but also to fully talk it through; to imagine the scenario happening and play it out in their minds. People need to see themselves successfully dealing with the situation in their mind's eye. It's a case of (mental) practise makes perfect.

Using the ABCDE Form (CBT Approach)

This approach, which used the acronym **ABCDE**, is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (or CBT). Further reading around this approach is highly recommended, especially books by psychologist, Martin Seligman, such as ***Learned Optimism*** and ***Authentic Happiness***.

The psychological research and insight from the last century that underpins this approach is essentially that it is our attitudes and beliefs, especially related to negative events (adversity), which determine whether we remain resilient or become stressed.

This is the **ABC** part. In simple terms, when something bad happens (**A**dversity), the way we explain it to ourselves (our **B**eliefs and attitudes about the event) strongly influences how we end up feeling (the **C**onsequences). Seligman showed that the Consequences could be negative (such as feeling depressed) or positive related to whether those explanations, our self-talk, was pessimistic or optimistic.

Pessimistic beliefs are often characterised by Permanent, Pervasive or Personal explanations of negative events, sometimes called the **3P's**. Permanent self-talk often includes the words *always* or *never*. Pervasive explanations are those that over-generalise, covering all kinds of circumstances in every kind of situation. Personal explanations are those involving self blame and taking everything personally.

In CBT, the **D** part is about how the individual challenges (or **D**isputes) their own negative beliefs and attitudes. This is can be done in four broad ways:

1. Looking rationally at the **evidence** (for and against) for the negative beliefs
2. Asking whether there are **alternative** explanations or different ways of looking at the situation
3. Thinking or following through the **implications** of the beliefs, playing it out in your mind (ok, assuming that nightmare scenario did happen, how would it ultimately play out?)
4. Asking whether, ultimately, the beliefs are **useful** (or damaging and destructive).

The **E** part is the 'Energization' that comes from successfully challenging one's own negative beliefs. This may enable the person to feel a bit better about their situation or perhaps simply come to terms with it (e.g. find acceptance). Or it may provide the impetus to help the person to move on and plan for the future more positively and optimistically.

This approach has been found to be particularly helpful in dealing with depression, which is often associated with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, which can come from the combination of negative events and pessimistic beliefs.

Managers should exercise care when using this approach with others. However, the form/approach could usefully be used to aid understanding of self and others (promoting empathy) and to provide insight into why stress and negativity can occur in individuals or teams. The form may also enable the manager to ask good questions.

Pressured Situations 1: Prevention and If-Then Planning

Rank	Pressurised Situation summary	Preventive Actions; If-Then Plans
1		Prevention (Steps that could prevent the situation from occurring)
		If-then plan (What you'll do if/when the situation occurs)
2		Prevention
		If-then plan
3		Prevention
		If-then plan
4		Prevention
		If-then plan
5		Prevention
		If-then plan

Pressured Situations 2: ABCDE Form (CBT Approach)

A	Adversity: Please describe the negative situation or event that has (or could have) a negative impact on you. What typically happens, where, who is involved?	
B	Beliefs: Please write down what you see as the underlying cause(s) of the situation. How does the situation come about, why, how frequently, who or what is responsible?	3P beliefs (Permanent, Pervasive, Personal)?
C	Consequences: Currently, what are the consequences for you of the situation/event and your beliefs about it? (e.g. in terms of how you feel)	
D	Disputation: Please use this space to challenge or 'dispute' your current or routine beliefs? What is the evidence ? Are there alternative explanations? What are the implications of your beliefs? Are they useful to you or are they damaging and destructive?	
E	Energization: What are positive effects that come about from successfully challenging or disputing your beliefs?	