

The Role of Humor in The Workplace

William J. Hisker, Ph.D.

October 25, 2010

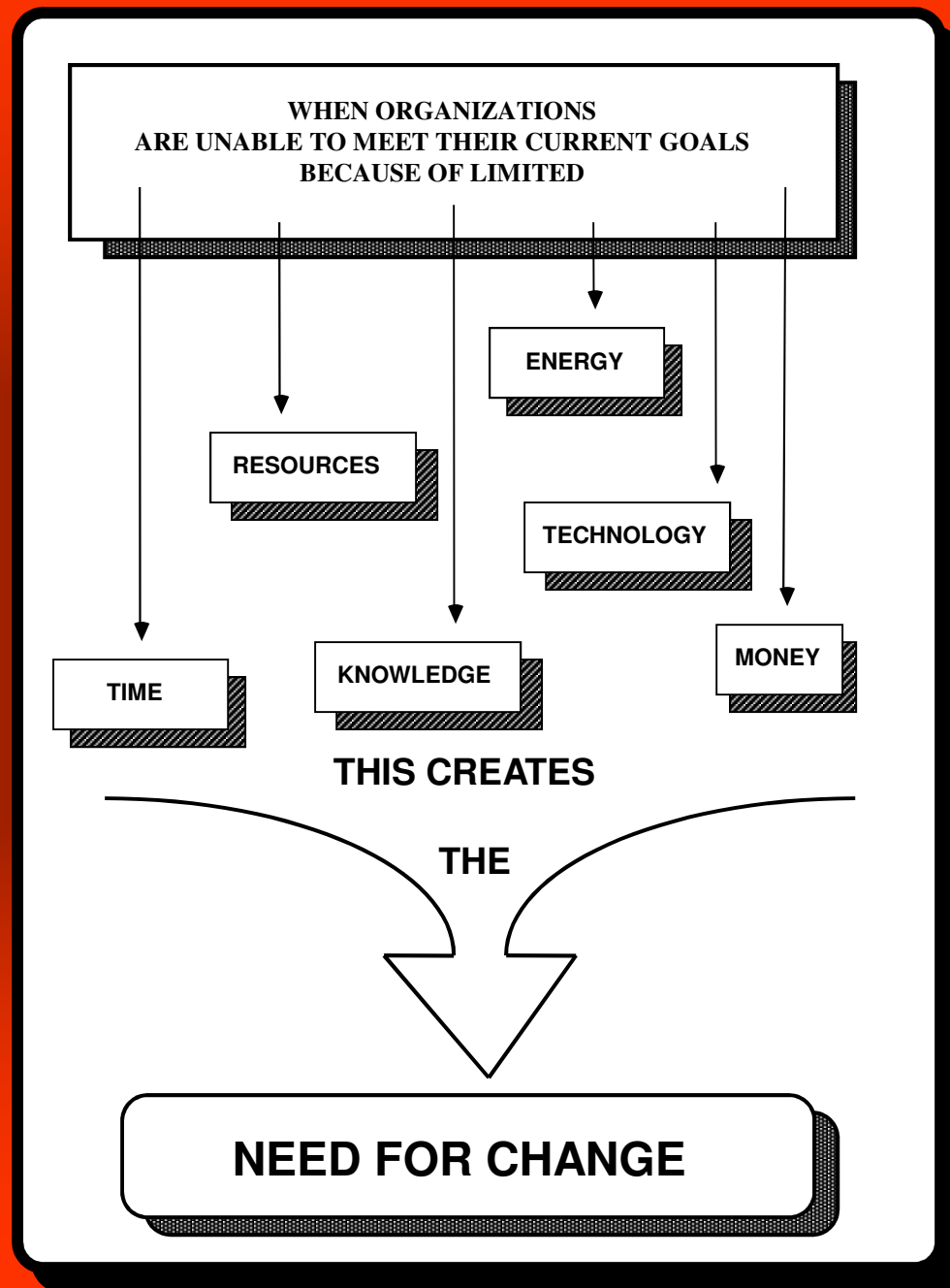
Being Serious About Important
Issues Does Not Imply Lack of
Humor

But

Humor is
Essential for the Effective
Handling of Serious Issues

Organizational
Change

The
Wellspring of
Organizational
Stress



Organizational “Stress Litmus Test”

- Do those suggesting change have the interpersonal skills to deal with the normal resistance that comes with any change? Yes _____ No _____
- Does middle management and the rank-and -file share the same concerns as upper management about the necessity for change? Yes _____ No _____
- Are there clear goals for the proposed change and are there ways to measure progress towards those goals? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Has a logical sequence of activities to achieve the proposed change been communicated to those expected to implement the new processes? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Have those who are expected to implement the change been involved in the planning process for the proposed change? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Are organizational members willing to suspend personal short-term goals for the success of the proposed change? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Does the organization reward risk taking?
Yes _____ No _____

➤ Do the various organizational sub-units have a history of co-operative interactions?

➤ Yes _____ No _____

➤ Are there sufficient corporate resources so that organizational sub-units and individuals will not have to share limited resources to achieve the planned change? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Have organizational members had training in effective team behavior? Yes _____ No _____

➤ Are organizational members committed to life-long learning? Yes _____ No _____

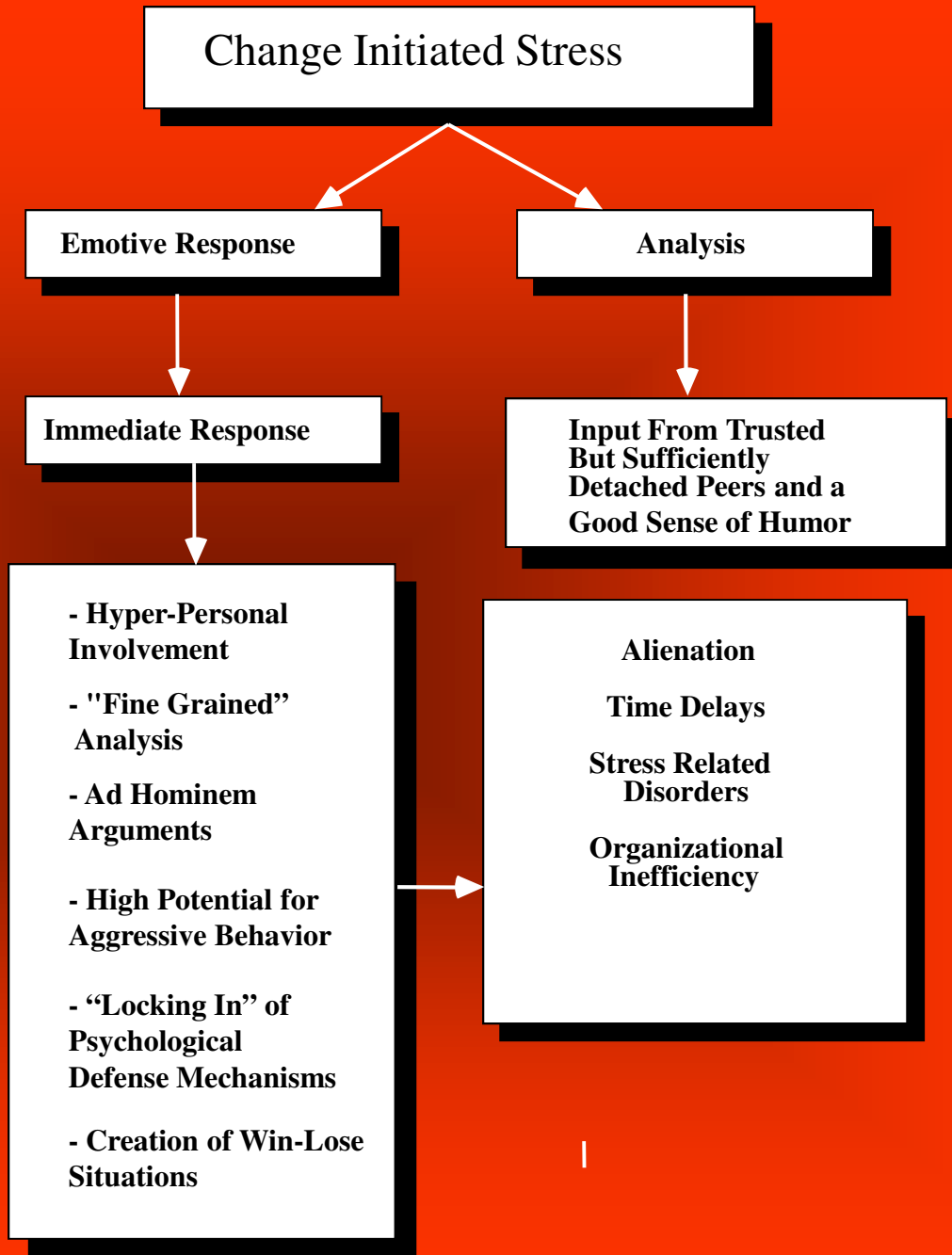
➤ Total: Yes _____ No _____

Scoring

Give yourself one point for each *No* answer

- Zero - I don't know what drug you are on but I want some!!
- Between 1 and 5 - This is the range where effective organizations operate. From your perspective the organization has the capacity and will to manage stress for organizational and personal growth.
- Between 6 and 10 - According to your perspective, the organization probably is not effectively managing stress; and without some attention to the problem cannot remain effective over the long term.
- Eleven - Install metal detectors!

Heuristic for Effectively Managing Organizational Stress



Available Options

Use overt or covert power to force a solution.

Available Options

Share the problem with those involved and find an agreeable solution.

Available Options

Ignore the problem and cope,
recognizing the limits of your
situation...

In other words...

**Never try and teach a
pig to sing...**

**Pigs can't sing, and it
annoys the pig!!**

Available Options

Remove Yourself from the
Situation

Or in other words...

**If
Your
Horse
is
Dead**

Dismount !

**Now some people
just can't bring
themselves to get off
that horse...**

**So if you are one of
them I have a few
suggestions**

- ❖ Say things like, “This is the way we always have ridden the horse.”
- ❖ Appoint a committee to study the horse.
 - ❖ Buy a stronger whip.
 - ❖ Change riders.
- ❖ Arrange to visit other locations to see how they ride dead horses.
 - ❖ Raise the standards for riding dead horses.
- ❖ Appoint a triage team to revive the dead horse.
- ❖ Create a training session to increase our riding ability.
- ❖ Compare the state of dead horses in today’s business environment.

- ❖ **Change your definitions or rules by declaring, “This horse is not dead.”**
- ❖ **Hire outside consultants to ride the dead horse.**
- ❖ **Harness several dead horses together to increase speed and pulling power.**
- ❖ **Declare that “No horse is too dead to beat.”**
- ❖ **Provide additional incentive funding (more sticks – more carrots) to increase the horse’s performance.**
- ❖ **Do a case-study to see if competitors can ride it cheaper.**

- ❖ Purchase a software package or institute a new program to make dead horses run faster.
- ❖ Declare that the horse is “better, faster, and cheaper” dead. Form a quality circle to find uses for dead horses.
- ❖ Revisit the performance requirements for dead horses.
- ❖ Downsize the dead horse.
- ❖ Reassign fault to the dead horse’s last rider.
- ❖ Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.
- ❖ Shorten the track.

- ❖ **Declare the dead horse was “one of the leading horses” in its day.**
- ❖ **Establish benchmarks for industry dead horse leaders.**
 - ❖ **Gather other dead animals and announce a new diversity program.**
- ❖ **Put together a spiffy PowerPoint presentation to get planners to double the dead horse R & D budget.**
 - ❖ **Get the dead horse a web site!**

Humor Users Profile

1

**Enabling
Humor
Users**

3

Black Holes

2

**Disabling
Humor
Users**

Principles For Workplace Humor

- Free The Child
- Pay Attention to Context
- Always Enhance Self Esteem
- Use the Velcro Principle

Most of us miss out on life's big prizes:

.... Employee of the year,

But we are eligible for life's small pleasures:

A pat on the back...A kiss behind the ear...A four pound bass.... A full moon...
An empty parking space...a crackling fire...A great meal...A glorious
sunset...Hot soup...Cold beer...And a hearty laugh at ourselves.

Don't fret about the "stuff" you can't control...Walk
away or freeze-out people and situations that threaten to
destroy you. Don't take yourself too seriously. If you can
learn to laugh at yourself and accept the absurdity of what
life gives you and enjoy its tiny delights...you will have a
long, productive, and more importantly, happier and less
stressful professional life.