

Section 7 Assessment  
CAT 1 - Background Knowledge Probe

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## **Background and Reason for Selecting CAT 1**

For my CAT 7 assignment, I decided to use an upcoming stress workshop that I will be facilitating. The learners / participants have varied knowledge and exposure to stress management. For some this may be their first exposure to the concept and methods of stress management while others may have attended workshops or read books on it.

With a short training period and the diversity of experience with the learners, I selected CAT 1, Background Knowledge Probe so that I may assess the current knowledge and understanding learners have of managing stress. This will provide an opportunity to focus instruction and learning activities on what is most needed as, “Background Knowledge Probes are meant to help teachers determine the most effective starting point for a given lesson and the most appropriate level at which to begin instruction” (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 121).

The Knowledge Probe is in line with teaching goal 16 of having learners, “develop appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits” (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 121). In this case the knowledge and skill set being developed is managing stress which will ultimately help them in achieving their career goals while enhancing personal growth and development. I also like how CAT 1 can be used as a pre-test / post-test learning assessment and it provides learners with an introduction of what will be discussed in the upcoming workshop.

## **Set-up and Supplies**

In following the suggestions by Angelo and Cross, I focused questions on the concepts that the learners will need to know. 1) What stress is, as not everyone will be

able to understand it or articulate it. 2) The causes of stress, so that they can identify stressors or triggers, including their own thought processes. 3) The signs and symptoms of not managing stress, so that they can recognize it in themselves and can react to it appropriately. 4) Techniques to manage stress, so that they can have strategies and skills to be able to manage stress. As such the four Background Knowledge Probe open ended questions selected for the short questionnaire are:

- 1) What is stress?
- 2) What causes stress?
- 3) What are the signs and symptoms of being stressed?
- 4) How can people manage stress?

In order to select instruction and activities that meets the needs of learners, and to begin where the learner is, I decided to hand the questionnaire out prior to the training event. When a participant signs up to attend the workshop they are handed the questionnaire to complete and then place in the large envelope provided. They are told that their responses are anonymous and that they are used to tailor the workshop to their needs and experience with stress management.

## **Results**

Nine have signed up and completed the Background Knowledge Probe questionnaire. It was a bit more time consuming and challenging to analyze the results of this questionnaire compared to previous CATs where I used a likert scale.

Question 1 – what is stress?

None of the respondents were able to define or articulate what stress is. After analyzing their responses, I eventually put them into two categories i) those who equate

or identify stress by what **causes** stress and ii) those who identify it by the **signs and symptoms**. I am pleased that I asked this question as Five out of nine equate stress with their stressors. Four respondents touched on how they felt inside or their physical reaction and were somewhat able to recognize the physical sensations of being stressed.

#### Question 2 – Causes of stress

All nine were able to articulate causes of stress. Although the question was written as a general statement, I had the impression that they were responding to what personally was causing their stress. After reviewing the responses, I managed to organize them into three types of stressors / causes of stress. The first category is time management. Four respondents indicated that this was an issue indicating that what causes them stress is having too much coming at them, too much to do and not enough time. Two of the four mentioned that the time logs that we ask them to complete each week (showing at least 25 hours a week of active job search) causes stress.

The next category I summarized as age related. Four discussed their age with comments such as it is embarrassing looking for work at their age (over 50), they are competing with young people, people interviewing me are younger than my kids, most people my age are retiring and hanging out on the golf course, not looking for work. One of these respondents indicated that their body is falling apart and another said that every time they go to the doctor they tell them they have a new ailment so that they don't want to go to the doctor anymore. This person added doctors under what causes stress.

The third category, indicated by three respondents relates to finances, unable to afford a car to job search and looking shabby, not able to pay the bills and the other indicated not being able to have decent clothes for interviews.

#### Question 3 – Signs and symptoms of stress

The nine respondents had no trouble listing some signs and symptoms of being stressed; however, there are many more symptoms that were not mentioned that they need to be aware of. Eight out of nine indicated some type of emotional symptom, such as wanting to give up, crying, lost my smile, irritable, two mentioned anger, two mentioned not sleeping and two indicated wanting to be alone and having nothing to do with friends. What was surprising is that no one mentioned the physical or mental symptoms. One person mentioned they are eating and drinking more. It was revealing to note that this person also mentioned drinking in how to manage stress.

#### Question 4 – How to manage stress

Four out nine respondents mentioned social aspects such as spending time with friends and family, talking to others in the same situation, and spending time at the center where there are people. Two mentioned that they would treat themselves to something nice, such as pampering, having a pedicure, having their hubby take them out. One mentioned a time management tool, to prioritize, one to walk away when getting angry and another to stay away from bars and drink at home.

#### **What worked**

The administration of the CAT and the results obtained from it worked well. A general Stress Management workshop has already been developed, however, the findings of this CAT can be used to make revisions and additions. I selected CAT 1 as I

thought it would be a good tool to learn where the learners are at and where to begin instruction, as well as what to focus on. It has been an effective tool in doing so. As mentioned previously, none of the respondents were able to articulate what stress is. Four mentioned some type of feeling or physical response. This gives us something to work with. We can use this as a launching pad in understanding that stress is a physiological response and we can have activities that highlight the body's reaction to stress and methods to manage stress such as deep breathing and visualization. They will be able to feel the actual impact that relaxation exercises can have on their body. This can lead into a discussion about taking care of their health and how managing stress and relaxation exercises can enhance physical, emotional and mental health.

I was not sure if I needed to ask the first question on the CAT; however, I am pleased that I did, as five out of nine respondents equate stress with their stressors. This is important to know as they may be of the perception that if I could get rid of \_\_\_\_\_ stressor, then I will no longer be stressed. These participants may view managing stress as beyond their control or that stress is from something that is done to them and can hopefully be avoided. They may not see that stress is an inevitable part of daily life and in of itself, it is not a bad thing to be avoided. The real issue is how they perceive and react to the stressor and their own thought processes.

I liked administering this CAT ahead of instruction. I have time to make revisions and additions based on the findings. For instance, I need to have more emphasis on time and priority management than originally planned. I also need to address the log sheet in the time management discussion and how it can be used for their benefit. Another area that needs to be included is discussion of how they feel about aging and

what they can do to promote positive aging. This was certainly not part of the plan prior to this CAT. The myths of the older worker are addressed in the job search workshops however, it is apparent how much their age is having an impact on their self perception and expectations and that their perceptions and thoughts are causing stress.

An area of need that was identified from this CAT is that there needs to be some assistance in dealing with finances. One idea that would deal with the clothing concerns would be to have a separate workshop on how to dress and make a good first impression on a tight budget. We have recently touched on this by having make-overs that include hairstyling and coloring as well as make up application and paying for the cosmetics and personal grooming supplies. However, this is a onetime thing and they are still responsible to obtain their own interview attire. The participants need help to learn how to dress on a tight budget and perhaps we could combine this with a field trip to one of the many fine second hand clothing stores that are nearby. The other idea to deal with finances in general is to have an outside trainer or consultant come in to help with this piece. Some of the items they could receive guidance on could be living on a budget, dealing with debt, reducing costs, eating healthfully on a budget and reducing transportation costs.

The responses have indicated a lack of knowledge about the diverse mental and physical signs and symptoms of being under stress and there needs to be a fair amount of time on this. There will also need to be a fair amount of time spent on learning about and implementing techniques to manage stress, which will be dispersed throughout the workshop. I will incorporate as many hands on activities as possible so that they can experience the effects for themselves and know how to apply techniques.

Some other areas that became clear to include in the workshop are a discussion about unhealthy and healthy ways to manage stress and deal with emotions. This will include learning about the damaging effects of not finding healthy ways to cope and the benefits to positive aging when they are using effective and healthy ways to manage stress.

### **What didn't work and what I would change next time**

For what didn't work as well, I would say my choice of wording on the questionnaire. For instance I made the questions general - what causes stress, signs and symptoms of stress and methods to manage stress. I mentioned that it appeared that they answered according to their own situation but I could not say for sure as I did not ask that. I think it would have enhanced my understanding of where the learner is at and what they are experiencing if I had personalized the questions. Next time I would word them as what causes you stress, what are your signs and symptoms when stressed and what methods and techniques do you use to manage stress? For the first question, what is stress, I would have them select from a few options that they can choose from that are correct and incorrect. This provides a better understanding of any misconceptions they may have and it would be easier to analyze.

### **References**

Angelo, T., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques*. (2nd ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.