



Last month's edition of the newsletter focused on the effects that stress can have on your body and your thinking. This month, we explore the topic of relaxation and its potential to facilitate effective problem solving as well as to reduce stress.

## **STEERING GROUP:**

The **Defence Thinking Skills Programme Steering Group** has been set up to help direct the programme to apply relevant knowledge to the needs of Defence. You are invited to send any comments, requests or suggestions to the group for consideration. The group is composed of:

- Dr Ross Hall (University of South Wales) Sports Psychology, Academic Manager for the Armed Forces
- Dr Simon Murden (Plymouth University & BRNC) Military Strategy and Learning
- Chris Taylor (Cranfield University) HR/Organisational Behaviour
- Dr Mike Rennie, (CABS, RMCS), Military Psychology
- Maj Jon Oates (JW, JFC) Defence Organisational Learning Strategy
- Maj Nick English (ArmyDiv – and doing a PhD on Thinking for Military Planning)
- Sqn Ldr (Retd) Nick Neal, (RAFD) Course Design
- Lt Kev Anderson (Joint Stress and Resilience Centre) Training Design
- Col Andy Deans (or rep) (D Ed Cap)
- Greg Lupton, MOD Operations Directorate
- Prof Jitu Patel, Dstl, C2 Research Programme/ Prof of Organisation Psychology, University of London Birkbeck College
- Brig Ian Huntley (or rep) CDLM
- Prof Karen Carr (Cranfield University)

## **EXPERIMENT: RELAXATION AS A THINKING AID**

One of the aims of the programme is to address research gaps of particular relevance to Defence Thinking Skills. An experiment is planned to assess the impact of relaxation techniques on our ability to solve convergent and divergent thinking problems in participants with differing cognitive styles. There is some academic support for the idea that some types of thinking skills can be enhanced when in a relaxed state of mind. However, the literature in this area is relatively sparse so this experiment will aim to fill in the gaps and provide more evidence either in support or against this hypothesis. This will help provide



evidence for Defence personnel to decide whether they should use relaxation to help with thinking effectiveness at work. Participants in the study will be assessed as either analytical or intuitive thinkers using the Cognitive Styles Quiz (CSQ) currently on the VLE and will

complete convergent and divergent thinking problems while in differing states of relaxation. Their base-line relaxation will be measured in terms of heart rate and skin conductance levels (Galvanic Skin Response). Half of the participants will be given relaxation exercises before attempting to solve half of the convergent and divergent thinking problems. The experimental design will balance order, practice and participant variables. The results will then be compared to assess whether relaxation can be an effective tool to aid thinking in these conditions. If you are interested in this experiment, please contact Chris Taylor ([c.s.taylor@cranfield.ac.uk](mailto:c.s.taylor@cranfield.ac.uk)).

The majority of people tend to think of relaxation as winding down after a day at work. Everyone does this

## **RELAXATION TIPS TO RELIEVE STRESS:**

differently but commonly it is done by watching TV, reading, playing music or video games. However, this approach is not an effective way of repairing the damage done by stress and although you may feel relaxed in the short-term, it does very little to keep you relaxed in the long-term. There are many techniques that can be incorporated into daily life though that can have a positive long lasting effect on your stress levels. It is important to remember that everyone is different and one relaxation technique that works for one person may not work for another. For starters, everyone reacts to stress in different ways. Some people tend to become more agitated and aggressive whereas others can become quiet, depressed and seek solitude.

One technique that can be used is deep breathing meditation which is a simple and easy to learn technique that is easily practiced anywhere so can be readily included into everyday life. Deep breathing focuses on trying to increase the level of oxygen in your lungs and requires you to take deep breaths from

your abdomen. Tips on how to do this are to sit comfortably and take deep breaths through the nose and exhale slowly through your mouth until all the air from the breath is gone. This technique is so useful as it can be done in just a few minutes literally anywhere and can also be combined with music or anything that you find relaxing.

When people really feel their stress levels rising, they often report the physical effects to be the most debilitating especially when combined with lack of sleep and sore muscles. To help combat this, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) allows you to spot the areas of your body that are being affected by stress. Through systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in the body you can focus on the increased relaxed feeling that is experienced after tensing muscles. There is also no need to limit yourself to just one technique at a time as you can gain additional relaxation when combining this with deep breathing.

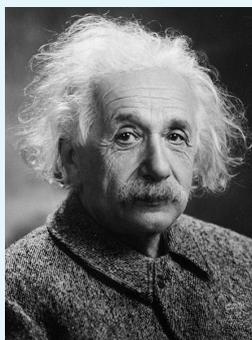
Another technique that can be used for relaxation is the concept of mindfulness. Derived from a Buddhist concept, mindfulness is about trying to be aware of your present feelings and trying to remain calm and focused without thinking about any worries that you may have in the past or in the future. This is more difficult than the two previous techniques mentioned and many people take mindfulness courses in order to maximise its effectiveness. It is important that for cognition to work at its highest output that people must experiment with different relaxation techniques. So try and give a few of these techniques a go as they may just be the answer to tackling the stressful aspects of life.

Please go to <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm> for more information on the relaxation techniques mentioned here as well as others. .

## START TAKING CONTROL STRESS MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE TRAINING PROGRAMME:

**STRESS** is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope. **Resilience** is the ability to adapt successfully in the face of a challenge or adversity. **START Taking Control** is a programme of training designed to deliver the skills and knowledge to individuals to enable them to cope with stress, and build their resilience. It is also designed to provide leaders and managers with further skills to increase their own resilience, be alive to stress and build resilience in their people. It consists of a 1-day **Foundation** module, for everyone in Defence, which introduces the basics of stress management and resilience, and a subsequent 2-day **Practitioner** module, for leaders and managers. In due course, **Advanced Practitioner** and **Stress Manager** Courses will equip appropriate personnel with the skills to implement Stress

and Resilience policy at unit level. All courses are delivered by the **Joint Stress and Resilience Centre** either onsite at the Defence Academy or by arrangement anywhere within the Defence estate globally. For more details, please contact Mrs Laura Deeks ([Ldeeks.cmt@da.mod.uk](mailto:Ldeeks.cmt@da.mod.uk))



**TEASER SECTION:** Last month we asked you to tackle a very difficult problem. The puzzle has several different names and variants such as Einstein's riddle and the Zebra puzzle, due to that many variants ask the solver to find where the Zebra lives. It is reported that the riddle was created by Albert Einstein in the early 19th

century and that only 2% of the world's population could actually solve it. So well done if you attempted to try and solve this and even more well done if you actually managed to solve it. The solution itself is posted in the table below although unfortunately the explanation is too long to include in this newsletter. Therefore, there is a resource on the VLE\* that shows the in-depth working out so if you want to see the logic behind the solution, please check that out.

\*To access the VLE, please go <https://vle.cds.cranfield.ac.uk/>, Click 'Getting Started for Students', login as a guest, click on the 'Thinking Skills' link and then the 'Defence Thinking Skills Programme' link to access the resources.

## JANUARY'S TEASER:

House	1	2	3	4	5
Colour	Yellow	Blue	Red	Green	White
Nation	Norwegian	Dane	Brit	German	Swede
Drink	Water	Tea	Milk	Coffee	Beer
Cigar	Dunhill	Blend	Pall Mall	Prince	Bluemaster
Pet	Cats	Horse	Birds	FISH	Dogs

What is unusual about the following words: revive, banana, grammar, voodoo, assess, potato, dresser, uneven?

As always the answer will be available in next month's newsletter.

## CONTACT US:

If you've enjoyed reading this and wish to be added to the mailing list or have any general feedback, please feel free to contact us ([defac-tsp-admin@defenceacademy.mod.uk](mailto:defac-tsp-admin@defenceacademy.mod.uk))