2024

Navigating embodied self-awareness states to produce work-enhancing adaptive stress responses

Kristina Banfield

NAVIGATING EMBODIED SELF-AWARENESS STATES TO PRODUCE WORK-ENHANCING ADAPTIVE STRESS RESPONSES

A Research Project

Presented to the Faculty of

Pepperdine Graziadio Business School

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Organization Development

---

by

Kristina Banfield

August 2024

This research project, completed by

KRISTINA BANFIELD

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of Pepperdine Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: April 2024

Faculty Committee

Committee Chair, Gary Mangiofico, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Ann E. Feyerherm, Ph.D.

Deborah Crown, PhD, Dean
Pepperdine Graziadio Business School

Abstract

Work-related stress is increasingly problematic for middle managers and executives, leading to escalating problems of burnout, turnover, diminished performance, and compromised well-being. However, given the same stressor, differential outcomes are observable across individuals, ranging from paralysis to agitation, and even enhanced performance. Individuals' responses to stress are strongly influenced by their mental models, physiology, and nervous systems—all of which can be deliberately modulated to promote more adaptive stress responses. The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of their modulated self-awareness states to optimize their stress response for work performance. A purposive sample of 10 senior managers and leaders was interviewed about their experiences of stress and its effects on their work performance. The data were examined using content analysis. Participants associated dysregulated embodied self-awareness with emotional overwhelm, ruminative thinking, and depletion. Modulated embodied self-awareness states were triggered by collaboration, autonomy, and challenging tasks. Modulated embodied self-awareness states improved work performance, effectiveness, and calmness. Restorative embodied self-awareness states included self-awareness, self-expression, and relaxation. These states were triggered by productivity, healthy connections, and positivity. RESA states enhanced work performance, improved connection, and promoted appropriate responses to work-related stressors.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Stress is natural and endemic to life and work, and occurs when an external influence (stressor) acts upon the individual (Friedman, 2015). However, work-related stress can be problematic for middle managers and executives still dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic, the Great Resignation, persistent labor shortages, and return-to-office mandates (Daniel, 2023). A survey of 3400 workers across 10 countries by the Workforce Institute at UKG (UKG, 2023) indicates that 46% of middle managers are intending to quit their jobs within the next 12 months due to work-related stress. Additionally, respondents reported that work-related stress negatively affected their home life (71%), wellbeing (64%), and relationships (62%).

Despite the ubiquity of stress, people experience and respond to stress differently, even when the settings and stressors are rather similar (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; O'Sullivan, 2011; Rudland et al., 2020). For example, in the event of a looming deadline, some individuals spring into action and deliver their best performances while others slip into paralysis. These differing psychological, physiological, and behavioral reactions are strongly influenced by individuals' mental models, physiology, and nervous system which, in turn, are influenced by the individuals' genetic makeup, predispositions, life experiences, and resources (Gandhe, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2003; Rudland et al., 2020; Selye, 1956).

Fogel (2020) defined three states of embodied self-awareness to reflect how the individual is paying attention to their inner and outer experiences. These embodied states of self-awareness affect the individual's overall physiological state, which in turn, influences their perceptions and reactions (Fogel, 2020; Porges, 2001). In a dysregulated

embodied self-awareness state (DESA), the individual exhibits distress responses including fight, flight, freeze, or fawn reactions (Porges, 2001; Fogel, 2020; Selye, 1984) which can produce swift and effective action (e.g., leaping out of the way of an oncoming car) but also may produce a range of adverse outcomes (e.g., damage to a relationship following a rageful outburst). In contrast, in a restorative state, individuals exhibit deep calm and quieting of the mind, enabling rest and recovery. In a modulated state, the individual exhibits an adaptive response to the stressor, characterized by high performance, focus, and productive responses to the stressor. These states influence important cognitive activities such as perception of the stressor (e.g., whether the stressor is a threat or an inspiring challenge) as well as the specific stress response—such as being vigilant and aware (indicating an adaptive stress response) versus being hypervigilant and less aware (indicating a maladaptive response). Developing the capacity to identify and navigate one's states of embodied self-awareness would constitute an important capability when it comes to accurately and adaptively perceiving work-related stressors and responding to these stressors in a way that optimizes work performance. Examining how managers navigate embodied self-awareness stages to optimize their stress response and work performance is the focus on this study.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of navigating embodied self-awareness states to produce performance-enhancing adaptive stress responses during work performance. All three embodied self-awareness states will be examined (i.e., dysregulated, modulated, restorative). The research questions were:

1. To what extent have participants experienced the states of dysregulated, modulated, and restorative embodied self-awareness?

2. What triggered each state and how did they navigate among the states?

3. How did each state affect them and their performance?

Significance of the Study

This study produced timely insights to aid managers, a workforce population under significant stress and in need (Daniel, 2023; UKG, 2023), in moving among and between the embodied self-awareness states to promote effective responses to stress as well as rest as needed. Specifically, by illuminating how managers navigate their self-reported embodied self-awareness states to manage stress, recommendations and best practices may be identified that could inform how these states could be more deliberately managed to produce adaptive stress responses. This is an important contribution to literature, given that much of the currently available research on embodied self-awareness states discusses approaches to enter restorative states through modalities such as yoga and dance (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2020; Kogler, 2020). Illuminating how to move from dysregulated states to modulated states in order to heighten performance and productivity would have extensive applicability in work settings. Furthermore, while extensive attention has been given to distress and maladaptive responses (Selye, 1955, 1956, 1984; Levine, 1997; Gande, 2014), stress can be harnessed for enhanced performance (Rudland, 2019). This study provided insights about how adaptive stress responses may be produced in work settings using the tools of embodied self-awareness.

Definitions

Distress: the outcome of perceiving a stressor as an obstacle or hindrance and reacting in ways that increase negative outlook and affect, often including maladaptive behaviors and adverse outcomes (Howard, 2016; Rudland et al., 2020).

Dysregulated embodied self-awareness (DESA): a somewhat frequent state of limited awareness of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations and associated with Porges's (2001) sympathetic (hyperactive) or dorsal vagal (hypoactive) states (Kogler, 2020; van der Kolk, 2015).

Embodied self-awareness: a particular way of paying attention (Blake, 2022) involving a felt-sense way of knowing one's experience through sensation and movement, rather than a descriptive way of knowing through language and ideas. Embodied self-awareness also is described as present moment experiencing of sensations that arise from within the body (Fogel, 2020).

Eustress: the outcome of perceiving a stressor as a growth-oriented challenge or opportunity and reacting in ways that increase positive outlook and affect, often including adaptive behaviors and productive outcomes (Howard, 2016; Rudland et al., 2020).

Modulated embodied self-awareness (MESA): a frequent state of sympathetic nervous system activation characterized by productive, fast-paced, task-related thoughts and behaviors (Fogel, 2020).

Parasympathetic nervous system (PNS): part of your autonomic nervous system which controls functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, urination and sweating, reproduction, and others (Cleveland Clinic, 2023a). The PNS controls and relaxes the body's responses during times of rest. The PNS uses 4 of 12 cranial nerves—including the vagus nerve, which comprises 75% of the overall PNS.

Restorative embodied self-awareness (RESA): a rather infrequent and deeply restful state of parasympathetic nervous system activation characterized by a focus on present-moment emotions and bodily sensations (Fogel, 2020).

Stress: the process of an external influence acting upon the individual and the individual's appraisal of the influence, their reaction, and the effect of their reaction.

Stress response: the individual's experience of cognitive and physiological arousal in response to a stressor (Howard, 2016).

Sympathetic nervous system (SNS): a network of nerves that helps the body activate the stress response—whether as a result of a threat, strain (e.g., exercise), or illness. The SNS acts to increase heart rate, breathing ability, improve eyesight, and slow down less essential processes such as digestion, immunity, and reproduction (Cleveland Clinic, 2023b).

Sympathetic state: one of three nervous system states outlined in Porges's (2001) Polyvagal Theory. In this state, the sympathetic nervous system is activated and individual exhibits a fight or flight response.

Ventral vagal state: one of three nervous system states outlined in Porges's (2001) Polyvagal Theory. In this state, the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, the dorsal vagus nerve is relaxed, and the individual is at rest.

Organization of the Study

This chapter described the background of the study, presented the study purpose, and described the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the study. Theory and research on the human stress response and embodied self-awareness are reviewed. Chapter 3 describes the methods that will be used in this study, including the research design and procedures for recruiting participants, ethical considerations, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 will report the study findings. Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of navigating embodied self-awareness states to optimize their stress response for work performance. This chapter provides a review of literature that informed the present study. Theory and research on their stress response are reviewed first, beginning with a definition of stress, followed by a discussion of the mental and physiological effects of stress and the implications of stress for performance. Research on adaptive stress responses is then reviewed and approaches for cultivating an adaptive stress response for work performance are outlined. Next, theory and studies on embodied self-awareness are reviewed, including its definition and a description of the three main states of embodied self-awareness defined by Fogel (2020).

Human Stress Response

Introduction of an actual or perceived stressor ignites a cascade of responses within the human body, which have implications for the individual's perceptions and cognitions, emotions, and physiology (Selye, 1955). Central to the stress response is the autonomic nervous system, which operates involuntarily to help maintain homeostasis of the body's circulatory, respiratory, digestive, excretory, and glandular systems; body temperature; endocrine hormone secretions; and cellular function of the immune system (Howard, 2016)**.** The autonomic nervous system also is involved in detecting stressors and coordinating the stress and relaxation responses (Blake, 2022). In this way, the autonomic nervous system differentiates safety and danger and then creates a correspondence between the body's activation and what is it sensing in the environment (Porges, 2004, 2009).

When a stressor is detected, the amygdala sends signals to both the prefrontal cortex, which regulates thoughts, emotions, behavior, and the hippocampus, which stores memory and learning, for the purpose of determining the nature of the stressor (Friedman, 2015). In conditions of elevated distress, the prefrontal cortex is impaired in forming working memory or providing accurate feedback to the amygdala. The result is a "primitive, less informed, and less nuanced" interpretation and reaction to a stressor (Friedman, 2015, p. 13). For example, one study of healthcare workers found that creative work was significantly disrupted under conditions of distress (Anjum & Zhao, 2022). Other effects of distress include sleep disturbances, anxiety disorders, dysphoria, and restlessness (Edwards et al., 1998). In contrast, emotions associated with eustress include excitement, joy, hope, positive affect, vigor, meaningfulness, manageability, and satisfaction (Moseley, 2018; Nelson & Simmons, 2011).

The aim of their stress response is to restore and maintain homeostasis under conditions of stress (Russell & Lightman, 2019). Seyle (1955, 1984) conceptualized stress as occurring in three stages (alarm, adaptation, exhaustion) in his theory of general adaptation syndrome. In the first, stage, the hypothalmic-pituitary-adrenal axis is activated to release hormones that prepare the body to respond (see Table 1). The hormones released in this stage are designed to ignite a quick response to the stressor through physical impacts of increased blood pressure, heart rate, and glucose levels while immune function, growth, digestion, and reproduction are reduced. Moreover, the brain is stimulated, and blood is diverted to the large muscles (Friedman, 2015). Following resolution or removal of the stressor, cortisol triggers the hypothalamus to reduce production of corticotropin-releasing hormones, thus returning physiological functioning to normal levels.

The second stage, adaptation, begins if the stressor is not resolved or removed. In this stage, elevated hormone levels persist, leading to ongoing brain stimulation, diversion of blood toward large muscles, and the depression of secondary physiological systems. As this stage persists, the risks for fatigue, memory lapses, problems with concentration, and irritability increase (Selye 1955, 1984). The third stage, exhaustion, occurs when the stressor continues to persist. In this stage, glucose levels decline as adrenal function becomes depleted and progressive mental and physical exhaustion, illness, and total collapse follow.

Table 1

Hormones Released During Stress

Neural Structure	Hormone Released	Outcome
Hypothalamus	Corticotropin-releasing hormone	Pituitary gland is triggered to release hormones
Pituitary gland	Adrenocorticotropin	Adrenal gland is triggered to release hormones
Adrenal gland	Epinephrine	Blood pressure and heart rate increase; blood is diverted to large muscles
	Norepinephrine	Blood pressure and heart rate increased; glycogenolysis and lipolysis occur to create energy; Bronchial smooth muscles are relaxed to expand airways
	Cortisol	Stimulates release of glucose to fuel the brain and muscles; Curbs nonessential biological functions (e.g., immune response, growth process, digestion, reproduction). Following removal of the stressor, also is involved in the feedback loop to shut down the stress response after the threat has passed

Note. Original table based on content from "The Human Stress Response," by M. J. Friedman, 2015, in N. C. Bernardy & M. J. Friedman (Eds.), *A Practical Guide to PTSD Treatment: Pharmacological and Psychotherapeutic Approaches.* Copyright 2015 by the American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14522-002

When occurring over short durations and in response to threat, the stress response is appropriate and beneficial for promoting survival (Russell & Lightman, 2019). However, a persistent stress response erodes any beneficial survival effects, as long-term exposure to cortisol hormones leads to a wide spectrum of problems, including metabolic syndrome, obesity, cancer, mental illness, cardiovascular disease, and increased susceptibility to infections.

Implications of Stress for Work Performance

Various stressors are present in the workplace, such as "burdensome work policies, conflicts with others, and job insecurity," among others (Anjum & Zhao, 2022, p. 2). When individuals perceive these as threats or hindrances, a sense of distress grows (Rudland et al., 2020). Distress at work has been associated with a wide range of significant and adverse impacts, including diminished job satisfaction and wellbeing, increased morbidity and sense of burnout, and even psychopathology and mortality (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Le Fevre et al., 2003). Crum et al. (2013) noted that stress has been implicated in nearly every type of mental and physical illness. Atkinson (2000) reported that 60% of all workplace absences in the UK are attributed to stress. Unhealthy behaviors such as bullying and maladaptive organizational cultures also tend to emerge alongside elevated workplace distress (Anjum & Zhao, 2022; Rudland et al., 2020). Friedman (2015) noted that exposure to threatening situations—such as workplace bullying and toxic organizational cultures—activates fear conditioning. Given the effects of stress on cognition, emotion, and physiology (Friedman, 2015), distress in the workplace can compromise interpersonal interactions, information processing, creativity, all of which can compromise performance (Rudland et al., 2020).

In contrast, when individuals perceive a stressor as a healthy challenge—such as in the case of a promotion, a new job, or a difficult stretch goal, a positive, growth-oriented psychological state of engagement is more typical, indicating the experience of eustress (Anjum & Zhao, 2022). In these cases, the presence of the stressor at just the right level of challenge can enhance cognitive performance—in contrast to a stressor that presents too little challenge (thus, failing to engage the individual) or an overwhelmingly challenging stressor (which would trigger distress and performance impairment; Rudland et al., 2020). In addition to performance enhancement, eustress has been associated with improved wellbeing, self-development, positive emotions and innovative attitude, improved motivation, and increased work quality (Anjum & Zhao, 2022; Ganhe, 2014). Similarly, Crum et al. (2013) observed that the role that stress plays in mental and physical health often is overlooked. Moseley (2018) added that more research is needed to differentiate the nature and impacts of eustress and distress in the workplace.

Cultivating an Adaptive Stress Response for Work Performance

Allostasis, or an adaptive stress response, refers to having a flexible response to stressors such that the body can rather smoothly and rapidly reset its physiological stress response and return to homeostasis (Howard, 2016). While an adaptive stress response features the stages and physiological reactions of a traditional stress response, the enhanced adaptability in the individual's emotional and behavioral responses means that the individual tends to have expanded coping skills (Avero, Corace, Endler, & Calvo, 2003; Endler & Parker, 1990), resilience (Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2003), and metacognition (Cartwright-Hatton & Wells, 1997).

Two key factors influence whether an adaptive stress response can be cultivated. The first factor concerns the nature of the stressor itself and the total cognitive load it

imposes (Rudland et al., 2020). For example, an isolated stressor may involve limited challenge and consequently be perceived as manageable, leading to an ability to swiftly move through the stress response and return to homeostasis. However, when multiple stressors are present, the challenges tend combine and be additive, potentially producing an intolerable level of stress (Rudland & Wilkinson, 2018), resulting in distress and precluding an adaptive response.

The second factor concerns the individual's conscious and subconscious moderation of the stressor (Rudland et al., 2020). This includes interpreting the stressor either as (a) a hindrance, generally leading to distress and maladaptive outcomes or (b) a surmountable challenge, generally leading to eustress and performance enhancement (Blascovich et al., 1999; Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Hargrove et al., 2013; Hattie, 2008). Examination of the literature suggests that six factors influence whether the individual will gauge a stressor a hindrance or challenge:

1. Appraisal: the individual's assessment of how important it is to deal with the stressor and whether it is possible for them to cope with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).
2. Motivation: the individual's desire to achieve the larger objective the stress obstructs or challenges (Rudland et al., 2020).
3. Situational complexity: the number of people, objectives, and general amount of activity reflected in the domain of the stressor and related goal (Rudland et al., 2020).
4. Mindset: the individual's attitude regarding stress, where beliefs that stress is destructive promotes distress and maladaptive outcomes while beliefs that

stress can be beneficial promotes adaptive responses and outcomes effects (Jamieson et al., 2013; Keller et al., 2012).

5. Personality traits: personality-based predispositions to responding positively or negatively to stressors. For example, Kung and Chan (2014) found that perfectionism can predispose individuals to distress and maladaptive responses, whereas resilience predisposes individuals to perceive stressors as challenges and exhibit positive responses to stressors.
6. Coping strategies: strategies and tolerance for handling distress (Dunn et al., 2008). Rudland et al. (2020) warned, however, that using terminology of "coping" primes a distress-oriented interpretation.

Rudland et al. (2020) added that when a stressor is evaluated to be a challenge, hormones are released in healthy and manageable doses, yielding a productive level of alertness that "improve[s] mental function, boost[s] memory, and speed[s] up brain processing" (p. 41). It follows that deliberately managing one's evaluation and moderation of a stressor may produce an adaptive response that improves work performance.

Rudland et al. (2020) added that when one is able to cultivate an adaptive stress response, stress-related growth can follow, which in turn is crucial to transformative change as it relies on an "emotional episode of prompting engagement through internal dissonance. Optimizing stress for work performance means utilizing challenges as an opportunity to ignite eustress by savoring, attending to, and appreciating positive experiences at work (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Moseley (2018) added that doing so can increase positive work engagement. The next section provides a more in-depth discussion of the individual's experiences of stress and how adaptive stress responses may be cultivated, using the lens of embodied self-awareness.

Embodied Self-Awareness

Embodied self-awareness refers to a particular way of paying attention, involving the ability to pay nonjudgmental attention to present-moment sensation, movement, and emotions (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2009). Blake (2022) elaborated that embodied self-awareness involves a felt-sense way of knowing one's experience through sensation and movement, rather than a descriptive way of knowing through language and ideas. In turn, experiences are felt directly as arising from within the body without intervening thought (Fogel, 2009). Blake (2022) added that embodied self-awareness could be understood as a phenomenological experience wherein one's tacit, felt-sense, embodied knowledge of moment-by-moment experience is brought into conscious awareness.

Blake (2022) added that people's mental, emotional, and physical states are heavily affected by embodied self-awareness. A review of literature on embodied self-awareness indicates that cultivating this ability provides many benefits. For instance, enhancing embodied self-awareness can reduce chronic pain, increase emotional awareness, reduce emotional reactivity, support healthier movement patterns, and release and heal the effects of trauma (Craig, 2003, 2015; Levine & Frederick, 1997; Mehling, 2016; Mehling et al., 2014; Myers, 2014; Payne, Levine, & Crane-Godreau, 2015; Schliep, Findley, Chaitow, & Huijing, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2015). It also appears that as a person's embodied self-awareness grows, their sense of connectedness within themselves and with others also increases (Blake, 2018; Fogel, 2009, 2021). This concept aligns with interpersonal neurobiology, which is premised on the proposition that individuals' internal physiological states unconsciously affect others (Barsade, 2002; Gallese, 2001; Iacoboni, 2009; Jospe et al., 2018; Siegel, 1999), implying that embodied self-awareness may be a critical component of how people help each other learn, grow,

and change. Furthermore, embodied self-awareness cultivates needed skills and capacities for navigating life and demonstrating leadership (Blake, 2022).

Fogel (2020) created a taxonomy of three particular states of embodied self-awareness: dysregulated, restorative, and modulated. Based on his conceptualization, each state is a unique phenomenological experience associated with differential physical, mental, and emotional outcomes. The following sections describe each embodied self-awareness state in detail.

Dysregulated Embodied Self Awareness

Dysregulated embodied self-awareness (DESA) is a frequently experienced state (Kogler, 2020; Van der Kolk, 2015) wherein the individual feels out of control in some way—whether this leads to agitation (indicating hyperarousal) or lethargy (indicating hypoarousal; Blake, 2022). The reason the observable manifestation of DESA can vary dramatically from one person to another stems from differences in how people respond to difficult situations.

Implications and effects of dysregulated embodied self-awareness. DESA is associated with activation of the sympathetic nervous system and/or the dorsal vagus nerve, consistent with Porges's (2001) sympathetic *fight or flight* or dorsal vagal *freeze and shutdown* stages, reflecting a maladaptive distress response. Accordingly, the recognition, processing, and integration of emotions become suspended (Aposhyan, 2004; Fogel, 2009, Ogden et al., 2006; Rosen & Brenner, 2003), and the resulting avoidance of felt experience and connection with oneself soon leaves the individual overwhelmed with emotions and bodily sensations (Fogel, 2020). The DESA state tends to distort people's mental and physical functions as well as their awareness of their bodies (Fogel, 2009; Quadt, Critchley & Garfinkel, 2018; Savitz & Harrison, 2018).

While in DESA, individuals commonly experience “chronic states of physical and emotional discomfort, disassociation, fatigue, hopelessness, despair, depression, shame, self-consciousness, anxiety, addictive urges, and extreme highs and lows” (Fogel, 2020, pp. 42-43), along with ruminative thinking (Blake, 2022)—all of which indicate internalizing behaviors (Fogel, 2020). As negative self-talk becomes a repetitive narrative, judgmental thought patterns, indecision, suicidal thoughts, worrying, blaming, and mental confusion flourish (Fogel, 2020). Due to the nervous system activation (i.e., sympathetic nervous system and/or dorsal vagus nerve), DESA also produces adverse impacts on various physiological functions, such as hormonal, immune, and digestive functions (Fogel, 2020; Jungmann et al, 2016; Levine, 1997; Ogden et al., 2006; Porges, 2001; Schore, 2003; Van der Kolk, 2015).

In other words, while in DESA, both the mind and body become overworked. If the individual is experiencing sympathetic hyperactivation during the DESA state, muscle tension, physical hostility, restlessness, aimlessness, and the tendency for risk-taking rise (Fogel, 2020; Levine, 1997; Porges, 2004). If the individual is experiencing dorsal vagus nerve activation during the DESA state, fearfulness, apathy, losing one’s train of thought, exhibiting a vacant gaze, and feeling numb and confused are common (Fogel, 2020; Levine, 1997; Porges, 2004, 2009). In cases where both systems are activated (whether simultaneously or in turns), a confusing mixture of both agitated and apathetic behaviors can emerge (Howard, 2016).

Regardless of the individual’s particular manifestation of DESA, the layers of unsettling emotions and sensations can leave the individual with self-doubt (Fogel, 2020). Howard (2016) added that the combating drives associated with simultaneous sympathetic and parasympathetic activation hinder the individual’s will to socialize as

"hostility, power assertion, withdrawal, or passivity" (Fogel, 2020) override their desire and ability to connect with others.

If an individual persists in a DESA state for an extended period, the agitation and apathy may result in harm to oneself or others (Fogel, 2020). Work performance also tends to be compromised when in DESA states due to burnout and exhaustion that commonly occur with DESA. Moreover, the sense of disconnection from others characteristic of DESA states undermines the natural human desire and experience of belonging and wellbeing (Alexander 2008; Capcioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Hari, 2019; Sorajjakool et al., 2008). Given that humans tend to mirror their environments, a contagion effect also occurs where one person's DESA state can have a ripple effect on others, throwing them into a similar DESA state, thus, multiplying the adverse intrapersonal and interpersonal effects described in this section (Iacoboni, 2009).

Despite its adverse outcomes, DESA states reflect a common human experience that can be utilized for deepening self-understanding and spurring personal growth (Kogler, 2020). Kogler (2020) explained that DESA states offer individuals the opportunity to recognize discomfort in the body; learn to identify the presenting sensations, thoughts, and emotions associated with the discomfort; and develop the ability to tolerate these long enough to discover the authentic and often deeper thoughts and emotions fueling the discomfort. Recognizing one is in a DESA state also can help the individual recognize what they are (and are not) able to tolerate physically, mentally, and emotionally. In turn, having gone beyond their tolerance point (indicated by being in DESA), they gain an opportunity to practice self-acceptance and self-regulation in the midst of daily life. Developing these capacities becomes powerful antidotes to the typical

experiences of shame, agitation, and anxiety characteristic of DESA states (Fogel, 2020; Van der Kolk, 2015).

Emergence and regulation of dysregulated embodied self-awareness. Emergence of the DESA state begins with stressors triggering the mind, the body, or both. Such stressors could occur in personal or professional domains and range from positive events (e.g., a decision to exercise or tackle a challenging work task) to negative events (e.g., negative feedback at work, a personal attack). While experiencing a stressor does not mean the individual will enter a DESA state, this state is more likely to occur when the individual lacks the mental, emotional, or other resources to adaptively respond to the stressor. In such cases, the individual experiences difficulty attending to their present-moment experiences and sensations. Both the individual's sympathetic and dorsal vagal states (Porges, 2001) are activated and the individual surrenders to rumination, amplified sensations, isolation, and fear as a persistent agitation or lethargy unfolds (Fogel, 2020).

Researchers have examined interventions for regulating DESA, including bilateral therapies, the Rosen Method, sensorimotor psychotherapies, somatic psychotherapy, somatic experiencing, mindfulness-based therapy (Fogel, 2009), yoga, and meditation (Kogler, 2020). These interventions have been found to aid individuals in recognizing and integrating their bodily sensations. Notably, these modalities are practitioner-led, making administration of the intervention an important first step in reversing the sense of isolation characteristics of DESA. Ultimately, when DESA is resolved, the opposite pole of embodied self-awareness may be reached. This opposite state is called restorative embodied self-awareness (RESA) and is discussed in the next section.

Restorative Embodied Self-Awareness

During RESA, the individual enters a period of rest, characterized by a ventral vagal state (Porges, 2001) wherein the dorsal vagus nerve is relaxed and the parasympathetic nervous system is activated. Accordingly, the individual experiences a psychological and physiological sense of safety. Relaxation begins and the individual's attention turns to their present-moment awareness, emotions, and bodily sensations (Fogel, 2020, 2021). Fogel (2020) added that feelings of sadness, happiness, excitement, and hopelessness tend to be more heartfelt while in RESA as sensations associated with these emotions are genuinely felt in the whole body. As present-moment awareness rises, logic and rational thought slows and subsides, allowing for a deeper and more meaningful sense of being in one's body, along with a deeper sense of calm, connection with one's self and spirituality, and surrender to the unknown (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2009). In essence, the body is free to vividly feel through simply being (Fogel, 2020) due the individual feeling seen, heard, and secure.

Implications and effects of restorative embodied self-awareness. RESA states facilitate deep repair of the mind and body in several ways. First, RESA states allow individuals to develop their ability to sense themselves more accurately so that they more adaptively respond to stressors and modulate their self-awareness (Blake, 2018; Fogel, 2021; Silsbee, 2018; StrozziHeckler, 1993, 2014). Second, RESA states empower individuals to accept what is within their lives—including both overwhelming and underwhelming experiences and to create a meaningful connection with those experiences. This process of integrating all experiences leads to an enhanced sense of peacefulness (Bernard, 2016; Fogel, 2020; Rosen & Brenner, 2003). In so doing, RESA states aid individuals in becoming truly present and calm. Third, autonomic, hormonal,

and immune systems flourish during the soothing vulnerability of RESA states, evidenced by muscle relaxation and release of tension, sighing, responsiveness to touch, gurgling sounds in the belly, and softer facial expressions (Fogel, 2011). Fourth, RESA states are associated with increased openness to interpersonal interaction, which tends to reflect "somatic resonance and deep states of connection" (Fogel, 2020, p. 41) as the individual becomes more receptive to social engagements without second guessing how they are being perceived or received by other people. Due to the multiple positive effects associated with RESA states, Fogel (2020) argued that RESA makes sustainable healing possible.

Cultivation and regulation of restorative embodied self-awareness. Individuals enter RESA in a variety of ways, including a pathway of first experiencing, recognizing, and regulating a DESA state (Fogel, 2020). Initial emergence of RESA typically is evidenced by sustained present-moment felt experience, non-conceptual thought in the form of evocative words and images that support presence and calm, and activation of the parasympathetic system (demonstrated, for example, by sighing, yawning, stretching).

Often, a RESA state is cultivated through modalities that stimulate a relaxation response, such as meditation, yoga, dance (Braun & Kotera, 2021; Fogel, 2021), authentic movement dance, gardening, intimate partnerships (Fogel, 2021; Maister, Hodossy, & Tsakiris, 2017), spiritual practice, or sports and exercise (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2020). Individuals can engage in these activities by themselves or with others. Engaging the help of a professional skilled in facilitating RESA states also can help individuals through the process of identifying and overcoming any personal obstacles to reaching a RESA state (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2011). Helpful professionals may include those trained

in mindfulness, psychotherapy, body psychotherapy, body-based coaching, Rosen Method Movement (Fogel, 2020), yoga (Kogler, 2020; Fogel, 2020), and somatic coaching or psychotherapy (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2009).

Despite the many powerful benefits of RESA states, it is important to note that a persistent RESA state is neither advisable nor desirable. Specifically, the human body is built to experience both parasympathetic and sympathetic states (Blake 2022; Fogel, 2009; Porges, 2004, 2009). Whereas parasympathetic states are important for rest and healing, sympathetic states are important for satisfying lifestyle demands of work and play. Thus, it is important to develop an awareness of when and how to switch out of a RESA state to accomplish tasks at hand (Fogel, 2020; Howard, 2016; Kogler, 2020; Porges, 2009). The next section describes the modulated embodied self-awareness (MESA), the final type of embodied self-awareness which aids the individual in switching between DESA and RESA.

Modulated Embodied Self-Awareness

Modulated refers to moving between the poles of DESA and RESA as needed. During MESA states, the sympathetic state is highly activated causing a lot of excitement in the nervous system, resulting in productive, joyful, and focused engagement in activities (Fogel, 2020). Although MESA is a highly active and vigilant state, the individual's muscles nonetheless become partially relaxed on a surface level, breathing becomes more fluid without pause, and the individual is less frantic and more slowed down, with a softer gaze and occasional eye contact as compared to DESA states (Fogel, 2020). Fogel (2020) summarized that the body is in movement with its environment with more ease.

In this so-called in-between state, the individual maintains deliberate, conscious embodiment (more characteristic of RESA) while maintaining a task focus (more characteristic of DESA; Blake, 2022). Fogel (2020) characterized the MESA state as having the skill to be productive yet conscious of one's actions. In other words, frequent yet brief moments of RESA enable the individual to bring presence to the tasks on which they are focusing (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2020). Fogel (2020) proposed that MESA may be a preferred state, as it suggests the individual is experiencing more awareness and mind-body connection on an ongoing basis than they would by in DESA, even if their DESA states are separated by periods in RESA.

Implications and effects of modulated embodied self-awareness. Individuals in MESA states report experiencing moments of grounding where they make deliberate choices to take a breath, notice themselves reconnecting with themselves, or welcome connection with another person (Fogel, 2020). Moreover, Fogel (2020) reported that individuals may feel more alive, helpful, and creative, in addition to experiencing a greater intensity of doing and thinking. As the individual becomes more aware of their environments and themselves, they gain more understanding and awareness of their feelings, leading to a greater sense of control (Fogel, 2020, 2021). Furthermore, problem solving, decision-making, and thoughts about one's self and others become more adaptive (Fogel, 2021). In terms of individuals' emotional states, MESA states are associated with more lighthearted feelings of excitement, playfulness, and wanting to connect with others (Fogel, 2020). The individual's resulting approachability invites social engagement and promotes feelings of being seen and appreciated, thus, adding depth to the individual's social awareness and connection (Fogel, 2020).

MESA is often considered essential to effectiveness because it aids individuals in enjoying a sense of calm (in contrast to DESA) and yet facilitates the sense of aliveness, vitality, and productive action (in contrast to the deeply restful nature of RESA; Fogel, 2020). By blending the awareness and presence of RESA with the action of DESA, MESA helps establish the foundation for individuals to recognize and understand the ongoing sensations occurring in their bodies as they engage in action. In turn, Fogel (2020) argued that MESA makes possible the development of self-confidence and exercise of appropriate life choices while reducing pain, anxiety, stress, depression and repairing health. Fogel added that MESA is helpful for expanding individuals' learning of how to acknowledge, tolerate, feel, and resolve dysregulation through the course of productive action.

Cultivating and regulating modulated embodied self-awareness. Cultivating MESA requires the intention to step out of the self-reinforcing cycle of DESA to attend to the present moment as well as the deliberate choice to move in and out of the restful parasympathetic state. In turn, the choice to cultivate MESA requires the choice to build the capacity to navigate stressful moments and become more sustainable to restore the mind and body (Blake, 2022).

Research has suggested that MESA can be cultivated using bodywork and psychotherapy, as these interventions aim to help individuals achieve functional, productive, socially engaged, and generally healthy states (Fogel, 2020). Fogel asserted that other helpful modalities include athletics, yoga stretching, dancing, music making, and other forms of creative and intense engagement. At the same time, Fogel (2020) cautioned that individuals need to engage in their own experimentation to determine what most effectively creates a MESA state for them. Thus, MESA tends to involve particular

methods, locations, and people as well as specific kinds of help, guidance, and resources in everyday life that help the person enter a MESA state.

As beneficial as MESA states are—especially in contrast to DESA states—individuals should still engage in RESA periodically. That is, although MESA states feature more awareness of bodily sensations than do DESA states, MESA-type awareness should not be mistaken as being in a state of full present-moment awareness (Fogel, 2020). That is, because MESA states occur in concert with sympathetic nervous system activation, persisting in this state without rest can result in exhaustion and burnout (Fogel, 2020). In other words, individuals in MESA states are at risk for becoming distracted by their productivity and overdoing it without seeking opportunities to recharge (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2020). When this occurs, the MESA state often and unintentionally gives way to a DESA state (Fogel, 2020).

Summary of Embodied Self-Awareness States

Table 2 is an original table created by the present researcher based on extant literature and designed to provide a summary of three states of embodied self-awareness. As shown in the table, DESA tends to be the most common state across the general population, followed by MESA. While DESA features dual activation of the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems, MESA features sympathetic nervous system activation while RESA features parasympathetic nervous system activation. As a result, each state features a unique pattern of thoughts, awareness, feelings, sensations, experiences, and symptoms. Moreover, each state offers benefits and drawbacks and are cultivated and regulated by body-oriented as well as talk-oriented approaches.

Table 2

Summary of Embodied Self-Awareness States

	Embodied Self-Awareness State		
	Dysregulated	Modulated	Restorative
Frequency of state	Very frequent	Frequent	Infrequent
Nervous systems activation	Sympathetic and parasympathetic	Sympathetic	Parasympathetic
General experience and focus	Agitated and distracted or lethargic and apathetic Focus on sense of overwhelm and distress	Productive and fast-paced Focus on task-related behaviors	Slow, calm, and relaxed Focus on present-moment emotions and bodily sensations
Nature of thoughts	Hyperactive, ruminative, judgmental, maladaptive	Active, adaptive, purposeful	Slowed and muted
Awareness, presence, and connection	Unaware of emotions and bodily sensations Disconnected from and unwilling to connect with self and others	Aware of emotions and bodily sensations but not to significant depth Desire for connection with self and others	Deeply aware and present to one's emotions, bodily sensations, and present-moment experiences Deep connection with self and others; sense of meaning and depth
Common feelings, sensations, and experiences	Hopeless, fatigued, tense, self-conscious, withdrawn, hostile, ashamed, anxious, depressed, indecisive, confused, overwhelmed, feeling out of control	Fully alive, helpful, creative, excited, playful, able to make decisions and solve problems, some sense of insecurity and desire to maintain face	Safe, relaxed, calm, whole, relieved, open to both positive and negative emotions, willing to be with others in authentic confidence
Other symptoms	Problems with digestion, problems sleeping, physical illness, empty gaze	Fluid breathing, softer gaze	Release of muscle tension, ease in digestion, responsiveness to touch

	Embodied Self-Awareness State		
	Dysregulated	Modulated	Restorative
Key Benefit	Starting point for personal development	Learning to adeptly acknowledge, move between, and regulate dysregulation and restoration	Promotes sustainable healing through repair of mind and body
Potential drawbacks	Self-harm Diminished personal wellbeing Diminished collective wellbeing Compromised work performance	Burnout and exhaustion Risk of entering dysregulated state	Delayed engaged in tasks
Modalities to Cultivate or Regulate State	Rosen Method Movement Tibetan Yoga and Meditation Somatic experiencing psychotherapy Mindfulness-based therapy	Bodywork Psychotherapy Athletics Yoga stretching Dance Music making Creative and intense engagement	Rosen Method Movement Meditation Somatic coaching and psychotherapy Body-based coaching Yoga Dance and authentic movement Gardening or time in nature Intimate partnership Spiritual practice

Note. Original table created based on "Three states of embodied self-awareness in Rosen Method bodywork: Part 1: Practitioner observations of their clients," by A. Fogel, 2020, *Rosen Method International Journal,* Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp. 4–36.

Synthesis of the Literature

Stress is conceptualized as the result of an external stressor acting upon an individual, yielding psychological, physiological, or behavioral reactions (Gandhe, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2003; Rudland et al., 2020; Selye, 1956). Theory and research on their stress response has emphasized that individuals' conscious and subconscious perceptions and moderations of stressors influence whether they will perceive these stressors as hindrances or challenges and whether their subsequent responses will be adaptive or maladaptive (Blascovich et al., 1999; Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Hargrove et al., 2013; Hattie, 2008; Rudland et al., 2020). Distress and maladaptive responses are associated with far-reaching adverse personal, interpersonal, and professional impacts (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Le Fevre et al., 2003). In contrast, adaptive stress responses can be performance enhancing (Blascovich et al., 1999; Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Hargrove et al., 2013; Hattie, 2008).

Due to the personal and professional benefits of adaptively managing stress, it would be helpful to identify approaches for optimizing one's stress response for work performance. In particular, research on embodied self-awareness reveals that the commonly experienced DESA state is consistent with maladaptive distress responses, while the infrequently experienced RESA state is consistent with the ventral vagal *rest and digest* or parasympathetic state (Fogel, 2020; Porges, 2001). Moreover, while each of these states serves important but divergent purposes, neither is conducive of productive work performance (Fogel, 2020). While in DESA, individuals typically experience difficulties focusing, an inability to engage and act in a productive manner. Hypervigilance and burnout are common, while critical thinking and creativity are

infrequent or nonexistent. While in RESA, individuals tend to experience a very relaxed state with little sense of urgency or engagement in task- or solution-oriented activities.

In contrast, the MESA state which involves alternation between parasympathetic relaxation, restoration, and being present with sympathetic activation of doing best reflects an adaptive stress response that allows for productivity and potential mindful action. While in this state, individuals tend to be highly focused while recognizing the need for restoration and taking breaks when needed.

Moseley (2018) noted, more research is needed to differentiate the nature, impacts, and management of eustress and distress. The present study aims to help explore that gap in research and practice by examining how others have navigated and utilized embodied self-awareness states as a tool for cultivating an adaptive stress response and optimizing work performance. The next chapter describes the methods used in this study.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of navigating embodied self-awareness states to optimize their stress response for work performance. The research questions were:

1. To what extent have participants experienced the states of dysregulated, modulated, and restorative embodied self-awareness?

2. What triggered each state and how did they navigate among the states?

3. How did each state affect them and their performance?

This chapter describes the methods that will be used in the study. The research design is described first, followed by a description of the procedures related to participant recruitment, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research interview design. Qualitative research allows for the investigation of various subjective perceptions of reality and focuses on gathering rich accounts from informants using interviews, questionnaires, and other approaches (Patton, 2014). Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) added that qualitative approaches are idea for capturing the varieties of experience, perception, and interprestation from participants. Qualitative research also is suitable for topics that have been the subject of limited investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because the focus was examining managers' navigation of embodied self-awareness states and impact on their stress response and

work performance. Prior research was not found on this population using these theoretical lenses; therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study.

Participants

A sample of 10 participants was drawn for this study based on the principles of attaining saturation (Patton, 2014). Participants were recruited using a combination of criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling strategies (Miles et al., 2019). To ensure that the participants were part of the population being examined in this study, each candidate had to satisfy five selection criteria:

1. The participant is employed full-time.

2. The participant has at least 1 year of full-time work experience.

3. The participant has a formal job title of "senior manager" (or its equivalent) or higher.

4. The participant has at least three direct reports.

5. At least three of the participant's direct reports have formal job titles of "manager" (or its equivalent) or higher.

To recruit participants, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique as a sample of convenience via her professional networks. Each of these individuals was sent an email invitation, which described the researcher, the study, and the criteria for and nature of participation (see Appendix A). Recipients were asked to contact the researcher to participate and to forward the invitation to those who may qualify and be interested in participating. Candidates who contacted the researcher underwent a screening interview (see Appendix B) to ensure they met the criteria and were available and interested in

participating. Candidates who qualified and volunteered were sent the consent information (see Appendix C) and scheduled for an interview.

Ethical Considerations

Oversight of this study was provided by the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board. All safeguards for human subjects were observed to protect participants. Study participation was completely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline any question or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants received an informed consent statement before undergoing an interview. The researcher answered any questions they had about the study before, during, and after their participation. Participation in the study was confidential, and any identifying information participants provided was omitted or replaced with pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data were collected using interviews. Each interview was conducted via Zoom web conference software and recorded via a handheld digital device. Interviewing recordings were stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer which was locked in a cabinet at her home except when actively in use. Transcripts were produced using otter.ai. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes in duration.

The interview script consists of 12 questions (see Appendix D). The first five questions are warm-up questions designed to ease participants into the discussion and get acquainted with the researcher. These questions briefly discuss where they work, their role, their tenure, what motivates them, and what concerns them about their work.

The core questions ask about participants' experiences with each embodied self-awareness state at work, beginning with MESA, followed by DESA, and ending with

RESA. For each state, they were asked to describe a situation, what prompted the experience, how it affected their performance, and how they moved out of that state. Next, participants were asked to report how much time they spend in each state at work, how much time they would like to spend in each state, and what they would need to achieve a different balance of DESA, MESA, and RESA states at work. To close the interview, participants were asked to share anything else they would like to offer related to their experiences navigating stress at work.

Data Analysis

Content analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2019) was used to examine the data. First, the researcher read each interview transcript several times to familiarize herself with the data and identify possible emergent themes. Second, she reviewed each response question by question to identify and apply themes. Upon completing the analysis, she reorganized the data by theme and counted the number of participants reporting each theme. Third, she asked a second coder who was a graduate student at Pepperdine University to review the analysis and confirm its accuracy. Results of the second coder's review was incorporated to finalize the analysis.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of navigating embodied self-awareness states to optimize their stress response for work performance. The research questions were:

1. To what extent have participants experienced the states of dysregulated, modulated, and restorative embodied self-awareness?

2. What triggered each state and how did they navigate among the states?

3. How did each state affect them and their performance?

This chapter reports the findings of the study. Participant demographics are provided first. Key themes are then reported and organized according to ESA state.

Participant Demographics

Ten participants were recruited and interviewed for the present study. Most participants were from healthcare (n = 4) or the financial industry (n = 3). Participants included executive-level professionals (n = 6) and senior directors (n = 4). Participants reported having a range of tenure at their employers. Table 3 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

	n
Industry	
Healthcare	4
Finance/Accounting/Insurance	3
Food Safety	1
Construction	1
Non-Profit	1
Role	
Executive	6
Senior Director	4
Tenure	
1-6 years	3
7-12 years	3
13 + years	4

Dysregulated Embodied Self-Awareness

Participants' Experience of the States Embodied Self-Awareness

When describing their experiences of DESA states, participants' responses indicated four themes: emotional overwhelm and ruminative thinking (n = 9), mental and physical depletion (n = 7), losing mental focus and motivation for work (n = 6), and disconnection with the self (n = 4).

Emotionally overwhelmed. Nine participants described feeling emotionally overwhelmed, characterized by increased needs for venting, heightened negative emotions and cognitions, increased frustration with leadership, increased sense of caution and doom. One participant recalled:

> I was getting very short. I'm a very personable guy at work. Most people I work with would say that I'm happy-go-lucky. For the most part, I'm a people person with our people internally and with our clients externally. I like to joke around. I like to bring a lighthearted element into the workplace so people feel like they can be themselves at work. But on this

> job, I was just cranky, irritated, and short with everyone. I was getting really bitter and resentful.

Another participant shared that while she was in DESA:

> I felt like I cried way more than I ever cried. I prayed more than I pray. It was just it was very stressful place. I actually started cleaning up my mailbox at work and taking anything personal on the computer. So that if someday she came in and said, you're gone, I was ready to go. And, and after been an nurse and the director for so long, you know that. You always know that that's a possibility. Because the higher you get ultimately the buck stops here for my whole service line and if people under me are not performing, it's on me.

Another participant similarly shared her reflections while in DESA, “I'm unhappy. Pissed off. Frustrated. I think the guy's a big jerk. He should be fired. I have all those moments. And you go, Okay, well, that's gonna happen. So okay, what I gotta do.”

Mental and physical depletion. Seven participants described feelings of mental and physical depletion while in DESA, characterized by burnout, lacking a sense of safety, feeling self-protective, and having disrupted sleep. One participant recalled:

> It's interesting because other people read it as defensiveness, but I was just exhausted. They’d say, “Oh she doesn't want to hear our feedback.” And I’m like, “No, actually, I'm just sick of him. That's what's coming through.” It's still ongoing, but it's 100 times better than it was a year ago. But we still have work to do.

Other participants recalled the sleep disruption they experienced. One stated, “My stress response was at an all-time high. I had a hard time sleeping.” Another shared, “I would lay awake and think about all the multimillion dollar projects being impacted.”

Losing mental focus and motivation for work. Six participants shared associated their DESA state with losing their mental focus and motivation for work. This was characterized by a loss of passion for work, questioning their work choices, and having a decreased sense of mental headspace. One shared, “It really made it tough for

me to continue to feel any real passion for the work that I do. And for the work that we were doing.**"** Another described his process of rethinking:

> Part of it was for me regrouping on whether or not I wanted to stay what I wanted to do. I didn't feel like I accomplished what I want to do on our journey together this company and reached our potential and kind of facilitated executed on my vision that I had. And so I was kind of soul searching, "What am I doing here?" I decided to stay, obviously. I mean, for me, it was kind of bizarre.

Another explained his experienced of decreased brainpower while in a DESA state:

> If even if you're trying to stay out of the way, it's hard to focus on something else it's hard to take your brain out of that whole thing and say, "Okay, I'm gonna go work on this other thing." I just would say you're probably not as productive in those times. You're probably just checking a few other simple boxes that do not require a lot of brainpower while you're waiting for things to resolve.

Disconnection with the self. Four participants described feeling disconnection from themselves while in DESA states. This involved having difficulty expressing their true emotions and setting aside emotions to get work done. One participant described her experience of wearing a mask to survive through the work day:

> Sometimes I would sit there and think, "Oh, my gosh, I this is this is horrible." Then I would shift how I feel. And it was not pretty and so I would tell my boss that I felt like for the last two and a half months of work, I felt like I sat on a block of ice, for it was very, very cold in that office. There was it was not it was not pleasant. And I just kind of would sit there and kind of tune out a little bit. And then I had to come back because I knew that the other staff depended on me to keep a I had to keep a positive environment, whether I knew which I knew it wasn't so that that was difficult to navigate.

Triggering and Process of Navigating the State

Examination of participants' responses to what triggered their DESA states indicated four themes: interpersonal dynamics and stressors (n = 9), significant project or

organizational changes (*n* = 7), being under-resourced (*n* = 7), and leadership changes (*n* = 5).

Interpersonal dynamics and stressors. Nine participants cited interpersonal dynamics and stressors that triggers their DESA state, such as blaming and lack of accountability, others' lack of self-regulation, not feeling heard, feeling deceived and betrayed, no longer being able to work with their old team, dealing with conflict, and experiencing value clashes with coworkers. One participant shared her story:

> Now you have to pick up the pieces from the distraction. All the while, the person or the people who write could have prevented it are right, blaming you yelling at your team, and it causes everybody a lot of stress. I could see my team was going to be stressed because they were going to be blamed for things that were not their fault. And I'm blamed for things that aren't my fault. I don't like it.

Another participant shared that his DESA state was triggered by workplace dynamics where teams were not taking responsibility for their tasks:

> They would have something that was supposed to be done on Wednesday, and Thursday morning, you go in and it's not done yet. And then they're like, "Oh, I still need to finish it off." And then it's like Thursday, two o'clock, is when they're posting what was supposed to be on Wednesday.

Yet another participant was triggered into a DESA state when a conflict of values surrounding the deliverable emerged. He explained:

> There was one pivotal event. I'll share this with you. I think it's somewhat relevant. Yeah, very pivotal column in a board meeting, or was it a board of a program review meeting, big meeting, where I was presenting to the parent company president. And he said to me, you guys need to think more like Walmart instead of Nordstrom. And my mind, I mean, I blew up, because there's nothing wrong with Walmart. It's not about that. But to me, in an industry, like insurance that's highly commoditized. Where I feel what I value. And what I felt like we built our organization around was delivering world class service, and innovation, and just relationships in general.

Significant project or organizational changes. Seven participants shared responses indicating that significant project or organizational changes triggered them into a DESA state. Such changes included such things as changes in programs or situations, losing control over the outcome, or acquisitions. One participant shared his experience:

> We connected LinkedIn learning to our learning platform and also tied that to a companywide 3-month development program we run. Our development program begins in April and we connected LinkedIn learning at the end of March so it's ready to go in April. We had all kinds of problems and issues. It was super stressful.

Another participant shared his experience of an acquisition and his lack of control over the experience:

> I left a big corporation, even though I was making a little bit more money, because I wanted to do something more entrepreneurial. And then the startup I joined was acquired by a big company. This acquisition was life changing for me. I was a minority investor, and I wasn't there long enough to do what I wanted to do within the company. I understood that the majority owners needed to sell for various reasons. It all made sense for them, and maybe even for our company. But personally, I would have liked to have waited a little longer.

Yet another participant shared her experience of significant rapid change in her organization: “Everyone in the whole hospital was stressed with her. She didn't stay very long, but she had her way of doing things and she kind of removed everything that we knew of the way things ran.”

Being under-resourced. Seven participants shared that the experience of having insufficient resources to address the demands and challenges facing them triggered them into a DESA state. Often, the source of insuffciency concerned lack of headcount, autonomy, time, confidence, or control over the parameters of the work. One participant recalled:

> My department of 14 staff members was split into three different directions. I was left with five employees and one vacancy. All our synergy was totally disrupted. Everything that was really working together as a team was split apart in no coordinated way.

Another participant described feeling a lack of support from those he expected to pitch in to help:

> We were going through a very difficult transaction, and I need structure. I tend to be the driver and the leader on most of the teams that I work on, but I also need that support infrastructure. I need to feel that other people are pitching in and carrying their weight and we're working together as a team. I didn't feel that in this project. Inside, I felt it was all on my shoulders. It made me a very irritable and angry person. I was really upset with my business partner because I thought, "He's not dedicating any time to this. I'm drowning. I'm working 18 hour days. I'm the only one that has an interest in getting this completed and knows what's going on." And I'm trying to keep the client happy. I just felt like I was all by myself.

Another participant shared that lacking autonomy triggered her DESA state:

> I highly value autonomy. So when that is taken away, when decision making is taken away from you, it feels very painful—especially when you're used to it before, when you become accustomed to doing great work and have high autonomy.

Leadership issues and changes. Five participants cited leadership changes that triggered them into a DESA state. These issues concerned toxic leadership, having different management approaches, and executive leadership turnover. One participant explained how leadership changes created unwelcome changes to her working conditions:

> Leadership has changed a few times. We have quite a bit of turnover in our executive leadership. So the situation that I had described to you where we were really given a lot of autonomy to create and do and, and have really great measurable outcomes from that work has since been completely changed.

Another participant explained how changes in leadership can create disruption and challenge, especially when they bring leadership styles that conflict with their own:

> We've had change in the leadership and on our team, and when new people come in, you have to figure out how to work with them**.** I say what I feel. I come from a place of empathy and more tolerance. I want to work with somebody struggling and support them. the new leader is much stricter, more aggressive, and less tolerant.

Impact of the State on Work Performance

Analysis of participants' responses about the impacts of their DESA states indicated two main effects: lowered work performance (n = 9) and strained relationships (n = 5).

Lower work performance. Nine participants noted that their DESA states served to diminish their performance in terms of missing deadlines, decreasing their productivity, and simply not bringing their best to the workplace. One participant explained the impact he has observed:

> We end up falling behind, or something gets out for the project deadline but misses the internal deadline, so I'm not able to review it. That creates sort of the stress of I don't actually know what's on the drawings. That means the potential of things being wrong is a lot higher. That's a big stress driver.

Another participant acknowledged:

> My stress response was horrible right in the moment. I like to joke around, I try to bring a lighthearted element into the workplace so people feel they can be themselves at work—all the positive stuff, right. But on this job, it was like the antithesis of me. I was cranky and irritated. I was short with everyone. I was getting really bitter and resentful at this partner because I felt hung out to dry. And there was one day that I had snapped in particular. And I got to a point where I was like, I don't think I want to work here anymore.

Another participant commented, "In the work we were doing, my productivity was impacted tremendously. It also impacted my team in a lot of ways and I tried not to let my response color that but I know it was impossible." Another participant similarly shared, "Whatever I tried to adjust just didn't work with her. My work performance and

stress response was not good. Because we are constantly trying to adjust our work performance for her, or what she wanted."

Strained relationships. Five participants shared that their DESA state negatively affected their relationships, in terms of diminished communication and conflict. One participant reflected. "Email became the default mode of communication. There was no interaction. It was like we lost the ability to collaborate with each other." Another participant reflected:

> I'm trying to like hold it together and there's just like, too much wrong. But it was like I could do nothing right. My staff could do nothing right. And I felt like I was in danger every day for my job for the first time.

Modulated Embodied Self-Awareness

Participants' Experience of the State

Analysis of the study data indicated that participants' experiences of MESA reflected three elements: stimulating and novel work (n = 10), collaboration and productive interaction (n = 9), and enjoyment and confidence (n = 6).

Stimulating and novel work. All 10 participants described being a state of high energy and tackling stimulating and novel tasks in this state. This included such things as new experiences, challenging deadlines, large projects with many parts, and needing to engage in critical thinking to innovate solutions. One participant shared:

> It probably was probably a little more than a year ago, I was in a meeting and I was tasked to host a, a town kind of like a town hall with on the the fentanyl use the fentanyl abuse, and how we could tackle it with respect how [we] were able to provide education. But what it was is that it was just me doing it, because I don't have an assistant. So the executive management task asked me to host this, but I had no idea it was going to involve. I had to put together a panel. It was very gratifying to see how I was able to help and deliver a very important message to Ventura County residents, families, educators. I think what was even nice was when after,

> after the after, it was all said and done, at the end of it, I was thanked for the job I did.

Another participant described having a high-pressure deadline:

> Most of what we do since we're an engineering is very task-oriented. Generally, in most projects, we have permit deadlines, and that's sort of our target date for getting stuff done. The first one, so that's, that's where most of the stuff comes up. There's making sure everyone's stays on task, we get the sort of the preliminary steps up to that to make sure whatever survey is good enough for the city. And that equipment and coordination is all complete and correct.

Collaboration and productive interaction. Nine of the 10 participants shared that their experiences of MESA included ample collaboration and productive interaction with others. These elements included such things as managing and moderating clients' impressions and the engagement, having an aligned team they interact with, and working together on tasks. For example, one participant elaborated:

> That was a huge part of what I did earlier on in my career, even more so than today. And it was challenging, right going over there. Because you had, there are a lot of expectations. When you do get these brief moments with your clients that are senior executives, and you want to make a good impression. You have to come with an agenda and a structure and anticipate questions and you know, what they're going to want to talk about and what's going to be what do you want to them to walk away from the conversation knowing whether it be about you personally, as a professional or about [the company] or our service offerings? Or what, what is the, what is the primary takeaway that you want to leave them with in structuring the conversation and kind of, say, kind of grooming it that direction, right, to achieve the right objective and, and leave the right impression was, is a it's an art. And it's challenging, and it requires a lot of focus and discipline and preparation.

Another participant shared, "I'm huge on collaboration, I get energized by other people. Seeing a vision come to life is also very rewarding. So that's probably one of the main times I can remember being very energetic about what we're doing."

Enjoyment and confidence. Six participants described the MESA state as involving the sense of enjoyment and confidence. Participants described leading from their strengths and values; enjoying the ability to learn, have variety, and be creative; and having confidence in their ability to execute. One participant explained her confidence in her ability to execute: "It didn't stress me out. It was something that I was good at. And like naturally having a skill set of like, like planning and pre empting I think made this a good positive experience for me." Another explained how the experience involved leaning into her strengths. She stated, "I think in the end of the day, for me, too, it played to my strengths. So that there's rewarding that right, using what doing what you're good at."

Factors Triggering the State

Examining participants' responses regarding the factors that triggered their MESA states led to the identification of three key themes: having a climate for collaboration (n = 9), having autonomy and accountability (n = 7), and receiving a high-stakes challenging task (n = 5).

Climate for collaboration. Nine of the 10 participants stated that having a climate for collaboration helped induce their MESA state. These participants noted that their colleagues engaged in partnership with them, they enjoyed synergy as a team, and team members had humility. One participant explained the exhilaration of collaboration in this way:

> While exhausting, and I was working forever, I think what was energizing, there was the opportunity to really see a direct impact on how we were helping our people through the decision making decisions we were making. And through the interaction, I got to know a lot more people, so kind of building that and knowing more people was energizing.

Another participant described the experience of having colleagues to bounce ideas off of:

> Some of the things that really kept me going was that I talk to the chief innovation officer once a month. We have a conversation and it really is we push each other on okay, what are you reading? What am I reading? What did you learn? How do you think that applies to us? What do you think we need to do differently? Those are the kinds of things that that right energize me.

Other participants explained how the sense of humility among team members supported the overall experience of MESA. One stated, “People were able to put egos aside.” Another shared:

> What brought that I think that experience really to life was there wasn't a lot of personality. There were personality dynamics, but no ego, no fear of saying throwing out a bad idea or challenging without repercussions to that type of thing. It was very honest, open, fluid thing.

Having autonomy and accountability. Seven participants explained that being given autonomy for and accountability over the outcome helped trigger their MESA state. Some participants noted that having supportive leadership who allowed freedom and autonomy but also provided clarity when appropriate was a central aspect of that. One participant noted, “There was a lot of fluidity and how we gathered the requirements and prototyped it and then built it and tested it and then implemented it.” Another described the sense of autonomy in this way:

> I think it was two things. So no one because first I didn't have anybody. I was kind of in charge, there wasn't anyone around to like run things by or need approval by I have autonomy to create a organize a planet and do things. So that made it easy.

High-stakes challenging task. Five participants noted that having a high-stakes challenging tasks helped ignite their MESA state. These participants noted having a clear need and measurable outcomes and having expectation and pressure to perform. One

noted, “There are a lot of expectations. When you do get these brief moments with your clients that are senior executives, and you want to make a good impression.” Another explained how she was able to visualize the outcome and that this was mobilizing:

> I got to thinking through the details I saw the logistic things of what I needed, even down from like. The kit, the materials getting to the place, what would I need on the day of, from garbage bags to scissors. Those are little things but make it run smoothly. I was just planning it and visualizing what it needs to look like and where I would need something.

Yet another explained the pressure felt by the whole team: “Everyone knew that we had a really, really tight deadline. So when we said if we can spend some time upfront to do these things that will make everything else go smoother later on.”

Impact of the State on Work Performance

All 10 participants described the MESA state as having a positive impact on their work performance, in four specific ways: mobilizing their thought and action (n = 10), being more effective individually and collectively (n = 6), feeling more positive and calm (n = 5), and needing to deliberately manage burnout (n = 4).

Mobilizing thought and action. Ten participants stated that the MESA state helped mobilize their thoughts and actions, such as being able to stay focused and energized longer, thriving under pressure, and being able to structure their tasks well. One participant explained:

> It felt like their research like when you read about the flow state by Csikszentmihalyi. It gives me the release of endorphins it's the opening right the serotonin and the dopamine flow your learning center though but it gives you sort of that ability or gives me the energy to stay with something longer.

Another explained how she was able to thrive under pressure:

> It was optimal, because I know when there's some anxiety, it just tightens everything else, you know. So in the, I believe it was optimal, yes, there

> were stressors, but I worked through worse. And so knowing how I've worked and how I do handle stress, really helped this I was able to kind of stop, take deep breaths, and say, this is just a new experience, think about the delivery of the message.

Yet another participant elaborated on how they were better able to structure their tasks:

> It was just breaking it down. Okay, step one, let's create a we, with the basic outline of how much money do we have? Do we need who can give us money? Agreed? Where can we have this so break down? At least not break it down? Start with the overall okay, this is what we have break down of like, Okay, how many kids do we have to build to meet the requirements deployed and expanded and create a bit of a timeline?

Being more effective individually and collectively. Six participants noted that in the MESA state, they were more effective individually and collectively. These participants described achieving more return on investment and long-term impact as well as gaining more opportunities for growth, and receiving recognition. One participant stated, “It was just win-win all around, and we raised some money as well.”

Another described the increased opportunity for visibility and growth: “There's this exposure component, and it's coming back to help me in this interview process. So people saw how I performed through that. So there's been this direct kind of work benefit from a stress response.” Others described the long-lasting positive impact of the work on their collective efficacy: “One of the things that it still carries through to today, 6 years later, is that we can accomplish anything, and didn't have that confidence.” Still others noted the recognition they gained, with one noting: “There was definitely a recognition at work,” and another stating: “We celebrated successes within the project before it was even released. That gave you confidence that we are making progress.”

Feeling more positive and calm. Five participants described feeling grounded and calm, excited and positive about going to work, and having the sense of work being rewarding. One participant elaborated:

> I have faith. Very often I say prayer, I take deep breath. And, and kind of center myself before I'm going into it…. And but you know, I always center myself first. And because when something abruptly comes at you, you don't want to go into that fight or flight. You want to stay calm, and be able to look at it objectively. The other thing too, is just I find myself the oldest director in the entire hospital now nursing non nursing and find myself the oldest director in the entire hospital now nursing non nursing and wisdom kind of guidance you because you've been in it for so long. So you know, things are going to be okay. Or you know, where you have to put your energy and whereas if I were a new director, I probably wouldn't feel as calm as I feel because you kind of you just know that these things are gonna come at you and depending on whatever organization you work The unknown is always there. But I guess you know, that also is a component of it. So like to be a labor and delivery nurse, which I was, but then I was also a mother baby, which are two totally different kinds and one is an adrenaline junkie, and you have to like not knowing what's around the corner, you have to thrive on that a little bit. Because that's what happens in labor and delivery. Mother Baby is very encouraging and comforting and educational. And so there are two different kinds of personalities, and I'm both of those. But I think that that probably prepped me for the position that I am in, because I kind of get off on not knowing what's next, and being able to adjust.

Another participant shared her positive view about the work experience in a MESA state:

> It was very, it was inspirational. And energizing felt really good. It's like you're in your container, right, of working with people that you like to work with and doing something you love. But like you're saying, those, those little things become overshadowed when you're in the greater hole of the energy, it is always the little annoying things and bureaucracy and all those things that aren't fun. But it doesn't stand out anymore. Because of the more positive feeling about everything.

Needing to manage burnout. Four participants additionally noted their need to manage burnout during this state. One elaborated:

> In that time, I didn't sleep. I worked 16-17 hours a day. I wasn't sleeping, I was thinking about it constantly. So like all the space in my head, right? Because there wasn't much else you can do anything else.

Restorative Embodied Self-Awareness

Participants' Experience of the States Embodied Self-Awareness

Participants' descriptions of RESA states included self-awareness and self-expression (n = 7) and relaxation (n = 2). These themes are described in the sections below.

Self-awareness and self-expression. Seven of the 10 participants described experiencing RESA states characterized by self-awareness and self-expression, reflected in happiness about themselves, listening to themselves, having a sense of alignment with their long-term career purpose, and leaning into their confidence to adapt and learn. One participant noted she experiences it when "I felt really positive about myself." Another shared:

> There's a lot of reflection. And there was just more little data points that you know, in my mind of like, I remember having written that down, I remember and so it's kind of it's also perpetual self-fulfilling prophecy of like, okay, when you write it down and say it and work towards it, it is achievable. And it kind of gets you refueled to take on the next challenge and, and all that kind of stuff. But it was.

Another explained it this way:

> I have my reading time my third time. I do a lot of like I watch some video casts and things like that on leadership. And I allow thoughts to come into my head and I'll jot them down. Or maybe it's a day where my one manager, two managers like the exact opposite of how they cope. But maybe it's how I know one manager thinks that this thought or maybe this would resonate with her. And so definitely having quiet time where I just know I need to allow thoughts to come to mind. That helps me kind of develop my vision and navigate to the end.

Relaxation. Two participants described work-related RESA states as having a sense of relaxation and absence of urgency. One participant explained:

> It's when I don't have an urgent deadline or, and I can just casually come into the office and go have lunch with some people or right just do something that's not urgent. Like we have web based learnings, right trainings that we've got to do, periodically, those are relaxing, because they're not urgent, time sensitive, and it's just check the box type exercise, right? But those are the situations when you take off the urgent client needs or the project timelines and things like that, that that make me think of what you were what you're speaking out slow.

Triggering and Process of Navigating the State

Examination of participants' descriptions of RESA states indicated that their work-situated RESA states were triggered by maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity (n = 9), focusing on healthy connection and collaboration (n = 8), and focusing on fun and positivity (n = 5).

Maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity. Nine participants described that they entered a RESA state by maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity, such as focusing on department growth, engaging with their work, allowing situations to emerge and remaining cognizant of the big picture, focusing only on what they can control, and being mindful of their approach. One participant explained:

> I think that a big piece of it was the ability to grow the department. I think if during that time, we were staying really stagnant or not really changing, I probably would have not enjoyed it to the extent or stayed that long. But the fact that it was a real growth opportunity. And by growth, I don't mean advancement, it wasn't like I was going to advance anywhere, but a real growth opportunity as far as what we could accomplish and how we could process improve, and how there was a lot of support to do that, to look at how patients were processed through how can we make this better? How can we support the cardiologist better, what kind of what kind of things can we change to make that their job easier and make things just flow more smoothly.

Another shared the sense of RESA when she reflected on the positive impact she is making:

> I always remember where I came from and always remember the reward. It's not necessarily monetary, the reward for me. it's just the reward of being able to help. And I think that that's how I've always been my whole life being able to help. That's probably why I became a nurse.

Another explained that she is mindful of her emotions and behavior so that she makes a better impact on others:

> I also think I'm much better at, I can't control it. I have zero control, right, I can only control how I show up. And how I impact others. And so I think maybe I focused there instead of internally rather than externally. And so that has helped, right? Because I think sometimes we strive when we feel like we want to control something that's uncontrollable. Or out of our room.

Focusing on healthy connection and collaboration. Eight participants indicated that experienced RESA states when they focused on healthy connection and collaboration, such as allowing the group to adapt, embracing and valuing team effort, trusting and appreciating colleagues, and creating and working within supportive environments. One participant explained the power of being appreciated for triggering her experience of RESA:

> This little girl came into my office. And she made this little birdhouse, and I still have it, it's a ceramic birdhouse. And she gave that to me. Also, it just makes me a little teary because she thanked me, she says, "Mrs. X, thank you so much for my shoes, I love my tennis shoes, and I love my dress shoes." And so when I would mentor nurses, I said you're not going to make a million dollars being a school nurse. But the birdhouse that I got is priceless. And a Picasso or a Renoir, nothing could ever, ever beat out what that signifies to me. I'm sorry, it just makes me emotional, because I'm going to retire here pretty soon. And so that is something that I remember, it's just I remember so dearly, because of she was so happy, she got her new shoes. I've enjoyed my tenure. As a school nurse, I always wanted to be in medicine, it just didn't always start out. It didn't start out that way. I started out as a banker, and then I decided I was a single parent. And I decided to pursue what I always wanted to pursue. And so I,

> I went into nursing as a single parent, when I put myself through college and, and that was it. And then I became then I moved out here and became a school nurse.

Another explained how she experiences RESA states by guiding and working with groups. She explained:

> I worked with a group of people from across our organization to in gather the data, I was leading the project overseeing the project as a sponsor, I remember seeing we were doing a design thinking session where we were redesigning the process and, and watching the teamwork and work a process and work with the data and being able to ask them questions and challenge their thinking and, and watch them come up with the solution. And some options for the solution that they were creating, not being told to do, but really co creating with a team from across the organization.

Yet another participant explained the power of supportive environments for triggering RESA:

> To see people start to get it, and to really feel good about themselves and empowered, that they doesn't matter what everyone else is doing. It's the choices I make individually for this patient's experience, to have shared decision making with the patient, and to be on the same page with all the care providers together. Being open to different kinds of practitioners like we're bringing on a certified nurse midwife. And we think that's because after look at growth perspectives to hear because you're obese, or kind of a waning occupation now, and who's seen a staff that just so enjoyed sitting and visiting with them, and even once where you think they really do a good job, all of a sudden, they kind of see like, oh, wow, I really do need to work on that. I need to stand up for this.

Focusing on fun and positivity. Five participants shared they entered RESA states at work when they focused on fun and positivity. One participant explained it this way:

> To be able to stand back and watch the team really craft and create something that was focused on a really positive experience and outcome. And watch people grow much people learn and have those aha moments of like, Oh, what if we did this? Or oh, wow, if we change this? It was really, yeah, I remember that day that we spent two days and just being really excited about what the team was doing and how they were doing it.

Another shared. “It is a way of being able to present to them to those core values that drive their own practice and I see where they're coming on the same page,” while yet another commented, “I just do have days where I'm like uber-energized. And like, let's do this. And I'll send a little gif to my team. Get ready, let's do this really.”

Impact of the State on Work Performance

Examination of participants’ responses about RESA states led to the identification of four key impacts: enhanced work performance (n = 9), peacefulness and optimism (n = 6), improved connection to self and others (n = 4), and more appropriate response to work-related stressors and integration of all experience (n = 4).

Enhanced work performance. Nine of the 10 participants described enhancing their work performance, such as accomplishing a long-term goal, elevating their solutions, keeping up with business developments, increased their productivity and problem-solving abilities, and solving specific problems. One participant described accomplishing a long-term goal: “When I started, I had this goal that I wanted to get to $100 million. How are we gonna do that? Having hit that was awesome. And kind of that feeling of Zen of like, okay we're in this really great spot.” Another participant explained the power of elevating their solutions. She explained, “We're coming up with solutions. We're elevating our plan, and that makes me want to celebrate, get excited for them, and then figure out what's next and move on to the next goal.” Yet another participant reflected:

> Work performance wise, it's positively impactful, I think optimal. I haven't been stressed, so that's been wonderful. And it feels better. And I feel that I have more energy to devote to other tasks, I can I have more capacity to think about other things and to hold space for others in a in a more meaningful way when I'm not like, burning the brainpower on worried about that.

Peacefulness and optimism. Six participants described experiencing peacefulness and optimism, including increased positive energy, maintaining a positive outlook and sense of happiness, and work-life balance. One participant shared, “I showed up for work, excited to be at work, went home feeling happy.” Another described being increased with positive energy:

> It gives me for me that positive energy of, “Okay, now, we've achieved something important or we're fulfilling a part of our mission, which feels good and so now, what's the next step?” versus you know, if where I have been before like in that ridiculous situation with the other gentleman we're talking about is you there are moments that we are like, Okay, do it yourself, buddy. I mean, you have those moments like you didn't like our advice. You didn't like what we told you about our experience, but you wouldn't use it fine. I think you're digging yourself out of your own hole. You can't you can't stay, I can't stay there myself. Yeah, I had those moments, but this was different. Like yes, right.

Yet another described how by making sure he was balancing his embodied self-awareness states and specifically experiencing RESA, he also was able to set limits on his hours and working late so that he still had time for his personal life:

> As a result of that, you're able to kind of manage outside of work easily. Because you have set hours, you don't have to worry about working extra to get something done or come coming out, working late and things like that, where you're able to come home, deal with your daily chores. Make real food. Right Stuff like takes time to where if you're dealing with changes, and there's no deadline shifts of last minute changes, and you have to work an extra two or three hours. That's the time it takes to whatever, clean up a little bit and make dinner. I would say it was the optimal situation of working a solid 8 hours.

Improved connection to self and others. Four participants stated that their RESA states resulted in improved connection to self and others, characterized by having increased compassion and appreciation for their team, being less self-critical, and more focusing more on personal goals. One participant noted, “I love my staff and I love

seeing them come together." Another participant described reaching a point of needing to recalibrate to identify and focus on and pursue personal goals. He explained:

> That was my second midlife crisis when the company was acquired. Hitting this milestone had me a little lost again, because it was kind of like after graduating MBA, I had all these goals and I hit them: I got the degree. I'm doing my job. I got married. I got a house. Kids. I realized: I need goals. What are they? It wasn't as much about attaining physical things or money. It was more about mental health or just personal goals and all those other things. That was the next step on that. And that was probably the time I felt most at ease.

More appropriate response to work-related stressors and integration of all experience. Four participants described having more appropriate responses to work-related stressors and being better able to integrate all their experience, evidenced by an enhanced ability to move forward, improved focus for new things and accomplishing everyday tasks, and improved motivation and enjoyment. One participant reflected that he got out of maintenance mode and thus was able to pursue new things:

> It was a relief to realize that the new hire can do this. Now I can do the other things I need to get done, and I can move forward. Instead of trying to maintain, I can actually go off and work on new things. It opened up that brain space.

Another participant commented on her improved motivation and enjoyment:

> My performance is very positive, because I'm like, I'm on it. And like next I'm feeling good. This is going where it needs to go. Like, it helps. Like it even motivates me to go to the next time. Like, I can do three more things like this is great. it's going where it needs to go. Super motivating. Those moments where no one needs me for anything right now. I'm actually completing my task, and I'm checking off these things. So definitely very, very motivating. Those are the good days. I'm like, Yeah, this is great. Life is great.

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the study. Participants described their DESA experiences as being characterized by emotional overwhelm and ruminative thinking,

mental and physical depletion, losing mental focus and motivation for work, and disconnecting from themselves (see Table 4). They reported their DESA states were triggered by interpersonal dynamics and stressors, significant project or organizational changes, being under-resourced, and experiencing leadership changes. DESA states reportedly affected participants' work performance and relationships.

Table 4

Summary of Findings: Dysregulated Embodied Self-Awareness

Category	Themes	*n*
Reported Experience	Emotional overwhelm and ruminative thinking	9
	Mental and physical depletion	7
	Losing mental focus and motivation for work	6
	Disconnection with the self	4
Triggering Factors	Interpersonal dynamics and stressors	9
	Significant project or organizational changes	7
	Being under-resourced	7
	Leadership issues and changes	5
Impact	Lowered work performance	9
	Strained relationships	5

N = 10

Participants associated experiences of MESA with stimulating and novel work, collaboration and productive interaction, and enjoyment and confidence (see Table 5). MESA states were triggered by having a climate for collaboration, autonomy, and accountability, and receiving a high-stakes challenging task. Participants reported that MESA states had a positive impact on their work performance in three specific ways: mobilizing their thought and action, being more effective individually and collectively, and feeling more positive and calm.

Table 5

Summary of Findings: Modulated Embodied Self-Awareness

Category	Themes	*n*
Reported Experience	Stimulating and novel work	10
	Collaboration and productive interaction	9
	Enjoyment and confidence	6
Triggering Factors	Having a climate for collaboration	9
	Having autonomy and accountability	7
	Receiving a high-stakes, challenging task	5
Impact	Mobilizing their thought and action	10
	Being more effective individually and collectively	6
	Feeling more positive and calm	5
	Needing to manage burnout	4

N = 10

Participants' RESA states included self-awareness, self-expression, and relaxation (see Table 6). Work-situated RESA states reportedly were triggered by maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity, focusing on healthy connection and collaboration, and focusing on fun and positivity. Participants reported that RESA states enhanced their work performance, peacefulness, and optimism; improved their connection to themselves and others; and promoted more appropriate responses to work-related stressors. The next chapter provides a discussion of these results.

Table 6

Summary of Findings: Restorative Embodied Self-Awareness

Category	Themes	*n*
Reported Experience	Self-awareness and self-expression	7
	Relaxation	2
Triggering Factors	Maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity	9
	Focusing on healthy connection and collaboration	8
	Focusing on fun and positivity	5
Impact	Enhanced work performance	9
	Peacefulness and optimism	6
	Improved connection to self and others	4
	More appropriate response to work-related stressors and integration of all experience	4

N = 10

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of navigating embodied self-awareness states to optimize their stress response for work performance. The research questions were:

1. To what extent have participants experienced the states of dysregulated, modulated, and restorative embodied self-awareness?

2. What triggered each state and how did they navigate among the states?

3. How did each state affect them and their performance?

This chapter provides a discussion of the study results. A summary of findings and their relationship to past literature are provided first. Practical recommendations are provided next. Limitations of the study are then acknowledged, and suggestions for continued research are outlined. The chapter closes with a summary.

Summary of Findings

Participants Experiences of Embodied Self-Awareness States

Participants described DESA as being a difficult experience in the moment, where they did not show up as the best version of themselves. Similarly, past literature explained that in these states, people tend to lose focus and not have as much passion or motivation for their work (Fogel, 2020). Recognition, processing, and integration of emotions become suspended (Aposhyan, 2004; Fogel, 2009, Ogden et al., 2006), and the individual quickly becomes overwhelmed by their emotions and physiological feelings as a result of avoiding felt experience and connecting with themselves. People in the DESA condition often have a distorted sense of body awareness and impairments in their mental

and physical abilities (Fogel, 2009; Quadt, Critchley & Garfinkel, 2018; Savitz & Harrison, 2018).

When asked to describe their experiences of MESA, participants described an experience of "working on all cylinders," having an "adrenalin rush," but also driving themselves to the point of needing to recharge. These findings are consistent with the literature, which described MESA as both a continued task focus (Blake, 2022) and purposeful, aware embodiment resulting in being able to get things done (Fogel, 2020).

Past literature described the RESA state as a condition of a relaxed dorsal vagus nerve and activated parasympathetic nervous system (Porges, 2001) and feeling safe on a physiological and psychological level. A state of deep relaxation is achieved when one pays attention to one's feelings, physiological sensations, and awareness of the present moment, including full-body experiences linked with emotions like joy, grief, enthusiasm, and despair (Fogel, 2020, 2021). Logic and rational thought fade away as one's awareness of the present moment grows, making room for a richer experience of being in one's body, serenity, spirituality, and acceptance of the unknown (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2009). When a person feels seen, heard, and safe, their body is able to express its feelings more fully (Fogel, 2020). Some participants did not consider it feasible to experience RESA in the workplace. They explained that because the workplace involves being with other people, it is not the time or place to relax and having "me" time. In lieu of the pure type of RESA states described in literature, they experienced a form of this state by remaining in work mode but being able to focus on less demanding tasks and not being pulled in multiple directions.

Triggers of Embodied Self-Awareness States

Based on the study findings, participants' main triggers for DESA was having low autonomy, strict timelines, and little clarity or communication. Participants explained that their way of navigating this state was by gaining self-awareness and learning from their experiences of dysregulation, including gaining key learnings about how to approach such experiences. Past literature noted that mental and physical stressors can induce DESA states, including both positive and negative events (Fogel, 2020). A DESA condition is more likely when the person is under-resourced for the presenting challenge (Porges, 2001).

Participants reported that their triggers for MESA involved gaining exposure to new situations, having fresh experiences and having the opportunity of autonomy. In particular, the experience of gaining autonomy was that they and their teams had increased freedom given to individuals and teams to come up with solutions. That sense of freedom gave them more energy because they would not be constrained to do things in a certain way. These findings were somewhat different from past literature, which focused on cultivating MESA by intentionally attending to the present moment and step out of the self-reinforcing cycle of DESA (Blake, 2022), such as entering the relaxed parasympathetic state, developing resilience and adopting sustainable practices for mental and physical well-being (Fogel, 2020). Fogel also discussed that people in MESA tend to anchor themselves by breathing, reconnecting with themselves, or connecting with others. Fogel further noted that MESA requires specific places, people, and ways of entering and exiting the state, as well as assistance and resources in daily life. The

findings identified in this study may be considered new insights for doing so within a workplace setting.

Experiences of RESA reportedly occurred when participants had an absence of urgency or deadlines. They navigated this by identifying what things they could get done without being disturbed and by celebrating milestones with the team. Additionally, participants described creating a sense of RESA by balancing the demands of their work and personal lives, so that if one domain was hectic, they strove to keep the other domain calm. Fogel (2020) noted that RESA states can be achieved when an individuals notice and regulate a DESA state using present-moment awareness and evoking phrases and imagery that encourage presence, calm, and parasympathetic system activation (sighing, yawning, stretching). Meditation, yoga, dance, authentic movement dance, gardening, intimate partnerships, spiritual practice, and sports and exercise can help cultivate a RESA state.

Impact of Embodied Self-Awareness States

Participants reflected that when they were in a state of DESA they did were not operating at their best. Ultimately, the participants reported these experiences led to learning and a positive impact on their performance. They also described feeling motivated to make a more conscious effort to maintain positivity for themselves and their teams. Similarly, past literature described emotional strain (Aposhyan, 2004; Fogel, 2009, Ogden et al., 2006; Rosen & Brenner, 2003), disconnection with the self (Fogel, 2020), ruminative and negative thinking (Blake, 2022; Fogel, 2020), mental and physical depletion (Howard, 2016). In terms of work performance, burnout, lower work performance, and isolation are common (Iacoboni, 2009).

In discussing their experiences of MESA, participants shared that they thrived under pressure, gained a deep sense of satisfaction and reward, learned from others when they were in these states, and more effectively navigated roadblocks. Overall, MESA states had a positive impact on participants' performance. Participants noted having greater energy to be present, communicate, show up for work, and work collaboratively with others. They described being better able to embrace creativity and move their egos aside to focus on the work. At the same time, participants noted that staying too long in this state could lead to experiences of burnout. Fogel (2020) observed that people in MESA may think and act more intensively and feel more alive, helpful, and creative. As they become more aware of themselves and their surroundings, they also are better able to understand and control their emotions (Fogel, 2020, 2021). Adaptability increases the sense of joy, calm, playfulness, connection, problem-solving, decision-making, and self- and other-perception (Fogel, 2020, 2021). Past literature also noted the risk of burnout if MESA is sustained for too long (Fogel, 2020).

Participants explained that their experiences of RESA ultimately increased their appreciation for their team. In this state, they described feeling more connected with themselves and others and being in a more relaxed state. Past literature similarly noted that RESA states provide benefits such as relaxation, healing, and connection to others (Fogel, 2020; Howard, 2016; Kogler, 2020; Porges, 2009), more accurate self-awareness and more appropriate response to stressors (Blake, 2018; Fogel, 2021; Silsbee, 2018; StrozziHeckler, 1993, 2014), enhanced integration of all experience, sense of peacefulness (Bernard, 2016; Fogel, 2020; Rosen & Brenner, 2003).

Recommendations

The findings from this study lead to a range of recommendations. Recommendations for senior managers, organizations, and coaches and wellbeing program providers are outlined in the following sections.

Recommendations for Senior Managers

The first recommendation for senior managers is to review project and role expectations. The study data suggests facing continuous challenges of overcoming and adapting to deadlines is a frequent barrier to team engagement. In addition, participants shared that space for autonomy is an important part of the collaboration process when engaging in challenging work. Therefore, a senior manager or higher can steer a team to develop realistic timelines when considering competing priorities and creating space for autonomy and collaboration to co-exist. Participants shared applying openness and flexibility in this process can create motivating pressure when adapting to challenging work. Implementing 1) pre-meeting regimens involving 1:1 check-ins to gauge capacity and time for mental preparation, 2) creating benchmarks for acknowledging small wins and opportunity for reevaluation of timeline feasibility, and 3) consistent communication on agreed outcomes to maintain alignment and sustainable team synergy through encouraging collaboration and deep thinking together provides a strong foundation in adapting to challenging work.

The second recommendation is to support a safe space for teams. Participants expressed moments of not feeling heard, suppressing true emotion, and having no control in high pressure scenarios. In addition, participants shared the value of opportunities to connect, vent, and reflect with others gave a sense of reassurance and safety. Thus, senior

managers or higher could provide options of how to access a safe space within or outside of the organization, which in turn could effectively build confidence and trust within the team. Edmonson (1999) used the term *psychological safety*, the collective perception among team members that the team provides a secure environment for taking interpersonal risks, to describe this quality. Psychological safety encompasses a sense of mutual respect and trust, which enables team members to freely express themselves without apprehension of humiliation, exclusion, or retribution for voicing their opinions. This setting promotes members' self-assurance, reliance, and a secure atmosphere by promoting transparent dialogue and cultivating behaviors that involve soliciting criticism and engaging in discussions about mistakes. Effective leadership is essential for promoting psychological safety by providing support and promoting non-defensive communication. Consequently, team members have a sense of confidence that enables them to engage in risk-taking, thereby fostering a culture of ongoing enhancement and innovation. Psychological safety ultimately improves team performance by fostering a culture that values and supports individuals. A safe space could be attained by suggesting each team member has access to another individual who acts as a "pressure valve," allowing the member to vent and gain perspective from another individual. The "pressure valve" is meant to prevent emotional outburst among individuals at work or at home and decrease suppression of true emotions. Also, senior managers mirroring positive outlook whether its towards the team's progress or supporting work-life balance can increase the team's confidence, energy, and excitement towards work.

The third recommendation for senior managers is to create an individual practice for embodied self-awareness. The study data shows senior managers or higher face

constant new experiences and unknown outcomes provoking a lack of confidence, imposter syndrome, and decreased ability for their 'best' selves to thrive. Senior managers or higher that engage with mentors or colleagues and establish a positive self-management routine can adapt to the new experiences and unknown outcomes more efficiently. Such connection could be nurtured with mentors or trusted colleagues through dialogue of similar title and responsibility to provide insight on shared experiences. In addition, self-management routines can be established through quiet time to reflect and connect with internal dialogue and begin a reframe or visualization process for engaging in mindful interactions. No practice is one size fits all as each individual will need to learn what works best for their lifestyle. However, prioritizing wellbeing in various ways such as time for social connection, decreasing commute time, or getting consistent sleep can be a starting point to creating the cornerstones in a work-life balance.

Recommendations for Organizations

Three recommendations are offered to organizations based on the study results. The first recommendation concerns the importance of cultivating a multiplier mindset (Wiseman, 2017). The study data conveyed organizations with frequent turnover in executive leadership led to negative outcomes from top down effecting work performance of others. In addition, senior leaders expressed the lack of decision making power challenged their values and ability to bring ease in times of significant change. Organizations should encourage all levels of leadership to cultivate a multiplier mindset to increase an ability to adapt to new personalities and contribute to a culture that values learning.

Wiseman outlined two primary leadership styles: multipliers and diminishers. Multipliers are leaders who amplify their team's intelligence and capabilities, creating environments where people excel and contribute at their highest level. These leaders tend to attract and optimize talent, create safe yet challenging environments, set high expectations and push teams to exceed their limits, encourage rigorous debates for diverse ideas, and give teams ownership and accountability. In contrast, Diminishers deplete their team's intelligence and capability because these leaders believe they are the smartest in the room. Diminishing types of leaders tend to hoard resources and underutilize talent, create a tense environment that stifles creativity, avoid seeking input and believe they have all the answers, make decisions in isolation, and prevent initiative by controlling every detail. Multipliers enhance employee engagement, foster innovation, and improve productivity by utilizing their team's full potential. In contrast, diminishers lead to disengagement and stifled performance. Leaders can assess and adjust their behaviors to become multipliers by fostering a culture that amplifies collective intelligence. Organizations can support this by promoting multiplier behaviors through training and development programs.

This especially applies to executive leaders to cultivate as they model influential attitudes and regulate the status quo of the organizations culture. To implement a multiplier mindset of supporting, leveraging and learning from talent, organizations can ensure feedback loops are in place for intentional and consistent communication throughout organization. Integrating mission driven leadership, acknowledging staff frequently by expressing appreciation and re-assurance gives more perceived control that employees have impact on decision making. In addition, executive leaders can support

one another to mirror expectations of support and decrease a sense of isolation in high pressure situations, which in turn gives space for deep thinking.

The second recommendation is to create a structure for autonomy and empowerment. Participants shared that their experience with autonomy was pivotal in their creative process and allowing their teams to do their best work. However, study data also mentions autonomy often was given then taken away due to significant changes in organization, indicating a sense of depleted empowerment and passion towards work because of the increased micromanagement. Sustainable autonomy and empowerment in the workplace can be created by implementing liberating structures (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014) and designing the organization to reward collaborative and individual work. Helpful liberating structures to integrate could be a) appreciative inquiry, b) discovery and action dialogue, c) impromptu networking, d) social network webbing, and e) design elements that lean into celebrating success and encourage learning from experiences. In addition, designing rewards to align with role expectations can be implemented by a) refining department and individual performance goals, b) adequately hiring talent to decrease workload of others, and increase time for work-life balance, and c) create dedicated time for absorbing and applying feedback or space and support to diffuse from challenging projects.

The third recommendation is to strive for transparency. Participants shared they often felt anxious, irritated, limited, a sense of pressure, and working in overdrive due to not knowing what was coming down the pipeline from the organization, especially during significant change. In addition, the lack of clarity and support often lead participants to question their employment or decrease their ability to perform their role responsibilities.

Organizations can strive for supporting transparency by increasing communication to all employees during significant change, especially to senior managers and higher as they inform their teams or departments. Applying transparency can be performed by forming an infrastructure for open, informative, and mindful conversations between executive leadership to senior leadership, and senior leadership to direct reports. Ultimately, this dialogue creates a safe space to seek clarity and feel supported as concerns are aired. The opportunity for conversation signals that curiosity is welcomed, a leader is going above and beyond by listening and providing information to close knowledge gaps, and reinforcing a sense of belonging by being heard.

Recommendations for Coaches and Wellbeing Program Providers

Two recommendations are offered for coaches and wellbeing program providers. The first recommendation is to actively address work-life conflict through adaptable frameworks. Study data insinuates working overtime often challenged the ability to be in a restorative state during work. In addition, participants face a conflicting internal dialogue to consistently apply boundaries for healthy self-reflection and not take emotional residue from work home. Applying adaptable frameworks to address work life conflict is crucial as each individual has their own value system, stress thresholds, and personal or professional goals. Thus, the frameworks aiming to inspire a modulated or restorative state would be beneficial to actively stay out of dysregulation to decrease work life conflict. Participants expressed the power of time to reflect was fundamental to learning about themselves, thinking of solutions to apply, and decompressing. Dialogue to reflect with an individual outside of work or home provides space for venting and compartmentalizing with a neutral perspective. In addition to dialogue, integrating habits

such as taking walks, breathwork, visualization, grounding, movement, or connecting with the present moment are opportunities to integrate work and personal habits.

The second recommendation is to mirror a positive narrative. Participants shared when they stay positive about themselves, interactions with their team and others becomes more synergistic and challenges are navigated with more ease as there is a mindset of wanting others to learn, grow, and succeed. In addition, these participants shared they challenge their team with difficult questions with an intention to help individuals reach their potential through increasing self-awareness. Conversely, the study data also shared high pressure deadlines can bring out a negative narrative leading to harmful impact on self-image and ability to connect with team confidentially. Coaches, EAP, and Wellness Program Providers can support senior managers or higher by mirroring a positive narrative by applying appreciative inquiry techniques, empowering a multiplier mindset and benchmarking with assessments. Mirroring positive narrative offers leaders to experience what modulated or potentially restorative state feels like, and how to effectively engage with positive interaction rather than colluding with negatively during high pressure deadlines. Becoming a positive ally can mean exposing whole picture thinking to allow individuals to be vulnerable with their true emotion, sparking ah-ha's to reframe narrative towards self, others, and the organization.

Limitations

Limitations are issues and events that occur over the course of a study and affect the validity and reliability of the study results. Three limitations affected the present study. The first limitation is that the study findings relied on self-reported data and evaluation of one's own stress response to the conveyed scenario. Accuracy of

participants scenario depiction and stress response could be skewed as participants recalled from past experiences. The data collected were from participants point of view, and no third-party point of view was collected to verify if this is how the individual interacted in the perceived experience. This could limit the context of experience and accuracy of how the individual or others were perceived in the shared scenario. To avoid limitation in the future, involving more cross-reference interviews with a direct report or colleague who was involved with the shared scenarios, or interviews with colleagues who know the senior manager or higher demeanor well enough to anticipate how the individual would respond to each ESA state would give more accuracy and verification of data.

The second limitation is sample size as the study conveyed 10 interviews. As a standard practice for research is to convey 12-25 interviews, the sample size may be too small to grasp nuances and diversity of industries, roles, responsibilities, mindsets, stress responses, and external factors. Involving a larger sample size in future studies would be helpful to have more diverse perspective.

The third limitation concerned the reliance of interviews as the source of data. Relying heavily on subjective qualitative accounts is not objectively verifiable. Future studies could complement these accounts with physiological data or other quantitative measurements to gauge which ESA state participants are in and what is occurring for them.

Suggestions for Research

Participants described a range of experiences related to dysfunctional embodied self-awareness states and what their experiences following these states were like.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the personal characteristics of people who move from DESA to growth versus the characteristics of those who move from DESA toward continued dysfunction. This follow-on study could be conducted as a phenomenology to examine the differences in the lived experiences of these two populations. The benefits of such a study could illuminate how individuals may support their movement from DESA toward growth.

A second suggestion for continued research concerns the tendency to get overcharged and burned out when in MESA. Participants described this experience as working on all cylinders and having an adrenalin rush. Therefore, it is critical to make time to recharge and restore one's energy. It would additionally be beneficial to examine how to build small episodes of RESA into the midst of MESA in order to regularly recalibrate to avoid burnout.

A third suggestion concerns further defining what RESA is within the workplace. Participants generally reported that true RESA, which concerns deep states of relaxation and restoration, doesn't occur at work. Therefore, it would be helpful to further examine whether RESA belongs outside of the workplace or how it needs to be adapted for the workplace. Related studies could also examine the extent to which RESA be induced through mindset and what benefits are produced around the clock for individuals when they practice workplace RESA.

Summary

Work-related stress creates problems for leaders and their organizations, reducing performance and creating issues of burnout, turnover, and compromised well-being. This study examined managers' experiences of their dysfunctional, modulated, and restorative

ESA states to optimize their stress response for work performance. A purposive sample of 10 senior managers and leaders was interviewed about their experiences of stress and its effects on their work performance. The data were examined using content analysis. Participants' described their DESA experiences as being characterized by emotional overwhelm and ruminative thinking, mental and physical depletion, losing mental focus and motivation for work, and disconnecting from themselves. They reported their DESA states were triggered by interpersonal dynamics and stressors, significant project or organizational changes, being under-resourced, and experiencing leadership changes. DESA states reportedly affected participants' work performance and relationships.

Participants associated experiences of MESA with stimulating and novel work, collaboration and productive interaction, and enjoyment and confidence. MESA states were triggered by having a climate for collaboration, having autonomy and accountability, and receiving a high-stakes challenging task. Participants reported that MESA states had a positive impact on their work performance in three specific ways: mobilizing their thought and action, being more effective individually and collectively, and feeling more positive and calm.

Participants' RESA states included self-awareness, self-expression, and relaxation. Work-situated RESA states reportedly were triggered by maintaining a proactive but tolerant focus on productivity, focusing on healthy connection and collaboration, and focusing on fun and positivity. Participants reported that RESA states enhanced their work performance, peacefulness, and optimism; improved their connection to themselves and others; and promoted more appropriate responses to work-related stressors. Several recommenadtions for practice and research were advised.

References

Alexander, B. K. (2008). *The globalisation of addiction: A study in poverty of the spirit.* Oxford University Press.

Anjum, A., & Zhao, Y. (2022). The impact of stress on innovative work behavior among medical healthcare professionals. *Behavioral Science, 12*, 340. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12090340

Aposhyan, S. (2004). *Body-mind psychotherapy: Principles, techniques, and practical applications.* W. W. Norton

Atkinson, W. (2000). When stress won't go away. *HR Magazine, 45*(12), 104–110.

Avero, P., Corace, K. M., Endler, N. S., & Calvo, M. G. (2003). Coping styles and threat processing. *Personality and Individual Differences, 35*(4), 843–861.

Barsade, S. G. (2002). The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 47*(4), 644.

Bernard, S. (2016). Relational somatic presence: Meeting trauma with Rosen Method bodywork. *Rosen Method International Journal, 9*, 25–53. https://1xhdko41sric25njz22ditir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BernardFinalArticleSpring2016.pdf

Blake, A. (2018). *Your body is your brain: Leverage your somatic intelligence to find purpose, build resilience, deepen relationships and lead more powerfully.* Trokay.

Blake, A. (2022). *Embodied awareness, embodied practice: A powerful path to practical wisdom* [Doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=case1647524618203834

Blascovich, J., Mendes, W., Hunter, S., & Salomon, K. (1999). Social 'facilitation' as challenge and threat. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology, 77*(1), 68–77.

Braun, N., & Kotera, Y. (2021). Influence of dance on embodied self-awareness and well-being: An interpretative phenomenological exploration. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 17*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1924910

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2014). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing.* Sage.

Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2007). *Savoring: A new model of positive experience.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cacioppo, J. T., & Cacioppo, S. (2018). The growing problem of loneliness. *The Lancet, 391*, 426

Cartwright-Hatton, S., & Wells, A. (1997). Beliefs about worry and intrusions: The metacognitions questionnaire and its correlates. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 11*(3), 279–296.

Cavanaugh, M. A., Boswell, W. R., Roehling, M. V., & Boudreau, J. W. (2000). An empirical examination of self-reported work stress among U.S. managers. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*(1), 65–74. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.1.65

Cleveland Clinic. (2023a). Parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS). https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/23266-parasympathetic-nervous-system-psns

Cleveland Clinic. (2023b). Sympathetic nervous system (SNS). https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/23262-sympathetic-nervous-system-sns-fight-or-flight

Craig, A. D. (2003). Interoception: The sense of the physiological condition of the body. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology, 13*(4), 500–505.

Craig, A. D. (2015). *How do you feel? An interoceptive moment with your neurobiological self.* Princeton University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, D. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crum, A. J., Salovey, P., & Achor, S. (2013). Rethinking stress: The role of mindsets in determining the stress response. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*(4), 716–733.

Daniel, W. (2023, February 8). Middle managers are so burned out that nearly half want to quit within the next year. *Fortune.* https://fortune.com/2023/02/08/work-burnout-middle-managers-nearly-half-want-to-quit-within-year/

Dunn, L. B., Iglewicz, A., & Moutier, C. (2008). A conceptual model of medical student well-being: Promoting resilience and preventing burnout. *Academic Psychiatry, 32*(1), 44–53. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ap.32.1.44

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350–383. https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Edwards, J. R., Caplan, R. D., & Van Harrison, R. (1998). Person-environment fit theory: Conceptual foundations, empirical evidence, and directions for future research. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of organizational stress* (pp. 28–67). Oxford University Press.

Endler, N. S., & Parker, J. D. A. (1990). Multi dimensional assessment of coping: A critical review. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*(5), 844–854.

Fogel, A. (2009). *The psychophysiology of self-awareness: Rediscovering the lost art of body sense.* W.W. Norton.

Fogel, A. (2011). Embodied awareness: Neither implicit nor explicit, and not necessarily nonverbal. *Child Development Perspectives, 5*(3), 183–186.

Fogel, A. (2020). Three states of embodied self-awareness in Rosen Method bodywork: Part 1: Practitioner observations of their clients. *Rosen Method International Journal, 13*(1): 4–36.

Fogel, A. (2021). *Restorative embodiment and resilience: A guide to disrupt habits, create inner peace, deepen relationships, and feel greater presence.* North Atlantic Books.

Friborg, O., Hjemdal, O., Rosenvinge, J. H., & Martinussen, M. (2003). A new rating scale for adult resilience: What are the central protective resources behind healthy adjustment? *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research, 12,* 65–76.

Friedman, M. J. (2015). The human stress response. In N. C. Bernardy & M. J. Friedman (Eds.), *A practical guide to PTSD treatment: Pharmacological and psychotherapeutic approaches* (pp. 9–19). http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14522-002

Gallese, V. (2001). The "shared manifold" hypothesis. From mirror neurons to empathy. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 8*(5–6), 33–50.

Gandhe, R. J. (2015). Positive stress: Review of relevant theories and an alternative conceptualization. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, 5*(3), 260–266.

Hargrove, M. B., Nelson, D. L., & Cooper, C. L. (2013). Generating eustress by challenging employees: Helping people savor their work. *Organizational Dynamics, 42*(1), 61–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2012.12.008

Hari, J. (2019). *Lost connections: Uncovering the real causes of depression—and the unexpected solutions.* Bloomsbury.

Hattie J. (2008). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* Routledge.

Howard, T. A. (2016). *Body awareness, sensory perception, and adaptive stress response* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10615676)

Iacoboni, M. (2009). *Mirroring people: The science of empathy and how we connect with others.* Picador, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Jamieson, J. P., Mendes, W. B., & Nock, M. K. (2013). Improving acute stress responses: The power of reappraisal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(1), 51–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721412461500

Jospe, K., Flöel, A., & Lavidor, M. 2018. The interaction between embodiment and empathy in facial expression recognition. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 13*(2), 203–215.

Jungmann, S. M., Vollmer, N., Selby, E. A., Witthöft, M. (2016). Understanding dysregulated behaviors and compulsions: An extension of the emotional cascade model and the mediating role of intrusive thoughts. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*, 1–13

Keller, A., Litzelman, K., Wisk, L. E., Maddox, T., Cheng, E. R., Creswell, P. D., & Witt, W. P. (2012). Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality. *Health Psychology, 31*(5), 677–684. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026743

Kogler, A. (2020). *Commentary on Alan Fogel's three states of embodied self-awareness in Rosen Method bodywork: Part 1: Practitioner observation of their clients; Part 2: Practitioner observations of their own experiences; Part 3: Practitioner post-session notes (Rosen Method International Journal, Vol 13, Issue 2, 2020).* https://roseninstitute.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/KoglerFinalSunday.pdf

Kung, C., & Chan, C. (2014). Differential roles of positive and negative perfectionism in predicting occupational eustress and distress. *Personality and Individual Differences, 58*, 76–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.10.011

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* Springer.

Le Fevre, M., Matheny, J., Kolt, G. S. (2003). Eustress, distress, and interpretation in occupational stress. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 18*(7), 726–744.

Levine, P. A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma: The innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences.* North Atlantic Books.

Levine, P. A., & Frederick, A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma.* North Atlantic Books.

Levine, P. A., & Mate, G. (2010). *In an unspoken voice: How the body releases trauma and restores goodness*. North Atlantic Books.

Lipmanowicz, H., & McCandless, K. (2014). *The surprising power of liberating structures: Simple rules to unleash a culture of innovation.* Liberating Structures Press.

Maister, L., Hodossy, L., & Tsakiris, M. (2017). You fill my heart: Looking at one's partner increases interoceptive accuracy. *Psychology of Consciousness, 4*(2), 248–257. https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000110

Mehling, W. (2016). Differentiating attention styles and regulatory aspects of self-reported interoceptive sensibility. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 371*(1708), 20160013.

Mehling, W., & Price, C., Daubenmier, J., Mike, A., Bartmess, E., & Stewart, A. (2014). Body awareness and the practice of yoga or meditation in 435 primary care patients with past or current low back pain. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 20*, A63–A64. https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2014.5165.abstract

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage.

Moseley, A. C. (2018). *Eustress in advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) students* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 10977438)

Myers, T. W. (2014). *Anatomy trains: Myofascial meridians for manual and movement therapists* (3rd ed). Elsevier.

Nelson D., & Simmons B. (2004). *Eustress: An elusive construct, an engaging pursuit.* Elsevier, JAI.

O'Sullivan, G. (2011). The relationship between hope, eustress, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction among undergraduates. *Social Indicators Research, 101*, 155–172. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41476424

Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy.* W. W. Norton

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.

Payne, P., & Crane-Godreau, M. A. (2015). The preparatory set: a novel approach to understanding stress, trauma, and the bodymind therapies. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 9*, 178. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00178

Porges S. W. (2001). The polyvagal theory: Phylogenetic substrates of a social nervous system. *International Journal of Psychophysiology, 42*(2), 123–146. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0167-8760(01)00162-3

Porges, S. W. (2004). Neuroception: A subconscious system for detecting threats and safety. *Zero to Three, 24*(5), 19–24.

Porges, S. W. (2009). The polyvagal theory: New insights into adaptive reactions of the autonomic nervous system. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine, 76*(Suppl 2), S86.

Quadt, L., Critchley, H. D., & Garfinkel, S. N. (2018). The neurobiology of interoception in health and disease. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1428(*1), 112–128. https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13915

Rosen, M., & Brenner, S. (2003). *Rosen Method bodywork: Accessing the unconscious through touch.* North Atlantic,

Rudland, J. R., & Wilkinson, T. J. (2018). When I say … stress. *Medical Education, 52*(7), 692–693. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13520

Rudland, J. R., Golding, C., & Wilkinson, T. J. (2020). The stress paradox: how stress can be good for learning. *Medical Education, 54*(1), 40–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13830

Russell, G., & Lightman, S. (2019). The human stress response. Nature reviews. *Endocrinology, 15*(9), 525–534. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41574-019-0228-0

Savitz, J., & Harrison, N. A. (2018). Interoception and Inflammation in Psychiatric Disorders. *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging, 3,* 514–524.

Schliep, R., Findley, T. W., Chaitow, L., & Huijing, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Fascia: The tensional network of the human body: The science and clinical applications in manual and movement therapy.* Churchill Livingstone/Elsevier.

Schore, A. N. (2003). *Affect dysregulation and disorders of the self.* W. W. Norton

Selye, H. (1955). Stress and disease. *Science*. 122 (3171), 625–631.

Selye, H. (1956). *The stress of life*. McGraw-Hill.

Selye, H. (1984). *The stress of life* (Rev. ed.) McGraw-Hill

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: Toward a neurobiology of interpersonal experience.* Guilford.

Silsbee, D. (2018). *Presence-based leadership.* Yes! Global, Inc.

Sorajjakool, S., Aja, V., Chilson, B., Ramírez-Johnson, J., & Earll, A. (2008). Disconnection, depression, and spirituality: A study of the role of spirituality and meaning in the lives of individuals with severe depression. *Pastor Psychology, 56,* 521–532. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-008-0125-2

Strozzi-Heckler, R. (1993). *The anatomy of change: A way to move through life's transitions.* North Atlantic Books.

Strozzi-Heckler, R. (2003). *In search of the warrior spirit: Teaching awareness disciplines to the Green Berets* (3rd ed). North Atlantic Books.

UKG. (2023). Mental health at work: Managers and money. https://www.ukg.com/resources/article/mental-health-work-managers-and-money

Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma.* Penguin.

Wiseman, L. (2017). *Multipliers, revised and updated: How the best leaders make everyone smarter.* Harper Business.

Appendix A: Study Invitation

Dear [*name*],

My name is Kristina Banfield, and I am a master's student in the Graziadio School of Business at Pepperdine University. I am studying how senior managers and leaders navigate their stress response for optimized work performance, and I need your help!

I am seeking study participants for a one-on-one interview to discuss their experiences navigating stress and the effects on performance. Specifically, I would like to interview individuals at a senior manager level or above who are currently working for a company and have at least 1 year experience in companies.

Participation in the study will be audio recorded and is anticipated to take no more than 45 minutes.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity as a participant will be protected before, during, and after the time that study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place during and after the study. Any identifying information you provide will be replaced with fake names and no information will be captured that reveals your identity.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in this study, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Please also forward this invitation to anyone you think may be interested in participating!

Thank you for your participation!

Kristina Banfield
Pepperdine University
Graziadio School of Business
Master's student
[contact information]

Appendix B: Screening Interview

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in this study! My purpose is to examine managers' experiences of optimizing their stress response for work performance. To make sure this will be a productive conversation, I need to ask you a few questions:

Question	Qualifying answer	Follow-up question or response to nonqualifying answers
2. How long have you worked there?	1 year or more	I am sorry. I am seeking participants with at least 1 year work experience. Thank you so much for your interest in participating.
3. What is your formal job title?	Senior manager or above	I am sorry. I am seeking participants at the senior manager level or above. Thank you so much for your interest in participating.
4. How many direct reports do you have?	Three or more	I am sorry. I am seeking participants with at least three direct reports. Thank you so much for your interest in participating.
5. What are formal job titles?	At least three are managers	I am sorry. I am seeking participants with at least three manager direct reports. Thank you so much for your interest in participating.

If the candidate qualifies:
Thank you for your answers! Participation will involve a one-on-one interview conducted via Zoom. I will audiorecord and transcribe it so I can focus on our conversation. In the interview, I will ask you about your experiences navigating stress and the effects on your work performance. Participation is voluntary and confidential. I will send you the consent information which outlines the confidentiality and safeguard protections further. Do you have any questions?

Can we schedule an interview day and time?

Thank you for your help!

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

IRB #:

Participant Study Title: Optimizing the Stress Responses for Work Performance

Formal Study Title: Navigating Embodied Self-Awareness States to Produce Work-Enhancing Adaptive Stress Responses

Authorized Study Personnel
Principal Investigator: Kristina Banfield, MA Candidate Office: [contact information]
Secondary Investigator: Gary Mangiofico, Ph.D. Office [contact information]

Key Information:
If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:
- Males and females age 18-75
- Procedures will include one 45-minute interview conducted via Zoom
- There are no risks associated with this study
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation
You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a senior manager employed at a Fortune 500 company.

What is the reason for doing this research study?
Stress is inherent in work and life. When leaders learn how to navigate their stress response in adaptive ways, they can optimize their work performance. The purpose of this study was to examine managers' experiences of optimizing their stress response for work performance.

What will be done during this research study?
You will be asked to take part in one 45-minute interview via Zoom to discuss your experiences navigating stress.

How will my data be used?
Your responses will be combined with all other participants' responses and common themes in the aggregate data will be identified. Any personal information that could identify you will be removed before the data are analyzed.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?
This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interviews involve questions about your experience with stress.

What are the possible benefits to you?
You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?
The benefits to science and/or society may include better understanding of how to navigate the stress response for optimized work performance.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?
Instead of being in this research study you can choose to not participate.

What will being in this research study cost you?
There is no cost to you for being a participant in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?
No compensation will be provided for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?
Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?
Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 3 years after the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pepperdine University, and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?
You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator, with Pepperdine University, or your employer. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Feedback Survey
To meet Pepperdine University's ongoing accreditation efforts and to meet the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) standards, an online feedback survey is included below: https://forms.gle/nnRgRwLgajYzBq5t7

Participant Name:

_____
Name of Participant: Please Print

Participant Signature:

_____ _____
Signature of Research Participant Date

Investigator certification:
My signature certifies that all elements of informed consent described on this consent form have been explained fully to the subject. In my judgment, the participant possesses the capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate.

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix D: Interview Script

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the study. The purpose of my research is to examine managers' experiences of optimizing their stress response for work performance.

Warm-up Questions

1. Where do you work?
2. What is your role?
3. How long have you been there?
4. What most excites or motivates you about your work?
5. What keeps you up at night related to your work?

Core Questions

Now I'd like to shift to talk about how different types of stress shows up in your day-to-day life and how you navigate that.

6. For the first type of scenario: Tell me about a time at work when you felt high-energy, challenged but productive and purposeful, and focused on task-related behaviors.

    a. What do you think prompted this experience?
    b. What effect did this experience have on your work performance, stress response, etc. (optimal, moderate, not good)?
    c. How did you navigate this experience?

7. For the second type of scenario: Tell me about a time at work when you felt a time of overwhelm and distress, typically experienced as a sense of agitation and distraction or, conversely, lethargy and disconnection. Often, this state can be associated with feeling disconnected from yourself and others.

    a. What do you think prompted this experience?
    b. What effect did this experience have on your work performance, stress response, etc. (optimal, moderate, not good)?
    c. How did you navigate this experience?

8. For the third type of scenario: Tell me about a time at work when you felt slow, calm, and relaxed, very focused on present-moment emotions and bodily sensations. This also can be associated with having a deep connection with self and others, as well as a sense of meaning and depth.

    a. What do you think prompted this experience?
    b. What effect did this experience have on your work performance, stress response, etc. (optimal, moderate, not good)?
    c. How did you navigate this experience?

9. We talked about three different kinds of experiences at work: productive and focused, distracted, and calm and reflective. How much of your experiences at work would you say fall into each of those buckets?

10. If you could adjust that balance, what would you like it to be?

11. What would you need in order to adjust that balance?

Closing Question

12. Is there anything else you would like to share related to your experiences of navigating stress at work?

Thanks so much for your insights—they are invaluable to me and my research!