



Eustress

- Energy from stress +

The Potential of Technology in Facilitating Eustress Experiences

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Outline

- Introduction
- Objectives and research questions
- Background
- Participants and method
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- Conclusions and the way forward

Introduction 1/2

- Research was carried out as a part of a research project on eustress
 - Multi-disciplinary research project (psychology, education, design, business)
 - Carried out by researchers from VTT and the University of Tampere during 2014-2015
- Focus on eustress = the positive side of stress, design for savouring positive experiences instead of minimizing negative stress



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Eustress

Introduction 1/2

Entrepreneurs as a target group for the study

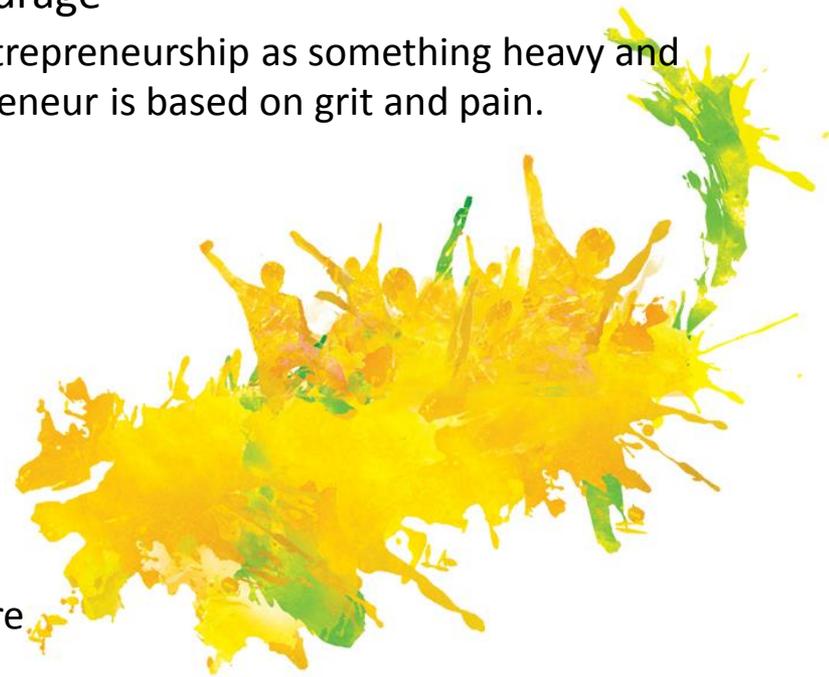
- Small business owners or self-employed workers
- Potentially having eustress experiences themselves
 - May have created favourable conditions for positive stress – by defining their working time, ways of working, working environment, tasks and tools
- Promoting positive drive, creativity and courage
 - The Finnish culture nurtures the idea of entrepreneurship as something heavy and stressful. The stereotype of Finnish entrepreneur is based on grit and pain.

Benefits of positive stress

- Drives you to get things done
- Brings enthusiasm and wellbeing
- Contributes to creating innovations

Essential for positive stress

- Feeling pleasure because of or inspite of pressure



Objectives

Main research objectives

- Gain understanding of the phenomenon of positive stress and especially the current and potential role of technology in experiencing it
- Identify opportunities for technology-aided design that supports experiencing positive side of stress

Goals of the research project

- Create knowledge for recognising and stimulating positive stress
- Enhancing individual and workplace well-being and finding new resources in daily life

Research questions

- 1) What is the current role of technology in experiencing positive stress in the everyday work-related situations of entrepreneurs?
- 2) What is the potential of technology in facilitating positive stress experiences?

Background

- The term eustress was first introduced by Hans Selye (1974), who divided the concept of stress into distress and eustress ¹
 - Based on the initiator of stress – either negative stressors or positive emotions
 - Later, he suggested that one can learn to react to stressors with positive emotions
- Already before, Richard Lazarus proposed that the cognitive response to stressors can also be a positive one ²
 - Depends on the individuals's resources and ability to cope ³
- Current understanding emphasises individual interpretation of stressors ⁴
- Eustress and distress are seen as distinct qualitative constructs ⁵

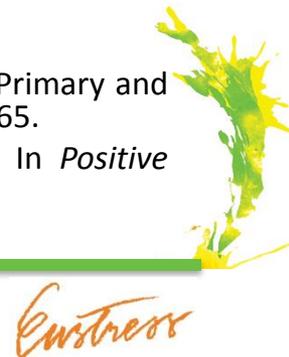
¹ Hans Selye (1974). *Stress Without Distress*. J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia.

² Richard S. Lazarus. 1966. *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*. McGraw-Hill, New York.

³ Richard S. Lazarus, Susan Folkman. 1984. *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. Springer, New York.

⁴ Mark Le Fevre, Gregory S. Kolt, Jonathan Matheny. 2006. Eustress, Distress and Their Interpretation in Primary and Secondary Occupational Stress Management Interventions: Which Way First? *J Manag Psych* 21, 6: 547–565.

⁵ Bret L. Simmons, Debra L. Nelson. 2007. Eustress at Work: Extending the Holistic Stress Model. In *Positive Organizational Behaviour*, Debra L. Nelson and Cary Cooper (eds.). Sage, London, UK, 40–53.



Participants and method

- **Participants: 21 Finnish entrepreneurs**
 - 11 males and 10 females
 - Age range from 30 to 52
 - From different fields: 10 worked in education and consulting, 11 in other fields, such as building industry and software design
- **Method**
 - Semi-structured interviews focusing on the participants' personal experiences of positive stress
 - First, the participants were interviewed on their daily life and a (potential) recent experience on positive stress; the role of technology was not asked until the end of the interview
 - The data was thematically analysed

Findings

- Everyone recognised the phenomenon of positive stress
- All recalled situations where eustress played an important role, such as giving an presentation, leading an important workshop or writing a critical document under time pressure
- Technology was seldom mentioned when talking about eustress experiences, but it was still seen as an enabler or barrier for experiencing eustress
- Role of technology evoked both positive and negative comments and experiences

Findings: RQ1

- Technology as a facilitator for eustress experiences
 - Creating or enhancing a feeling of control
 - Supporting instant & dialogic communication
 - Enabling shared understanding
 - Conveying a feeling of presence
 - Staying updated and inspired
 - Helping presenting one's work

“When I have coached managers, it [well-designed video conferencing system] has been great, totally amazing. The table in Helsinki looks exactly the same as the table here; it looks through the screen as though we were around the same table. I couldn't believe that those people are in Helsinki (laughs), not here in Tampere.”
Female, 49.



Findings: RQ1

- Technology as an obstacle to experiencing eustress
 - Causing frustration because of poor functionality, slowness or complicity
 - Distracting concentration from the main task
 - Extending work to leisure time
 - Creating a feeling of inadequacy

“It is difficult to switch off; you are connected to the work all the time. You should detach at least for a moment, do something else. It’s unfortunate that I’m quite a slave to my phone and tablet and laptop.”

Male, 40.

“You notice that there is so much going on in the world, that you feel inadequate. There is always someone who tweets and someone who has done something and who publishes something. It’s endless. If you try to keep up, it makes you stressed – negatively, not positively.”

Female, 39

Findings: RQ2

Potential of technology in facilitating positive stress

- Identifying the current ways of working which facilitate eustress and have potential to be aided by technology
- Technology may serve as an enabler to create an appropriate mindset or ways of working which lead to eustress

Identified themes

- Co-creation and collaboration
- Planning and scheduling
- Togetherness and shared success
- Means for mental preparing
- Ways to recover



Findings: RQ2

- **Co-creation and collaboration**

- Enhancing presence between partners or providing concrete tools for collaboration
- Focusing on a shared goal, providing tools for demonstrating ideas or recording results, sharing relevant information

“I see email, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and such as separate tools, used unconnected from the really meaningful stuff. Technology should support presenting the staff with the relevant things, that make people committed and help create states of excitement together.” Male, 41.

- **Planning and scheduling**

- Tools to create tight enough but achievable scheduling, ways to monitor progress and trigger oneself to complete relevant tasks
- Chopping tasks, scheduling with peaks and recovery



Findings: RQ2

- Togetherness and shared success

- Recognising the achieved results, good progress and positive feedback within the team, but also the unrewarding but necessary work for a shared goal
- Reminding to recall the feelings of the good moments

“I launched a sort of shovel prize ... Most of us don't really do anything with the shovel as we live in the city centre, but the thing is that you can have it besides your desk. Everyone knows that the one who has the shovel has done something really unrewarding, which has brought money and got things going on, but definitely hasn't been enjoyable.”

Female, 39.

Findings: RQ2

- Means for mental preparing
 - Achieving appropriate mindset to respond to new challenges
 - Can be reassuring and relaxation but also striving for positive energy
 - Very versatile actions from mindfulness exercises to playful behaviour

“When we worked in the open space office I saw how fast you can travel with the office chair down the corridor. It was like I was a child again. It distracted me from the cause of the stress and made me feel good. And when feeling good, it is easier to continue with the challenge.”

Female, 39.

- **Ways to recover**

- Important for detaching from work, all stress – positive or negative – requires recovery
- Physical activity, social contacts, leisure activities and a sufficient number of breaks as key methods
- Technology should be designed to also for blocking work issues and being unavailable when wanted

Conclusions and the way forward

- To sum up
 - The current role of technology is twofold: supporting eustress by enhancing the flexibility and fluency of working, but also preventing it by the poor functionality or excessive pervasiveness of technology
 - The potential role of technology extends to areas central to experiencing eustress: co-creation and collaboration, planning and scheduling, togetherness and shared success, the means for mental preparing and ways to recover
- The way forward: Deepening and broadening knowledge
 - Self-reporting on eustress experiences, including physiological measurements
 - Designing an online solution (a digital 'eustress toolbox') for trying out ways of thinking and working which may lead to eustress
 - An intervention for piloting the digital eustress toolbox

Thank you!

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