



Stressed out? How Business Chemistry can help you and your team

As if your regular job weren't stressful enough, add in the holidays, the pressure of the year-end close, and a major shift about to take place in Washington, and the conditions might send anyone's stress level to new heights.

It really does depend on who you are, however. The Deloitte Greenhouse™ Experience team recently surveyed more than 23,000 professionals about their stress levels at work and matched their responses to their Business Chemistry® type. The good news: overall, respondents reported only modest levels of stress. Fourteen percent said they rarely experience work-related stress, and 57% said they sometimes do. At the other end, however, 26% said

they experience such stress often, and an unhappy few (3%) said they are almost always stressed.

Knowing which employees are experiencing the most stress can have implications for productivity, health, and performance. And like other senior business leaders, CFOs not only have to keep their own stress levels in check, but also ensure that their team members are not falling victim to the pressures of the job. In this issue of *CFO Insights*, we'll discuss how finance chiefs can not only help those around them cope more effectively with stress, but also help improve the overall quality of communication and interactions they have with people of different workstyles.

Mapping stress to workstyles

As discussed in a previous *CFO Insights*, Business Chemistry was developed by Deloitte in conjunction with scientists who specialize in neuro-anthropology and genetics. It uses data derived from an online assessment to match people to one (and typically two) of four primary types (see "The power of Business Chemistry," *CFO Insights*, May 2013):

Drivers are analytical thinkers who are intellectually creative and prefer experimentation over theorization. To them, business is just that: business. As such, they have limited tolerance for small talk and aren't afraid to ruffle feathers to get their point across. ➤

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Pioneers are blue-sky ideas people, whose adaptability allows them to thrive in multiple environments. To them, business is exciting when they're exploring possibilities and redefining the status quo. As such, they sometimes feel weighed down by structure and details.

Integrators are masters of empathy and nuance, and are particularly skilled at understanding the broader context of an issue. As such, they often take time to consider everyone's opinions and socialize an approach before moving forward.

Guardians prefer concrete reality and are particularly skilled at providing structure and minimizing risk. As such, they can be reluctant to pursue unproven ideas and often deliberate thoroughly before making decisions.

Based on those thumbnail descriptions, can you guess which type is most likely to report feeling stressed at work? According to the Deloitte Greenhouse research, Guardians and Integrators reported more stress than did Pioneers and Drivers (see chart right).

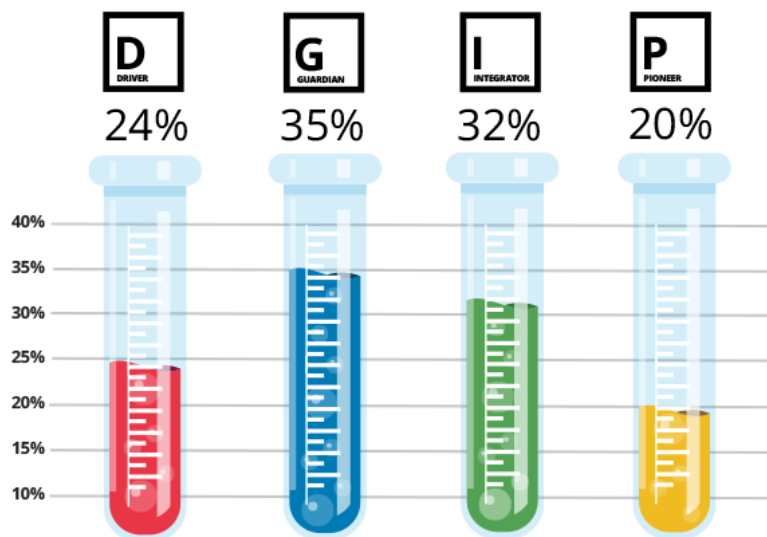
And, in a second survey of more than 17,000 professionals that queried them about their responses to stress, Guardians and Integrators were also less likely to say they're effective under stress compared with Drivers and Pioneers.

Know your stress triggers

Some level of stress at work is inevitable, no matter what your Business Chemistry type. But certain stresses can affect different types differently, too. Consider, the most common sources uncovered by the survey:

- Making an error, which topped the list, with 82% indicating this caused them stress;
- A challenging workload, entailing long hours or juggling multiple responsibilities, which was cited by 52%;
- Incidents of conflict, such as getting reprimanded or having to deliver a difficult message (also 52%);
- Situations that create urgency, such as critical projects or time pressure (46%);
- Face-to-face interactions, such as delivering presentations or meeting a new stakeholder (45%).

How stress affects different Business Chemistry® types
Percent of respondents who report feeling stressed often to almost always



Across those scenarios, Guardians and Integrators reported higher levels of stress than did Pioneers and Drivers. More than a third (35%) of Guardians, for example, reported feeling stressed “often to almost always,” compared with just 20% of Pioneers who feel that way.

One reason may be the faster pace of today's business environment, which can pose a challenge for Guardians, given their preference to work in a deliberate way, with all details covered and decisions carefully considered. Integrators, meanwhile, often strive for consensus, which also takes time. And both types prefer tried-and-true ways of operating, with a careful consideration of risks.

Those traits can bring tremendous value to a team, but they may also bring more stress to the individuals characterized by them. Guardians and Integrators are also more likely to internalize mistakes and dwell on what they might have done differently, which could contribute to higher stress. Pioneers and Drivers are more likely to brush off mistakes and move on. Because they are less likely to take charge in group settings, Guardians and Integrators may experience a certain loss of control that can also increase stress. (See sidebar, “Inward and outward views of stress.”)

What's a CFO to do?

Of course, when it comes to stress, we all have coping mechanisms. In Deloitte's second survey of 17,000 professionals, the most commonly cited were:

- Action strategies, such as diving in and tackling the issue head-on (83%);
- Cognitive coping strategies, such as stepping back and thinking through the possibilities (79%);
- Doing groundwork, such as getting organized or seeking more information (78%);
- Interpersonal strategies, such as talking with someone and bouncing ideas off people (47%);
- Taking time out to do something else, like exercising or socializing (46%).

Armed with these common responses and a knowledge of Business Chemistry, CFOs can help their team members deal with stress more effectively. One of the first steps is simply to observe their preferred modes of working and general behavior patterns to get a read on which primary type they fall into. (For a closer look at how to “hunch” other people's Business Chemistry types, click [here](#).) Then, once you know who your Guardians and Integrators are, you might consider paying particular attention to their levels of stress and guiding them toward solutions.

An additional source of relief may come from helping team members rethink their attitudes toward stress. Conventional wisdom holds that stress is harmful and should be reduced. But emerging research is also telling a different story: While stress can exact a genuine physical toll, those effects can be mitigated by the mind-set a person adopts toward stress. Put another way, stress may be harmful only if you *think* it's harmful.

Consider the classic fight-or-flight response: Confronted with a challenging situation people either engage in conflict head-on, or flee. We have been led to believe there are no other options. That's analogous to how many people frame their possible responses to workplace stress: either endure it or find a way to reduce it.

But since stress in the workplace is, at least to some degree, unavoidable, reducing it may not be an option, and enduring it is, well, stressful. But new research is revealing other possible responses. One is the challenge response, in which you regard your physical response to stress not as a sign that you are being weakened or made ill, but as a source of energy that can propel your performance.² Think of an athlete facing a high-pressure situation, or a performer about to take the stage: yes, those situations are stressful, but the physical sensations they engender can be harnessed to drive the person experiencing them to new heights.

There is also the “tend and befriend” response, in which you channel the negative energy you experience due to stress toward reaching out and helping others, thus alleviating your own stress.³ The nurturing and expansion of social networks that such behavior engenders can be a source of genuine relief.

The challenge and tend-and-befriend responses dovetail with Business Chemistry types: Drivers may be more likely to embrace a challenge response, because when a potentially stressful situation is reframed as an opportunity to achieve better outcomes, they respond positively. Integrators are more likely to thrive when they feel that their work matters, so a tend-and-befriend approach may reassure them and make them feel more connected to others. Guardians may face a bigger challenge in effectively dealing with stress,

however; not only do they report higher levels, but nascent research suggests some of the coping strategies described above may be less effective for them than for other Business Chemistry types.⁴

That doesn't mean that all is lost for Guardians and that they must resign themselves to higher levels of stress. But it does suggest that they may need more encouragement to talk about the stress they are experiencing, and a more individualized plan of response.

Why it matters

At a time when business is more competitive than ever, CFOs and other leaders cannot afford to have team members performing below capacity due to stress. Engagement, productivity, and employee health may all be adversely affected, so it is wise to focus on stress issues broadly, and pay particular

attention to team members who may be experiencing higher levels. They may be paying a price for it in terms of performance and be less likely to know how to deal with it effectively.

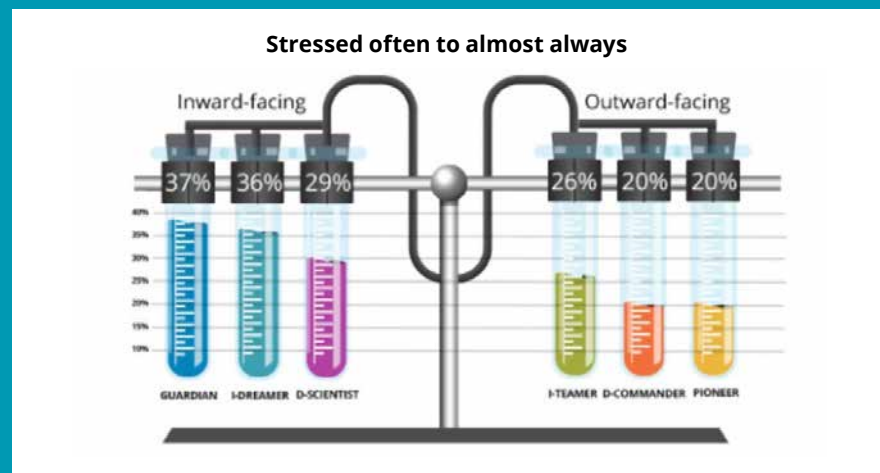
People are different, and even a rudimentary knowledge of Business Chemistry can help you appreciate and value how diverse working styles can help your company achieve common goals. Moreover, by viewing stress through the lens of Business Chemistry, CFOs can help certain team members—and their entire staffs—not only cope effectively with stress, but maybe even reframe it as a catalyst for better ways of working. ◀

*For more information on Business Chemistry and stress overall, visit deloitte.com/us/stress, and for some specific do's and don'ts see the related blog: <https://businesschemistryblog.com/2016/12/07/business-chemistry-dos-and-donts-during-times-of-stress/>.

Inward and outward views of stress

When it comes to stress, a deeper dive into Business Chemistry uncovers other differences. In addition to the four main types, some people can be further divided into sub-types (Scientist, Dreamer, Teamer, and Commander) and described in terms of whether they are inward-facing or outward-facing. People who are outward-facing (akin to being extroverted) are generally more outgoing, energetic, adaptable, and competitive, and typically report lower levels of stress. Pioneers, Integrator-Dreamers, and Driver-Commanders (see diagram below) are much less likely to report constant feelings of stress than are Guardians, Integrator-Teamers, and Driver-Scientists.

Organizations and teams may want to pay special attention to their inward-facing team members to understand what might be done to reduce stress levels. Inward-facing types may bring particular strengths that can add value to a team—like conscientiousness, strong listening skills, and detail-focus. Their tendency to be sensitive to others' experiences and reactions can help improve team collaboration and performance, but they are often the most stressed members of the team.





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End notes:

1. *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It*, Kelly McGonigal, Avery, May 2016.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

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