COPING STRATEGIES OF JOB STRESS AMONG MANAGERS OF ELECTRONICS INDUSTRIES IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Job stress is ubiquitous in today's organizations, and the costs of these phenomena cut across all levels of society. In recent years, researchers considering job stress in the workplace have made great strides in understanding several aspects of the stress phenomenon in the field of organizational behavior. Thus, it becomes more important that the coping methods of these job stresses are well explored and directly linked to individuals experiencing this situation, in order to ensure the right methods can be used for the best benefits in coping with job stresses. This research presents an integration of past research and theory that models the relationship of antecedents of job stress and coping methods among managers. The scope of this study is limited to managerial positions in electronics firms in Malaysia. Job stress antecedents in this study are related to organizational sources of stress and individual's personality traits. A set of demographic factors like age, gender and length of services, to name a few, are also studied as influencing factors to job stress. The final framework in this study includes the coping variables, in which will determine the best and most suitable coping methods for managers under job stress. A proportional sampling plan will be done to cover the surveys to be covering all major locations of electronics firms in Malaysia. Theoretical and managerial implications of the study will be discussed in details. The implication of the study would be extremely beneficial for electronics organizations in not only identifying the organizational sources of job stress, but also to understand the personality behaviors of their management staffs. More importantly, this study will recommend the best coping methods for managers that would enable the leadership team in the electronics organizations to be able to handle job stress more efficiently. This paper will discuss the pilot study results of this research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's managers face many challenges in the highly competitive working environments, characterized by lack of time, more uncontrollable factors, background distractions, lack of space, general uncertainty, and more administrative tasks that has resulted in job stress. In short, managerial work in organizations in exposed to highly stressful environments. Keichel [1] identified job stress as one of the key problem in the workforce for the next century. For instance, in a survey done by the UK Institute of Directors, 40% of the responding members said stress was a big problem in their company and 90% thought that the work practices could be a factor affecting the level of reported stress. The increasing workloads and roles at the workplace have placed managers under a lot of pressure. This has led to a significant effect on managers' psychological health that inevitably leads to stress and burnout. With job stress becoming an alarming factor for managerial staffs, coping methods to adopt and overcome the psychological distress has become significantly important.

Job stress in the workplace appears to be a wide spread cross-cultural phenomenon. Most of the research work on stress has focused on basic elements, namely (a) antecedents of stress, (b) mediators of stress and (c) outcomes of stress (Jerusalem, 1993, as cited in Deary and Blenkin [2]). Depending on the subject's characteristic coping response, potential stressors may result in different outcomes in terms of physical and psychological disturbances (Endler & Parker, 1990a, as cited in Deary and Blenkin [2]). Stress models typically show personality and environmental factors as having a strong influence on stress outcomes and coping methods (Cohen & Williamson, 1991; Maddi, 1990; Revicki & May, 1985, as cited in Deary and Blenkin [2]). In the case of personality, the dimension of neuroticism, one of the five personality traits, is thought to be an influential antecedent in human stress process [3].

2. METHODS

This research is encompassed by a pilot study using 40 managers from random electronics firms in Malaysia. The questionnaires were given in a hard-copy format and a time study was conducted. The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between organizational sources of stress and personality traits to job stress. Subsequently, the study will also gauge the relationship of job stress to coping methods. The nature of this study is correlational as it attempts to analyze the relationship between the antecedent variables to job stress and between job stress and the coping variables. This is a field study and no artificial setting was created as it examines manager's personality and their perception to organizational sources of job stress in their natural work environment. Each individual manager represents the unit of analysis in this study.

3. VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

All instruments were previously used from published literature (E.g. [4-6]). The survey measurement scale except the demographic profile utilizes a 5-point Likert response format, while the coping inventory utilizes a 4-point Likert response format.

Antecedent Variables - antecedent variables in this study will be represented by organizational variables and individual variables. Organizational variables include conflict, work overload and unfavorable work conditions. These variables will be measured using a structured questionnaire

designed by Davis, et al. [4]. The next individual variables, in this study will cover the personality traits of the managers. Dimensions of personality will be accessed using the NEO Five Factor Inventory [5] that measures the following aspects of personality traits, namely, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Given the fact that demographical factors may influence job stress, personal variables like gender, age, salary range, length of working years, educational status, marital status and job satisfaction will be statistically controlled.

Job Stress Variable - job stress variable will perform a function of dependent variable to the antecedent variable (organizational sources of stress and personality variables). Job stress will be measured using a screening inventory which helps indicate one's levels of job stress [4].

Coping Variables - Dimensions of coping will be accessed using the Coping Resources Inventory (CRI) [6]. This inventory will tabulate coping methods, namely Cognitive, Social, Emotional, Spiritual/ Philosophical, and Physical. Coping resource inventory covers 5 domains of resources. Cognitive scale addresses an individual's optimism about life and sense of self-worth. Social scale measures how much the person feels a part of social network that one can count on during the times of stress. Emotional scale refers to an individual's ability to accept and express emotions. Spiritual or philosophical scale accesses extent to which an individual is influenced by values from religion, traditions or personal philosophy. Physical scale covers an individual's health-promoting behaviors.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the present study, data collected from different segments of the electronic industry in order to find out the influence of organizational factors and individual factors on job stress. Content validity of the instrument was carried out through a Delphi technique by interviewing the first line managers, regional managers and some senior managers working in both domestic and multinational electronic companies at Malaysia. Almost all of them, in summary, were satisfied with their managerial job, and was aware of the types of stressors that would cause job stress. Everyone agreed that among all stressors, conflict, overload and work conditions would cause any employees in any positions to not be at their best in their job and career. Interesting finding, was most of them were not aware of any coping methods that can be associated with the stressors and personality traits of a certain individual. Majority of them agreed that in spite of some employers would focus on promoting Work Life Effectiveness or Balanced Work; there was no programs or efforts to manage individual employees suffering from any specific kind of job stress.

As shown in Table 1 below, all organizational variables, namely conflict, work overload and unfavorable work environment has 5 items/questions each. Croanbach's Alpha value for conflict was 0.746, work overload at 0.241 and unfavorable work conditions at 0.850. Personality traits have 12 questions each, and for Neuroticism, the Croanbach's Alpha value was at 0.452. To measure Neuroticism scale among respondents, 12 items were asked which constituted a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.452. The highest mean is 29.025 and there is a inter correlation among the items.

In terms of association tests, the results indicate that there is an association between conflict and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 78.2% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.346. There is also an association between work over load and job stress (p<0.001) and

the strength of association is 79.7% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.762. The results indicate that there is also an association between unfavorable work environment and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 74.4% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.478. Strong association between neuroticism and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 80.5% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.547. The rest of personality traits do show associations to job stress as the following, extraversion and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 82.7% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.616; openness and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 75.7% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.510; agreeableness and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 86.4% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.866 and conscientiousness and job stress (p<0.001) and the strength of association is 83.3% (Cramer's V value) with a Phi value of 2.634.

Table 1 shows the Pearson correlation test was performed to measure the correlation between the individual, organizational and the job stress. As per the above table, there is a positive correlation between unfavorable work condition and job stress (0.424), Neuroticism and job stress (0.422), conflict and job stress (0.335), work load and job stress (0.301), agreeableness and job stress (0.163) and is not significant. In addition, there is a negative correlation between Extraversion and job stress (-0.113), openness and job stress (-0.037), conscientiousness and job stress (-0.169).

Table-1. (Above): Correlations between Job Stress and Personality/Organizational variables

		Conflict	Work overload	Unfavorable work condition	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Job stress
Conflict	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-0.140	0.646	0.025	0.016	-0.166	-0.142	0.003	0.335
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.390	0.000	0.880	0.924	0.307	0.381	0.986	0.035
Work overload	Pearson Correlation	-0.140	1.000	-0.093	-0.068	-0.191	-0.155	0.382	0.235	0.301
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.390		0.568	0.678	0.237	0.339	0.015	0.144	0.059
Unfavorable work condition	Pearson Correlation	0.646	-0.093	1.000	0.329	-0.316	-0.189	-0.022	-0.129	0.424
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.568		0.038	0.047	0.244	0.893	0.428	0.006
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	0.025	-0.068	0.329	1.000	-0.036	0.090	-0.064	-0.181	0.422
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.880	0.678	0.038		0.825	0.582	0.697	0.263	0.007
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	0.016	-0.191	-0.316	-0.036	1.000	0.083	-0.039	0.221	-0.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.924	0.237	0.047	0.825		0.609	0.811	0.170	0.487
Openness	Pearson Correlation	-0.166	-0.155	-0.189	0.090	0.083	1.000	0.010	-0.056	-0.037

Continue

	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.307	0.339	0.244	0.582	0.609		0.951	0.730	0.821
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-0.142	0.382	-0.022	-0.064	-0.039	0.010	1.000	0.548	0.163
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.381	0.015	0.893	0.697	0.811	0.951		0.000	0.315
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	0.003	0.235	-0.129	-0.181	0.221	-0.056	0.548	1.000	-0.169
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.986	0.144	0.428	0.263	0.170	0.730	0.000		0.297
Job stress	Pearson Correlation	0.335	0.301	0.424	0.422	-0.113	-0.037	0.163	-0.169	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.035	0.059	0.006	0.007	0.487	0.821	0.315	0.297	
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40

In view of the relationship between job stress and coping methods, Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation test was performed between job stress and coping resources used by the respondents. Physical resources (0.787) i.e. the degree to which respondents enact health promoting behavior believed to contribute increased physical wellbeing have a significant correlation on job stress of the respondents. This resource is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress and to enable faster recovery. Cognitive resource (0.676) i.e. respondents maintaining a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook toward others and optimism about life in general is also have significant correlation to job stress. In addition, Emotional resource (0.616) also has a good correlation on job stress. In the other hand, Spiritual/Philosophical (0.460) and Social resources (0.420) have a weak correlation on job stress.

Table-2. (Above): Correlations between Job Stress and Coping Methods variables

Correlations between job stress and coping resources

		Job Stress	Cognitive	Social	Openness	Spiritual/Philosophical	Physical
Job Stress	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.676	0.420	0.616	0.460	0.788
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.007	0.000	0.003	0.000
Cognitive	Pearson Correlation	0.676	1.000	0.571	0.564	0.259	0.625
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.107	0.000
Social	Pearson Correlation	0.420	0.571	1.000	0.281	0.049	0.326
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.007	0.000		0.079	0.763	0.040
Emotional	Pearson Correlation	0.616	0.564	0.281	1.000	0.573	0.728
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.079		0.000	0.000
Spiritual/Philosophical	Pearson Correlation	0.460	0.259	0.049	0.573	1.000	0.625
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.107	0.763	0.000		0.000
Physical	Pearson Correlation	0.788	0.625	0.326	0.728	0.625	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.040	0.000	0.000	

5. RESULTS

In summary, all organizational variables has strong correlation to job stress. All 3 vectors, namely conflict, work overload and unfavorable work environment has direct positive relationship to job stress. However, it seems conflict and work over load having the most significant strength to

this relationship. Likewise for personality variable, all 5 traits have a direct relationship, with Neuroticism having the strongest positive relationship and Agreeableness having a weak positive relationship to job stress. In addition, there is a negative correlation between Extraversion, Openness and Conscientiousness personality traits to job stress. In terms of coping methods, Physical resources i.e. the degree to which respondents enact health promoting behavior believed to contribute increased physical wellbeing have a significant correlation on job stress of the respondents. This resource is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress and to enable faster recovery. Cognitive resource i.e. respondents maintaining a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook toward others and optimism about life in general is also have significant correlation to job stress. In addition, Emotional resource also has a good correlation on job stress. In the other hand, Spiritual/Philosophical and Social resources have a weak correlation on job stress.

6. SUMMARY

In general, the study supports the hypotheses that higher presence of conflicts, work overloads and unfavorable work conditions in the work environment will cause higher job stress. Managers with Neuroticism personality are the ones that suffers most job stress and Openness personality with the ones with the least job stress. Coping methods that most managers in Malaysian electronics industry prefer in managing their job stress seems like Physical resources like getting into physical activities like sports to release their stresses. Cognitive resource seems another popular method of coping to job stress, especially maintaining a positive outlook and being highly optimistic in their life.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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