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Stress Coping Strategies By It Professionals In South India

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ABSTRACT
A stress can be damaging to the individual's psychological and physical health because it often triggers physiological responses that may be harmful these responses to stress tend to be largely automatic. Controlling them depends on the coping responses people make to stressful situation. Thus a person's mental and physical health depends, in part, on his / her ability to cope affectively with stress. In this paper, an attempt is made to evaluate the coping strategies followed by the IT professionals to reduce their stress levels and to suggest suitable measures for reducing occupational stress to the IT companies. The most preferred coping strategy of IT professionals was found to be problem focused, followed by social support. Though, emotion focused was found to be least preferred strategy, positive distraction strategy recorded a high mean more than social support strategy.

Key words: Psychological, Physiological, Coping Strategy, Distraction Strategy, Social Support Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The theories such as job design, goal setting, organizational behavior modification, group dynamics, management of conflict, communication skills, political strategies, leadership styles, organization processes and design, decision making skills, control techniques, management of change, and organization development techniques suggest ways to manage more effectively cope with stress. These are all even overall theories being developed on coping with stress. Taking time to manage time suggests some simple techniques such as time management that can be used to cope with stress. However there are two major approaches to dealing with job stress.

Fred Luthens (1995) pointed out that there are the individual strategies, which tend to be more reactive in nature. That is, they tend to be ways of coping with stress that has already occurred. Some individual strategies, such as physical exercise, can be both reactive and proactive, but most are geared toward helping the person who is already suffering from stress. The second general approach is to develop a more proactive set of strategies at the organization level. The idea behind these organizational strategies is to remove stress for individual jobholders.

Stress affects not only our physical health but our mental well-being too. To successfully manage stress in everyday lives, individual should learn to relax and enjoy life. The best way to manage stress is to prevent it. This may not be always possible. So, the next best things are to reduce stress and make life easier.

STRESS COPING STRATEGIES

'Coping' refers to efforts to master, reduce or tolerate the demands created by stress. People cope with stress in many ways. A number of researchers have attempted to identify and classify the various coping techniques that people in dealing stress. Their work reveals quite a variety of coping strategies. People cannot

remain in a continuous state of tension. Even if a deliberated and conscious strategy if not adopted to deal with stress. The key to understanding stress and coping is individual perceptions of demands and the sufficiency of their coping responses to demands. According to this transactional model, coping can be broadly divided into emotion focused coping and problem focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused (also called palliative) coping refers to strategies used to moderate distressing emotions. In contrast problem focused coping refers to attempts to alter the demands-coping imbalance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Design

The top seven IT companies as per the present estimate by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM, 2013) was considered as the population. A convenience sample of 700 software employees is used in the present study, because it is the best sampling method while dealing with large sample sizes and infinite population. In addition, most of the earlier research studies also adopted the convenience sampling method. Since, IT professionals are dispersed over wide geographical area; the sample is taken from the prominent IT hubs in India such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai cities where a large number of IT companies are located and software professionals are employed. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed physically, through web links and emails to professionals employed in software companies operating in different city locations in India. The selected companies HR managers / executives were approached on this purpose seeking support in conducting the survey.

The sample was drawn from both men and women software professionals holding positions ranging from trainees or fresher's to middle management. Repeated follow ups result in collecting a total of 498 filled-in questionnaires, out of which 8 questionnaires were half- filled and 6 other questionnaires were found having inconsistency in the responses. Both half-filled and inconsistent questionnaires were removed from the sample, leaving finally 482 valid, usable questionnaires.

Statistical Analysis

The collected responses were screened for errors systematically and coded by using MS Excel 2007. The coded data was transferred to SPSS 20.0 for further statistical analysis. In this study, consistency of scales used in questionnaire initially in pilot study was tested by using reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha scores). The collected data was tabulated using mean and standard deviation. Both descriptive and inferential techniques such as cross tabulations, Z test, Pearson correlation, analysis of variance and linear regression were used for the analysis of data and testing the hypotheses in accordance with the objectives

OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the coping strategies followed by the IT professionals to reduce their stress levels.
2. To suggest suitable measures for reducing occupational stress to the IT companies.

HYPOTHESIS

H01: There are no significant differences in the stress coping strategies among software professionals according to

their work experience

H02: There are no significant relationship between occupational stress and coping strategies among software professionals

Coping Strategies

Coping may be defined as cognitive and behavioural effort made to master, tolerate or reduce demands that tax or exceed a person's resources (Cohen and Lazarus, 1979). The coping strategies can refer to cognitive, affective or behavioural strategies towards overcoming the stress (Lazarus, 1999).

Coping check list (CCL) developed by Rao, Subbakrishna and Prabu (1999) was used in the present study. The scale has 70 items describing a broad range of behavior, emotional and cognitive responses used to handle stress. Each item is responded to with a "Yes" or a "No". It is applicable to both sexes. The author has indicated that individual items represent three major "dimension" of coping which have been categorized into other sub-dimensions. The three dimensions are problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and problem and emotion focused coping, which is further sub divided into problem focused scale – problem solving, emotion focused scale (distraction positive methods, distraction negative method, acceptance/redefinition. Religion/faith and denial/blame) and social support – which is the combination of both problem and emotion focused coping. The score of each subscale is therefore, the sum total of the responses on the scale. The scores indicate that higher the score better the coping and vice versa.

Table 1.1 portrays the sub scales and its statement number in a detailed manner. The list of statements was directly used in the questionnaire that can be referred for complete scale.

Table 1.1 Coping Strategies Sub Scales

Coping Strategies	Sub scales	No. of Scale Items	Statement No's
Problem focused	Problem solving	10	1, 12, 30, 44, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 & 70
Emotion focused	Distraction – Positive	14	4, 10, 11, 22, 29, 37, 40, 45, 48, 50, 57, 59, 63 & 64
	Distraction – Negative	9	8, 14, 17, 24, 34, 36, 58, 60 & 69
	Acceptance/ Redefinition	11	2, 5, 13, 16, 18, 20, 28, 41, 43, 47 & 61
	Religion/Faith	9	9, 12, 25, 27, 33, 36, 39, 62 & 66
	Denial / Blame	11	6, 19, 23, 31, 32, 35, 38, 49, 51, 67 & 68
Problem & Emotion focused	Social Support	6	3, 7, 15, 26, 42 & 65

Courtesy: Rao K, Subba krishna DK, Prabhu GG (1989)

HYPOTHESIS TESTING ON COPING STRATEGIES

The hypothesis tested and discussed in this section majorly focuses on the relationships between respondents profile and their stress coping strategies such as gender, age, qualifications, marital status, work

experience, annual income and working hours. Further, tests the relationship between occupational stress and coping strategies among IT professionals in India. A total eight hypotheses were framed and tested by using appropriate statistical tools such as Z test, ANOVA, Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression.

H01: There are no significant differences in the stress coping strategies among software professionals according to their work experience

This hypothesis is framed to examine the relationship between work experience and stress coping strategies of the IT professionals in India. Table 1.3 portrays the mean and standard deviation of different experienced IT professionals with respect to their coping strategies. From the table, it can be observed that the problem focused and emotion focused was high in the respondents having less than 2 years of work experience (mean=3.70, 3.17), whereas the social support coping was found to be high in respondents having work experience between 2 and 4 years (mean=3.55). The next higher mean was observed in the respondents having work experience above 7 years (overall coping mean=3.17).

Table 1.2 Mean distributions between Work Experience and Coping strategies

Experience / Coping Strategies	< 2 years (n=103)		2 - 4 years (n=127)		4 – 7 years (n=79)		> 7 years (n=173)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Problem Focused	3.70	0.095	3.58	0.438	3.56	0.360	3.54	0.365
Distraction-Positive	3.64	0.070	3.47	0.659	3.17	0.391	3.51	0.273
Distraction-Negative	2.89	0.332	2.22	0.369	2.57	0.873	2.65	0.857
Acceptance/ Redefinition	3.18	0.271	3.36	0.597	3.30	0.480	3.37	0.382
Religious/ Faith	3.00	0.332	3.12	0.953	2.74	0.790	2.96	0.693
Denial/Blame	2.91	0.457	2.73	0.450	2.80	0.838	2.76	0.764
Emotion Focused	3.17	0.241	3.03	0.401	2.95	0.526	3.09	0.462
Social Support	3.08	0.251	3.55	0.657	3.04	0.787	3.27	0.372
Overall Coping	3.24	0.206	3.15	0.417	3.05	0.435	3.17	0.390

To test the relationship between work experience and stress coping strategies of the respondents, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried as there are four sub-groups in the work experience. Table 1.3 displays the ANOVA test results employed between work experience and stress coping strategies. From the table, it can be noted that all the p values are less than 0.05, (except blame/denial strategy) which clearly says that stress coping strategies are having significant relationship with the respondents work experience.

Table 1.3 Relationship between Work Experience and Coping strategies

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Problem Solving	Between Groups	1.709	3	.570	4.764*	.003
	Within Groups	57.163	478	.120		
	Total	58.872	481			
Distraction Positive	Between Groups	10.480	3	3.493	20.880*	.000
	Within Groups	79.971	478	.167		
	Total	90.450	481			
Distraction Negative	Between Groups	27.406	3	9.135	20.377*	.000
	Within Groups	214.294	478	.448		
	Total	241.700	481			
Acceptance/ Redefinition	Between Groups	2.635	3	.878	4.398*	.005
	Within Groups	95.445	478	.200		
	Total	98.080	481			
Religious/Faith	Between Groups	7.123	3	2.374	4.419*	.004
	Within Groups	256.816	478	.537		
	Total	263.939	481			
Denial/Blame	Between Groups	2.089	3	.696	1.648	.177
	Within Groups	201.948	478	.422		
	Total	204.037	481			
Emotion Focused	Between Groups	2.568	3	.856	4.844*	.002
	Within Groups	84.461	478	.177		
	Total	87.029	481			
Social Support	Between Groups	17.541	3	5.847	21.033*	.000
	Within Groups	132.882	478	.278		
	Total	150.424	481			
Overall Coping Strategies	Between Groups	1.668	3	.556	3.963*	.008
	Within Groups	67.075	478	.140		
	Total	68.744	481			

Note: * significant at 95% confidence level
Thus, H02 (null hypothesis) is rejected.

H02: There are no significant relationship between occupational stress and coping strategies among software

professionals

This hypothesis examines the relationship between occupational stress levels and the coping strategies adopted by the IT professionals. To test this hypothesis, both Analysis of Variance and Pearson Correlation were employed for detailed investigation on the relationship between occupational stress levels (independent variable) and coping strategies (dependent variable).

Table 1.4 Relationships between Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Problem Solving	Between Groups	41.627	25	1.665	44.030*	.000
	Within Groups	17.245	456	.038		
	Total	58.872	481			
Distraction Positive	Between Groups	77.186	25	3.087	106.143*	.000
	Within Groups	13.264	456	.029		
	Total	90.450	481			
Distraction Negative	Between Groups	222.998	25	8.920	217.491*	.000
	Within Groups	18.702	456	.041		
	Total	241.700	481			
Acceptance/ Redefinition	Between Groups	85.374	25	3.415	122.555*	.000
	Within Groups	12.706	456	.028		
	Total	98.080	481			
Religious/Faith	Between Groups	232.319	25	9.293	134.016*	.000
	Within Groups	31.619	456	.069		
	Total	263.939	481			
Denial/Blame	Between Groups	181.353	25	7.254	145.823*	.000
	Within Groups	22.684	456	.050		
	Total	204.037	481			
Emotion Focused	Between Groups	74.211	25	2.968	105.606*	.000
	Within Groups	12.818	456	.028		
	Total	87.029	481			
Social Support	Between Groups	126.365	25	5.055	95.805*	.000
	Within Groups	24.058	456	.053		
	Total	150.424	481			
Overall Coping Score	Between Groups	59.291	25	2.372	114.406*	.000
	Within Groups	9.453	456	.021		
	Total	68.744	481			

* Significant at 0.05 level

Table 1.4 shows the ANOVA test results conducted between occupational stress of the respondents and their coping strategies. From the table, it can be observed that all the variables are statistical significant at 95 % confidence level ($p<0.05$). Hence it can be inferred that there is a statistical significant relationship between

occupational stress and coping strategies adapted by the respondents. For deeper understanding the relationship between occupational stresses and coping strategies, Pearson Correlation was also employed by considering all the variables of the study. Table 1.5 displays the Correlation test results conducted.

Table 1.5 Relationships between Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies

Correlations						
		Self-Analysis	Stress Related Behaviour	Habitual Changes	Routine Hassles at Work	Overall Stress
Problem Solving	Pearson Correlation	-.030	.072	.035	.345**	.108*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.512	.114	.443	.000	.018
Distraction Positive	Pearson Correlation	.007	.008	.159**	.562**	.194**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.876	.863	.000	.000	.000
Distraction Negative	Pearson Correlation	-.090*	.046	-.112*	-.098*	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.310	.014	.031	.066
Acceptance/ Redefinition	Pearson Correlation	.211**	-.016	.186**	.397**	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.732	.000	.000	.000
Religious/ Faith	Pearson Correlation	.232**	.060	.072	.096*	.180**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.186	.116	.035	.000
Denial/ Blame	Pearson Correlation	.128**	-.061	.015	.176**	.104*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.180	.741	.000	.022
Emotion Focused	Pearson Correlation	.130**	.010	.077	.291**	.169**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.818	.090	.000	.000
Social Support	Pearson Correlation	.125**	-.113*	.194**	.422**	.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.013	.000	.000	.000
Overall Coping Score	Pearson Correlation	.125**	.003	.094*	.349**	.183**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.949	.040	.000	.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Thus, H02 is rejected.

Correlation is a technique for investigating the relationship between two quantitative, continuous variables.

Further, correlation coefficient (r) gives a measure of the strength of the association between the two variables which ranges from -1 to +1. From the Table 1.5, it can be observed that all the antecedents of occupational stress found significant except the stress related behavior. The negative distraction found to be insignificant with the occupational stress of the respondents. All other coping strategies found to be correlated with the occupational stress of the respondents.

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

The coping strategies were investigated by seventy statements that were grouped into three strategies: problem focused, emotion focused and social support (problem and emotion focused). The scales used for investigation was adapted from coping check list developed by Kiran et al. (1989). The most preferred coping strategy of IT professionals was found to be problem focused, followed by social support. Though, emotion focused was found to be least preferred strategy, positive distraction strategy recorded a high mean more than social support strategy. Work experience is a key variable which needs more attention as the mean values are mixed with no definite pattern. The professionals with '< 2 years' experience were good at problem focused and emotion focused strategies, whereas professionals with '2 – 4 years' experience displayed high mean in social support strategy. Statistically found a relationship between work experience and stress coping strategies. The professionals with low income (less than Rs. 2 lakh) found highly adapting all the coping strategies with exception to social support, and professional with high income (above Rs 10 lakh) exhibited low mean values across different coping strategies. Finally, the occupational stress of the IT professionals found to have statistical significant relationship with the stress coping strategies.

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