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Coping Strategy and Organizational Stress: An Empirical Analysis

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Organizational stress has been an issue of concern as it leads to strain and negative organizational and personal wellbeing. The present study intends to assess overall stress and stress associated with various roles among the Technocrats of Himachal State Electricity Board (HPSEB) and the coping mechanism they adopt to deal with stresses ensuing these roles. A sample of 300 randomly selected male technocrats (mean ± SD = 37.30 ± 5.27 years) participated in the study. The result suggested that technocrats using avoidance mode of coping reported significantly higher overall organizational role stress as compared to their counterparts using approach mode of copying (df=221, t=2.21, p< .01). In terms of various components of organizational role stress, technocrats using avoidance coping reported significantly higher stress from experiencing inter role distance (df= 221, t= 2.83, p< .01), role isolation (df= 221 t=2.00, p<.05) and self-role distance (df=221, t=2.89, p< .01) as compared to workers using approach coping. However, stress associated with role stagnation was reported significantly higher by technocrats using approach mode of copying (df=22,t=2.27, p<.05). It is evident that employees adopt avoidance mode of copying to deal with overall organizational role stress along with components of role stress. This is a dysfunctional coping mechanism that offers short term relief. The study attributes avoidance coping to higher overall stress experienced by technocrats along with stresses emanating from conflict due to performing multiple roles on and off the job, conflict arising from concept of self and demands of the role and feeling of being isolated in the set of organizational roles. Workers adopting approach mode of coping reported higher stress due to role stagnation i.e. stuck at a position for a longer period. The present study suggests that curative measures must be adopted through regular stress audit programmes and by creating awareness on functional mechanisms of coping to deal with organizational stress and its various components.

Keywords: Humor styles; forgiveness; mental health; Mediation effect.

Stress has plagued humans in different ways. It is not true that stress is the inevitable consequence of modern life. Our ancestors were highly stressed too. A study in the recent past reported high levels of Cortisol a stress hormone, from the hair of ancient Peruvian remain (Webb et. al., 2010). Maybe the complexity of modern life might have increased the potential for stress experience in terms of its nature, intensity, frequency and duration. Stress has been found to co-exist with human life. Organizational stress has been an issue concerning workers at job as it leads to strain or negative psycho-physiological response (Bollinger et. al., 2022). The increasing complexity of organizations and their emerging roles, increases the susceptibility for individual workers to experience stress at the workplace. While stress is ubiquitous, however, due to the inherent nature of complexity, a convergence on a common definition of stress has not taken place. Stress has been considered as Stress Producing Events Conditions (SPEC) (McGrath and Beehr, 1990), which has been conceived as basically social and psychological in nature rather than physical in form. Others have envisaged stress as interplay between internal and external demand and individual resources and described it as a condition in which internal or external demands exceed a person's coping abilities (Lazarus, 1990). The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines job stress as,"the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of a job do not match the

capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers" (NIOSH, 1999). However, the key point that is generally accepted by the researchers is that stress, whether at work or elsewhere, is not an exogenous entity but an individual phenomenon (Sharma, 1999; Sharma, 2022). Stress at work has been used as an umbrella term meaning different things to different people. However, it has been distinguished in two different perspectives, stress generating work conditions and stress response. While the earlier is a condition impacting from the work itself, the latter is the individual's response to the stressor in terms of his/her inability to cope (Chandola, 2010). The workplace has been described by several researchers as a place filled with stress and negative emotional experiences (Kovacs, 2007). Typical job stress has been found across different professions including teachers, doctors, nurses, and corporate employees (Kerr et.al., 2011, Bagheri, Hosseinabadi et.al., 2018). In a Meta analytic study, Montgomery and Rupp (2005), reported that poor coping skills were significant factors that caused daily stress to become distress. The inability of the human body to distinguish successfully the serious stressors from the daily stressors may lead to severe problems at the workplace in terms

Table 1. Comparison of Technocrats using Avoidance or Approach as dominant mode of Coping with respect to Organizational Role Stress

Sr. No.	Measures of ORS	Approach Coping (n=110)	Avoidance Coping (n=113)	t-Value
1	IRD	M=3.10 SD=1.74	M=3.83 SD=2.10	2.83**
2	RS	M=2.65 SD=1.10	M=2.32 SD=1.04	2.27*
3	REC	M=2.84 SD=1.68	M=2.57 SD=1.25	1.36
4	RE	M=5.94 SD=3.88	M=6.62 SD=3.58	1.38
5	RO	M=4.20 SD=3.68	M=4.77 SD=3.13	1.26
6	RI	M=4.08 SD=3.77	M=5.00 SD=3.41	2.00*
7	PI	M=2.48 SD=1.11	M=2.73 SD=1.00	1.78
8	SRD	M=2.40 SD=1.08	M=2.80 SD=0.95	2.89**
9	RA	M=2.42 SD=0.96	M=2.67 SD=1.41	1.52
10	RIn	M=2.53 SD=1.02	M=2.65 SD=1.45	0.71
11	Total ORS	M=2.68 SD=9.77	M=36.05 SD=9.15	2.66**

*p<.05, ** p<.01

IRD- Inter Role Distance
RS- Role Stagnation
REC- Role Expectation Conflict
RE- Role Erosion
RO- Role Overload
RI- Role Isolation
PI- Personal Inadequacy
SRD-Self Role Distance
RA- Role Ambiguity
RIn-Resource Inadequacy

of wellbeing and productivity. Understanding how the complex system of roles influence the individual stress response and lead to coping behavior is an important challenge. In this context several studies have reported huge costs borne by the companies in terms of medical and other expenses (Chapman, 2005; Hassard et.al., 2017).

In the present study, stresses associated with role space i.e., the system of various roles, which the individual carries and performs, and "role set" i.e., system of various roles of which incumbent's roles is a part, (Pareek, 1983) were considered for a group of technocrats who used either approach or avoidance coping to deal with the stress.

Method

The present research was delimited to the technocrats serving in the Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB) at Shimla due to convenience of data collection. A sample of 300 technocrats (mean ± SD age 37.30 ±5.27 Years) subjects were randomly selected. Minimum qualification of these technocrats was diploma in engineering. All the subjects were male, married and having an urban middle class background with minimum five years of job experience.

Research Tools:

Organizational Role stress scale (Pareek, 1983) was used to measure organizational role stress. Organizational Role stress scale (ORS) is 950 items scale assessing 10 different roles considered as potential stresses in an organization. These 10 stresses are Self-Role Distance (SRD), Role Erosion (RE), Resource Inadequacy (RIn), Inter Role Distance (IRD), Role Stagnation (RS), Role Expectation Conflict (REC), Role Overload (RO), Role Isolation (RI), Personal Inadequacy (PI) and Role Ambiguity (RA). The scale has acceptable reliability and validity (Pareek, 1983).

The organizational role PICS (O) (Pareek, 1983), a semi projective instrument was used for the assessment of various coping strategies that the employees adopt to deal with organizational role stress. PICS stand for Projective Instrument for Coping Style.

Results

Table 1 provides the comparison of technocrats using either approach or avoidance coping strategies when they encounter stress associated with organizational roles.

It is quite evident from the table that technocrats using avoidance mode of coping reported significantly higher overall organizational role stress as compared to their counterparts, using approach mode of coping ((t=2.21, p<. 01). The component wise index of stress and coping strategies used by the technocrats indicate that higher stress in terms of Inter Role Distance (t= 2.83, p< .01), Role Isolation (t=2.00, p<. 05) and Self Role Distance (t= 2.89, p<. 01) was experienced by the subjects using avoidance coping. However, higher stress associated with Role Stagnation was reported by the technocrats using the approach mode of coping (t=2.27, p< .05). The result by and large indicates that higher overall stress as well as the stresses associated with specific roles is higher among the technocrats using avoidance mode of coping.

Discussion

A growing body of research reveals that occupational stress is an issue of concern (Yan et.al., 2022; AlMuammar et.al., 2022). Although ample research has shown the relationship of stress and wellbeing (Fortes et. al., 2022), less is known, however, about how individuals deal with stress that they experience at work. Generally, studies have viewed stress as an overall experience measured as a composite score (Khade et.al., 2022). The present study attempted to investigate the overall and component wise index of organizational stress and the pattern of coping technocrats adopt to deal with these stresses.

The study noticeably points out that technocrats using avoidance coping strategies experience higher overall organizational stress and stress associated with various roles they occupy and perform. These roles are mainly connected to linkage related stresses. Pareek (1994), suggested that linkage related stresses are experienced when there are weak linkages between self and the organizational roles. It is quite obvious that every individual experiences

some form of stress and certainly tries a way to respond to it (Lazarus, 2006). It could be possible that technocrats using avoidance as a dominant mode of coping tend to have weak linkage between their concept of self and the demands of the role, leading to self-role distance stress. Likewise, technocrats using avoidance coping reported poor linkages between different roles these technocrats perform and linkage with other roles in the role set leading to experience of stress due to being isolated in the role set. Furthermore, higher linkage related stress among avoidance copers might be because of lack of integration that the technocrats establish while executing various roles. The technocrats using approach coping reported higher stress related to role stagnation. This means technocrats tend to play their own role efficiently and confine themselves in their own role. Pareek (1994), observed this is the usual tendency of the workers. The workers in this situation tend to be bound by the role they occupy and approach the situation to avoid the conflict. Another factor associated with predominant use of avoidance coping strategy by the technocrats was their age. The participant in the present study belonged to a relatively younger age category (Mean = 37.30 years). Studies in this context reported that employees with younger age tend to adopt emotion-focused coping that include escapism, wishful thinking, denial etc. (Terry and Hynes, 1998). Furthermore, researches have also revealed that with advancing age people tend to use problem focused coping in perceived controllable situation and emotion focused i.e., avoidance strategy in perceived uncontrollable situation in comparison to younger people who tend to predominantly use avoidance focused coping regardless of controllability (Aldwin, 2011)

Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB) is a public sector organization having a large number of technical staff and yet little effort is made to audit stress at regular intervals at the organizational level and create an effective awareness programme making employees aware about effective coping strategies, despite having strong research evidence of high stress among technocrats (Sharma and Sharma, 1989; Sharma and Acharya, 1991; Tharakan, 1992). Studies have revealed that technocrats experience a high level of stress in their job domain. In such conditions employees may choose not to think about stressors, resign to the fact believing that nothing can be done, or may rely on emotional discharge or may take recourse to short term temporary relief such as alcohol, smoking or doing drugs. All these strategies belong to avoidance-focused coping.

The findings of the study confirmed that technocrats using different modes of coping experienced different levels of overall and role specific organizational role stress. The study in this context recommends that while devising stress management strategies for specific jobs it is important to focus on role specific strategies and implementing them according to the type of organization.

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