

# Role of work stress and coping strategies of employee's Performance: An Empirical study with reference to private university employees

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**ABSTRACT** – The article tries to explore the role of work-stress and coping strategies of employee performance, This study is an attempt to emphasize that performance of employees is influenced by Work stress and effort expended by them in coping with stress. Private university Employees are not a stress-free community. Overall similarity in coping behavior of employees is indicative of a possibility that the bureaucratic structure has an important role to play in deciding the reactions of employees. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984) coping is a mechanism of handling external and internal demands that are exceeding the resources of the person in order to prevent negative consequences. This research paper is inferential analysis in nature and makes use of primary data as well as secondary data. Regression analysis were used to test the statistical significance of this impact and ANOVA were used to test the hypothesis. The study found that Majority of employees perceived moderate work stress that are inter-related with Employee's Performance.

**Key words:** Work Stress, Coping strategies, Employee Performance.

## I. Introduction

Work stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed upon it. It is a mental and physical condition which affects an individual productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work (Vokic, N., Bogdanic, A., 2007). Work can also be a tremendous burden, with deadlines to meet, work overload and difficult bosses placing considerable pressure and strain on workers. Therefore, jobs and the work environment commonly produce stress, which if not properly handled, can result in negative and dysfunctional behavior at work (Riggio, 2003). Researchers commonly agree that stress is a serious problem in many organizations. The cost, organizations pay for work-stress is also seen as high. In terms of money, reports from International Labour Organization suggest that inefficiencies arising out of work-stress may cost up to 10 percent GDP of a country (Punekar, et. al., 2008). At an individual level, it becomes a cause of many diseases and even mortality (Cooper, C.L and Dewe, P., 2004).

## II. Work Stress and Performance

Work stress affects employee performance. Empirically researches have shown a negative relation between stress and performance. High level of stress is known to bring down job performance (Beehr and Newman, 1978), Performance of an employee can be stated as all of the behavior employees engage in at work. The definition probably is slightly

misleading because at times people might be engaging themselves in work which has no relation to their job

Performance (e.g. making personal phone calls). More appropriate way then would be as suggested by Campbell, (1990), according to which job performance is stated as a collection of behavior employees engage in at work, as long as that behavior contributes to the attainment of organizational goals. Present study has focused on the job and the organizational sector. Human

Behavior in the organization was found to be influenced by number of factors, such as physical, social and psychological. The type of relationship one had with the organization was defined by role. Every individual in the organization had an assigned role to play. Through the role an individual interacted and got interacted with the system. Organization were a system of the roles was suggested by Pareek (1993). He stated role to be a position a person held in the system (organization) as defined by the expectations of others and self. Work stress is a stress related to work. There are eighteen components of Work stress. The mean score of Work stress scale is called as Work -stress.

## III. Coping with Work stress

According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984) coping is a process of managing external and internal demands that are exceeding the resources of the person in order to prevent negative consequences, health-related behaviors, such as cigarette

smoking and drug abuse, were seen ways of coping with a stressful work situation in order to get short-term relief. Lazarus, (1984) coping had two connotations in stress literature. It was either used to denote the way of dealing with stress, or the effort to 'master' conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response was not readily available. (Monat and Lazarus, 1977) Coping referred to efforts to master conditions that taxed or exceeded adaptive resources. Cohen and Lazarus., (1973) considered coping as an active ongoing strategy, by learning and relearning, in a particular stress situation. Five major categories of coping strategies have been suggested

Which broadly fall under two heads, Approach Coping and Avoidance Coping Approach Coping.

#### **A. Approach Coping**

Approach coping strategies are characterized by direct attempts to deal with the situation through overt action or realistic problem solving mental activity e.g. discussing with experts, brainstorming, and thinking about alternative solutions etc. In these strategies, our focus is on the problem to be dealt with and on the agent, that has induced stress. These have been categorized into three:

- i. Behavioral – Approach Coping Strategy: The characteristic feature of this coping strategy is confronting, planning, taking impulsive decisions, negotiating etc. Common to all is the tendency to do /act in a way of directly doing something about the problem situation. E.g. devote more time and energy to meet the demand of situation.
- ii. Cognitive –Approach Coping: The characteristic features are intellectualization, positive reinterpretation, cognitive reappraisal etc. The coping strategy is by getting mentally involved in dealing with the problem situation. e. g. coming up with a couple of alternative solution to the problem.
- iii. Cognitive –Behavioral Approach Coping Strategy: This is a combination of above two strategies, exhibiting characteristic features of both. This involves along with appraising the problem situation also scheduling action to deal with it. e.g. Console myself with the thought that the situation is not so bad as it could have been and deal with positive effect.

#### **B. Avoidance Coping**

Avoidance coping strategies are those wherein a person tries to get emotional solace and comfort e. g. Going off to sleep, take leave, drinking alcohol, smoking, excessive eating etc. These have been further categorized into two types:

- i. Behavioral Avoidance Coping Strategy: The characteristic features are inhibition action, turning towards religion, escaping, behavioral disengagement, withdrawal etc. The tendency of the person is to seek immediate relief by simply avoiding the situation e.g. smoking, drinking alcohol, praying to God, etc.
- ii. Cognitive Avoidance Coping Strategy: This is characterized by rationalization, mentally distancing, resignation etc. The person facing the problem situation instead of thinking ways of solving the problem blames himself for the present situation feeling guilty and depressed.

#### **IV. Performance**

Employee performance has been described in many ways; ability to achieve targets, realize goals, attain benchmarks. Most commonly people immediately talked of job performance as what a person did at work. Sarmiento and Beale, as cited in June (2011) noted job performance

Resulted from two elements, abilities and skills (natural or acquired) that an employee possessed, and motivation to use them in order to perform a better job. Campbell, 1990; according to which job performance was stated as a collection of behavior employees engaged in at work, as long as that behavior contributed to the attainment of organizational goals. Performance: Performance is taken as a multidimensional concept. There are eight dimensions/components of performance scale. Here the mean score of the performance scale is called as performance.

#### **V. Literature review**

Kahn, et.al (1964) defined stress as an event that place demand on the individual, Caplan, et.al., (1975) defined stress as an environmental characteristic that posed threat to the individual. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) held an interactive view in defining stress and suggested that when people realized that they were unable to cope with the demands placed upon them by their environment, they became stressed, researchers found stress to be associated with anxiety, depression, sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, anger, and/or worthlessness. Stressed people were also more likely to be psychologically distressed than those who were not stressed (Dua, 1996). Stress was seen as a pattern of specific and nonspecific responses an organism. The work environment stressors have been listed and discussed in the comprehensive reviews of the work-stress literature by researchers (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Ivancevich and Matteson,1980; Swanson,V.,et.al 1998; Ongori,H and Agolla, J.E., 2008) made to stimulus events that disturbed its equilibrium and



taxed or exceeded its ability to cope (Zimbardo, 1988). Hans Selye (1980) described four basic variation of stress. When events had a harmful effect, stress was correctly labelled as distress. Yet stress was also seen to have a beneficial effect. Events, which led to a stimulating effect that resulted in personal growth, were called eustress or good stress. A person was said to be under stress when he or she ran out of resources to manage them. If the amount of pressure becomes too great to handle then employees began to show physical or psychological symptoms that not only impeded their working capabilities but also resulted in physical and / or mental illness (Brown, Cooper, and Kirkcaldy, 1996).

## VI. Objectives of the research

1. To study the performance of employees as a function of Work stress and their Coping strategies.
2. To study Work stress in relation with coping strategies of Private University Employees.

## VII. Hypothesis

Ho1- Performance of the employees of Private University is not a function of Work stress and coping.

H11-Performance of the employees of Private University is a function of Work stress and coping.

H02- Work stress of Private University Employees is not significantly related to coping.

H12 - Work stress of Private University Employees is significantly related to coping.

## VIII. Research Methodology

The sampling technique followed was stratified random sampling. Questionnaire formulated at five-point Likert scale, Instrument used for data gathering, Contains three tools:

- I. Work Stress Scale,
- II. Performance scale,
- III. Coping Strategies Scale.

Firstly, the work stressors faced by Private University employees and the extent of stress which employees perceived arising from various components of job was measured using this scale. The statements covering 15 components : Role ambiguity, Role conflict, Role overload, Responsibility for people, Poor Peer relations, lack of supervisory support, Relationship with subordinates, Group and political Pressure, Powerlessness, under participation ,Constraints of rules and regulations ,intrinsic impoverishment, low states, unprofitability ,Relationship between work and family, It is based on Work Stress Index (OSI), constructed and standardized by Srivastav, A.K., & Singh, A.P.

(1984),Reliability as measured in terms of Cronbach alpha on SPSS is 0.856. Secondly Performance scale, Employee performance was studied using this scale. It is based on - Taxonomy of Higher- Order Performance Dimensions model proposed by Campbell (1990), Reliability as measured in terms of Cronbach alpha on SPSS is 0.82. There are statements covering Dimensions/components of employee performance are Task Proficiency, Motivation, and Personal discipline, Commitment, Relationship with co-worker,

This scale for coping strategies scale mechanism is widely used as a standard measure of coping. It has been constructed and standardized by Srivastava, A.K. (2001). The scale is of sufficient reliability and validity. Reliability measured in terms of Cronbach alpha on SPSS is 0.7 for approach coping and 0.75 for avoidance coping. The Coping Strategies Scale comprises of the statements identifying approach and avoidance approach. Based on the level of operation of coping process (i.e. cognitive or behavioral coping Strategies) and orientation coping effort ( i.e. approach and avoidance coping strategies), five major categories of coping strategies have been suggested which broadly fall under two heads, Approach Coping and Avoidance Coping. Approach Coping: These have been categorized into three: Behavioral – Approach Coping Strategy, Cognitive –Approach Coping Strategy, Cognitive – Behavioral Approach Coping Strategy, Avoidance Coping: Behavioral Avoidance Coping Strategy, Cognitive Avoidance Coping Strategy.

Data collection the participants were approached at their work place. The forms containing various tests were circulated randomly and respondents were asked to fill in demographic as well as other information. The data was analyzed giving thought to the main hypothesis: To find relationships between performance, work-stress and coping. Each assessment was looked at individually and descriptive statistics were computed for each, Questionnaires contained some positive questions and some negative question. Scale used was from 1 to 5, 5 being the Maximum score for each question, for example if there are four questions on role Ambiguity then the maximum score for role ambiguity will be 20. For negative questions, the score was reversed. Total scores for each area of Work stress, performance and coping were calculated and the total score was tabulated. Multiple regression analysis, simple regression, was conducted to explore different relationships.

### A. Assessing normality of data

Work stress, Performance and Coping (Approach and Avoidance) were the Continuous variables. Analysis of continuous variables indicated that gathered data Findings of the research study were fulfilling the criteria of normality and there were no extreme cases (outliers) in the data.

**B. Multiple Regression Analysis for studying employee performance is a function of Work stress and coping**

Multiple Regressions analysis was carried out to examine whether, performance of Private University employees is a function of Work stress and coping. As we know coping is studied in terms of approach coping and avoidance coping. As per norms, performance of the employee is dependent variable (DV). In the regression model Work stress, approach coping and avoidance coping are the independent variables and are entered simultaneously for the analysis using the enter method. as per the Model summary - Work stress, approach coping, avoidance as independent variables and performance as dependent variable.

**C. R (.15), Adjusted R Square (.30), where adjusted R square (.022) Std. Error of the Estimate (11.81) Predictors**

Work stress, Approach coping and Avoidance coping, the above model summary table gives us the R values for assessing the overall fit of the model. The adjusted R square value in this case is .03; this indicates that the three IVs in our model account for 2.2 % variance in the DV.

**Table 1: Performance of the employees of Private University**

| Model            | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)       | 65.6                        | 5.2        |                           | 13.53 | .001 |
| Work Stress      | .062                        | .024       | .135                      | 1.778 | .078 |
| Approach Coping  | .010                        | .054       | .010                      | .154  | .001 |
| Avoidance Coping | .086                        | .068       | .067                      | 1.171 | .000 |

**D. Dependent Variable: Performance**

Using the regression coefficients for IVs the ordinary least square equation for predicting performance of the central government employees can be written as:

$$\text{Performance} = 65.6 + .062 (\text{Work stress}) + .010 (\text{Approach coping}) + .086 (\text{Avoidance coping})$$

**IX. Interpretation**

The adjusted R2 value reveals that independent variables (work stress, approach coping and avoidance coping) in the multiple regression analysis model accounts for 2.2% variance in the dependent variable (performance). As per the ANOVA table the F value 10.06 is significant at 0.01 and interprets

significant results that this regression model is significant. This helps us to reject the null hypothesis and accept that employee performance is a function of work stress and coping. At this stage, we find Approach coping and Avoidance coping as weak predictors and work stress as strong predictor for performance.

**A. Simple Regression Analysis for studying effect of work stress on performance**

Regression analysis was carried out to examine the effect of work stress on the performance of the central government employee. As per norms, work stress is independent variable and performance of the employee is dependent variable. The relationship between work stress and performance is investigated by using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The obtained coefficient R =.157 is significant at 0.01 level and reveals positive relationship between work stress and performance.

Model summary of the work stress as independent variable and performance as dependent variable. Where values are R.157, R Square.025, Adjusted Square.022, and Std. Error of the Estimate 11.852 Predictors: Work stress. In the present analysis R value (.157) indicates correlation between the observed Values and the predicted values of the DV. R2 (.025) gives the proportion of variance in the dependent variable caused by the set of IV s chosen for the model. An adjusted R Square value of 0.022 means that the IV (work stress) in the model can predict 2% of the variance in the DV (performance).

**X. Findings**

An attempt to analyze the relationship between performance, Work stress and coping of the Private University employees. For this a sample of 14 Private University employees was randomly taken from ten departments of university was put through inferential analysis which indicates work-stress level indicated low to moderate stress at work. Majority of employees, seventy one percent, perceived moderate stress. Importantly, not a single employee reported to experience of high stress, Constraint of rules and regulation, one of the components of work-stress was perceived to be the least stressing factor by Private University employees, Private University employees felt that their job had enhanced their social status and due significance to their position was given within the organization.

Component of Work stress which led to the perception of moderate to high stress was role overload and relationship with subordinates. Coping of employees comprised of approach coping and avoidance coping. Higher tendency of approach coping and lower tendency of avoidance coping was



seen. □□ Performance of employee of Private University was found to be function of Work stress and coping. There was significant and positive correlation between employee performances and Work stress. Indicating that Work stress was not distressing. □ Employee performance was found to be positively and significantly related to Avoidance coping.

## XI. Conclusion

Based on the finding of the present study and literature reviewed we conclude that Employees Performance of Private University is influenced by work stress and effort expended by them in coping with stress. Where □ coping behavior of employees is indicative of a possibility that the bureaucratic structure has an important role to play in deciding the reactions of employees. Private university employees are not a stress-free community. Overall moderate level of stress at work indicates that Private University as an employer is playing its role properly.

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