RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOURCES OF JOB STRESS, PERSONALITY TRAITS AND JOB STRESS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF COPING STRATEGIES

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FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
2016

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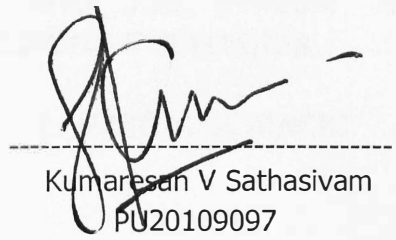

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Thank You.
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ABSTRACT

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 strategies 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 work place stresses. This research presents an integration of past research and theory that models the relationship of antecedents of job stress and coping strategies among managers in electronics firms in Malaysia. A total of 400 electronic company managers participated in this study. This study is a survey using multiple questionnaires, namely, 'Job Stress' to measure the levels of job stress , 'Organizational Sources of Job Stress', to measure the sources of job stress , while 'NEO Five Factor Inventory' to gauge the personality of the manager and 'Coping Resources Inventory' to measure coping strategies. A set of demographic factors like gender, marital status and educational status, are also studied as influencing factors to job stress. Coping strategies in this study is positioned as a moderating variable. 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 recommends the best coping strategies for managers that would enable the leadership team in the electronics organizations to be able to handle job stress more efficiently. In the years to come, acknowledging the presence of job stress in major industries such as electronics industry in Malaysia, would become critical and the study would be able to help identify coping strategies that organizations can use to enable the best productivity from their management team. Contributions in of this study would prove essential to electronics firms in terms of managing their leadership workforce in terms of their stress management, productivity and well-being of the individuals. This will also allow companies to develop avenues to suit the rightful facilities and forums to address job stress for their employees that would result in work life effectiveness, which will result in highly motivated managers, highly productive organizations and a huge economy boost for the nation.

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ABSTRAK

HUBUNGAN ANTARA SUMBER STRES PEKERJAAN , PERSONALITI DAN STRES KERJA: STRATEGI DAYA TINDAK SEBAGAI MODERATOR

Stres pekerjaan merupakan satu fenomena yang berlaku dalam sesebuah organisasi yang melibatkan setiap lapisan masyarakat. Sejak kebelakangan ini, kebanyakan para pengkaji telah memfokuskan kepada konsep memahami fenomena ini dalam bidang tingkahlaku organisasi. Oleh itu, ia menjadi lebih penting bahawa kaedah yang diguna untuk menghadapi masalah stres pekerjaan dapat dikaji secara langsung kepada pekerja yang mengalami masalah ini, untuk memastikan kaedah yang sesuai boleh digunakan dalam menangani stres di tempat kerja yang semakin serius yang boleh menjejaskan produktiviti semasa bekerja. Seramai 400 orang pengurus syarikat elektronik terlibat dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini merupakan kajian berbentuk survei dengan menggunakan soalselidik 'Job Stress' bagi mengukur stres pekerjaan, 'Organizational Sources of Job Stress', bagi mengukur sumber stres pekerjaan, manakala 'NEO Five Factor Inventory 'untuk mengukur personaliti para pengurus dan 'Coping Resources Inventory' bagi mengukur strategi daya tindak. Fokus utama kajian ini ialah untuk melihat hubungan antara sumber stres pekerjaan, personaliti dan stres kerja serta peranan strategi daya tindak sebagai moderator dalam kalangan pengurus di perindustrian elektonik di Malaysia. Faktor sosio demografi seperti jantina, status perkahwinan dan taraf pendidikan juga dikaji sebagai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi stres kerja dan juga strategi daya tindak yang sesuai. Implikasi kajian ini amat berguna untuk industri elektronik, bukan sahaja untuk mengenal pasti sumber-sumber stres kerja dalam sesebuah organisasi, tetapi juga untuk memahami tingkah laku serta personaliti kakitangan pengurusan mereka. Lebih penting lagi, kajian ini akan mengenalpasti kaedah terbaik untuk menangani masalah stres kerja dengan lebih efisien. Adalah diharapkan kajian ini dapat memberi sumbangan kepada bidang industri elektronik dalam memastikan para pengurus di dalam industri ini dapat bekerja dengan lebih efisien. Sumbangan kajian ini adalah penting untuk firma elektronik dalam menguruskan tenaga kerja mereka dari segi pengurusan stres pekerjaan, produktiviti dan kesejahteraan individu. Ini juga akan membolehkan syarikat-syarikat untuk menyediakan latihan atau kemudahan yang sesuai bagi menangani stres pekerjaan untuk pekerja mereka serta melahirkan para pekerja yang produktif dan bermotivasi yang dapat memberi rangsangan ekonomi yang tinggi untuk negara.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

CRI	Coping Resource Inventory
E&E	Electrical and electronics
FFM	Five Factor Model
FIZ	Free Industrial Zones
H1	Hypotheses 1
H2	Hypotheses 2
H3	Hypotheses 3
H4	Hypotheses 4
ICT	Information and communication technology products
LED	Light-emitting diode
MATRADE	Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation
MIDA	Malaysian Industrial Development Authority
MNC	Multi National Corporation
NEO-PI	NEO – Personality Inventory
NEO-PI-R	NEO – Personality Inventory - Revised
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturers
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VIF	Variance inflation factor
WHO	World Health Organization
Df	Degree of freedom
CON	Conflict
OVERL	Work Overload
WRKENV	Unfavorable Work Conditions
NEU	Neuroticism
EXT	Extraversion
OPN	Openness
AGR	Agreeableness
CONS	Conscientiousness
COG	Cognitive
SOC	Social

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EMO	Emotional
SPR	Spiritual/Philosophical
PHY	Physical

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

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 (1993) identified job stress as one of the key problem in the workforce for the next century. For instance, in a survey by the UK Institute of Directors, 40% of the responding members said stress was a big problem in their company and 90% thought that working practices could be a factor affecting the level of reported stress (Suzanne, et al., 1998). 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 strategies to adopt and overcome the psychological distress has become significantly important.

Furthermore, the weakening of the global economy in the past years has resulted in severe stressful happenings among local and foreign firms in terms of the recent downsizing and retrenchment activities, to stay competitive. Much of the problem stems from Malaysia's heavy reliance on electronics industry, which accounts for 39.1% of total exports (Malaysia's Trade Performance 2010, Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation). Among the working class, jobs have been lost, salaries cut, bonuses trimmed and over time work slashed. With these happenings around the industrial sector, job stress becomes a major phenomenon among Malaysians.

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Stress can be described as the distress that is caused as a result of demands placed on physical or mental energy. Stress can arise as the result of factors including anxiety and tension, according to Holmes and Rahe (1967). Stress is caused when life events are felt to be threatening to individual physical, social or mental well-being. The amount of stress experienced by an individual depends on how threatening these life events are perceived to be, individual coping strategies and how many stressful events occur in a short period of time (Smeltzer, 1987). Tension is a natural reaction to anxiety. It is part of a primitive survival instinct where physiological changes prepare the individual for 'fight or flight'. This sympathetic response, as it is known, results in a chemical Adenosine Triphosphate (ATP) being released in the body and causes muscles to tense ready for action (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Physiologically, blood vessels near the skin constrict, to slow bleeding if injury is sustained, and to increase the blood supply to the muscles, heart, lungs and brain. Digestion is inhibited, the bladder relaxes, the heart rate and breathing speed increase, the body sweats more. The person affected becomes more alert, their eyes dilate and a surge of adrenaline gives rise to an increase in energy. These responses are extremely useful in situations of physical danger but, unlike for primitive humans, many of the anxieties of modern life are not ones that can be solved by a 'fight or flight' reaction or by any physical response (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Modern day stressful situations tend to continue for much longer periods of time and an immediate response does not relieve the anxiety-provoking situation. Therefore, prolonged states of anxiety can lead to symptoms of stress which prevent the individual from returning to his or her normal, relaxed state. Prolonged stress can therefore be detrimental to health and wellbeing (Williams and Cooper, 2002).

When stressed, individuals often indulge in behaviors which may relieve the immediate feelings of anxiety in the short-term, but which only add to their problems in the longer term (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987). For example, alcohol, drugs, smoking and/or over-eating are often used to cope with immediate problems of stress. Avoiding, ignoring or failing to recognize underlying problems is also a common occurrence. When too many work demands are placed upon someone, he or she may work harder for longer hours and attempt to keep up with an

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impossible schedule instead of trying to reduce such demands. In the long term, such behaviors will only serve to increase the physiological symptoms of tension and deplete physical energy reserves (Sutton and Rafaeli, 1987).

Job stress is stress involving work. According to the current World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, occupational or job-related stress "is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope". 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) moderators of stress and (c) outcomes of stress (Jerusalem, 1993; Deary and Blenkin, 1996). Depending on the subject's characteristic coping response, potential stressors may result in different outcomes in terms of physical and psychological disturbances (Jerusalem, 1993). Stress models typically show personality and environmental factors as having a strong influence on stress outcomes and coping strategies Deary and Blenkin, 1996). 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 (Deary and Matthews, 1993).

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Not all job stress is deemed harmful. Stress affects people differently. Some people seem to thrive on extremely stressful lifestyles, while others struggle to cope with everyday life (Williams and Cooper, 2002). Everyone has an optimum level of stress. Too little excitement and too few challenges may lead to an extremely dull life, yet too much stress can lead to health problems. Nevertheless, a certain amount of stress can actually prove to be good for individuals (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Positive stress can act as a spur to achieve better results than would otherwise be attained, and no-one would wish to avoid such potentially stressful but enjoyable events as the birth of a child, forming new relationships or undertaking new challenges (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Stress is also extremely useful in acting as an enabler to avoid problems and dangers. It is a motivator to solve problems and is an important warning signal that something is wrong with an

individual's life, thereby allowing him or her to take some action (Williams and Cooper, 2002).

In many countries, employers have a legal responsibility to recognize and deal with stress in the workplace so that employees do not become physically or mentally ill. It is important to tackle the causes of stress in the workplace as stress at work can lead to problems for the individual, working relationships and the overall working environment. These issues may include lowered self-esteem and poor concentration skills for the employee. The employer may suffer from increasing customer complaints, staff turnover and days lost to sickness. Managing stress in the workplace is therefore an essential part of both individual and corporate responsibility.

In the UK, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a guide entitled Tackling stress: The Management Standards Approach (2005) which outlines six key areas of the workplace that should be monitored in order to assess levels of stress. These key areas are as follows,

a. Demands - Including such issues as workload, work patterns and work environment.
b. Control - How much the person has control in the way they do their work?
c. Support - Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues.
d. Relationships - Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behavior.
e. Role - Whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.
f. Change - How organizational change is managed and communicated within the organization.

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Effectively coping with stress, managing stress and finding ways to reduce unnecessary or unhealthy levels of stress are important life skills that everybody needs. Negative stress, tension and anxiety are extremely common problems in modern life and most people will suffer from potentially dangerous or debilitating symptoms of stress and stress related issues at some point in their lives.

In addition to stress being caused by events, certain situations can lead to people feeling stressed; although as mentioned before the degree of stress will depend, amongst other things, on that individual's coping strategies. The environment can make us stressed: for example, noise, crowds, poor lighting, pollution or other external factors over which we have no control can cause us to feel anxious and irritable.

Adjusting to modern-day life can also be a source of stress. People now communicate with other people in many different ways, for example, through the internet, mobile phones and various broadcast media, thus the expectation of a quick response has increased. We also have many more commodities available to us and some people feel an expectation to maintain a certain lifestyle and level of consumerism. In addition, for many people it is now the norm to manage a full or part-time job and to be the primary career nurturing a family. All of these changes mean that stress is now unfortunately commonplace in both our personal and professional lives.

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1.2 Research Problem

Stress is a state that occurs when people are faced with events they perceive as endangering their physical or psychological well-being, and are unsure of their ability to deal with these events (Cook and Hunsaker, 2001). Sources of stress are called stressors. Stressors, based on most studies include variables like environment, individual and organization (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1999). For the past decade, the manufacturing sector has been undergoing constant technological development (Jestin and Gampel, 2002). This is inevitably led to high pressure and job stress among managers in the work environment. Above all, the recent economic slowdown in the global economy from the year 2000 has a significant