Particularities of personality traits and perceived stress at workplace for the young workers in Romania

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Abstract

The main objective of the study is to analyze the relation between personality and organizational stress among entry-level employees through a quantitative study based on self-applied questionnaires. Method: The participants were a number of 34 entry-level employees aged between 20 to 26 years old (M=23.74; S.D.=2.58), male and female, urban and rural areas. Instruments: 1) the personality inventory DECAS (Sava, 2008); 2) the stress questionnaire CAPES (Aniței & Chraif, 2010). Findings show that there is a statistically significant correlation between emotional stability and satisfaction at workplace (r=0.482, p<0.05) and between conscientiousness and satisfaction at the workplace (r=0.48, p<0.05).

Keywords: Personality traits, emotional stability, stressors, consciousness;

1. Introduction

The current economic context and the situation concerning the labor market in Romania forces young employees to stay at the current job, even if it does not meet their conditions and expectations. Most employees consider that things are going bad, and the economic crisis strengthen the context in which they are forced to accept compromise situations at work: the lack of criteria for performance and competence, not taking into account the studies and the irrelevance of the knowledge gained, not taking into account the job description and the conditions from employment contract, unpaid overtime, lack of payment correlation with workload, failure to comply with labor protection conditions, etc. (Chraif, 2010; Chraif & Aniței, 2011a; Chraif & Anitei, 2011b; Aniței & Chraif, 2011).

According to the cross-cultural level research on global economic stress measure and corporate impact, which involved interviews with over 1,686 enterprises from six countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Turkey) describes how the crisis affected the corporate sector; how organizations responded; and their expectations about the near future (World Bank’s Enterprise Financial Crisis Survey, 2008). The study also confirmed that during economic downturns, employees are more stressed on factors such as increased focus on profitability, increased focus on quarterly sales revenue, lack of an optimal administrative support, aggressive competition from colleagues, the risk to remain without a job / business failure, the pressure...
from customers to improve service quality and loss of good employees. Generically named the disease of the 20th century, Albrecht (1986) defines the concept of stress as being a new and strange disease that is occupying more and more space in our lives. Also, neither the role of individual differences in various sequences of stress is not entirely clear because of personality factors have only a protective or vulnerability effect consequences of stress or have an impact on the evaluation of reactions to stress. Derevenco, Băban & Anghel (1992) emphasizes the fact that certain personality factors act as risk factors for distress (for example: neuroticism or anxiety) and others as protective factors (for example: optimism, self-efficiency). The positive stress called by specialists eustress or positive stress, means the level of stimulations that maintain physical tonus and mental balance of the individual, the health state inducing a positive adaptation to the environment. Hence, eustress occurs when requirements of the environment do not exceed the capacities of the individual and are not fully used, thus achieving a creative adaptation; and distress as opposed to eustress appears when individual capacities are exceeded, resulting in a maladaptation of the individual (Cooper, Dewe, O'Driscoll, 2001). Stimulus-individual-response Cooper, Dewe, O'Driscoll (2001). In this model the assessment of the situation is presented as a perpetual process that evolves over time and depends on individual re-evaluations regarding the stress factor. According to this model, personal variables (beliefs, values, goals) interact with environmental variables (claims, demands, constraints) through a cognitive process (primary assessment). Analyzing the occupational stress, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the U.S.A (NIOSH) emphasizes that workplace stress is a response manifested on mental and emotional level, which appears when job requirements do not match the capacities, resources or needs of the employee (NIOSH, 1999).

On the other hand, the International Labour Organization (1986; 1992) defines workplace stress as being: a) A physical and emotional negative response that occurs when job requirements do not match the capacities, resources or staff needs. On long term, this leads to deterioration of the employee’s health (occupational diseases) and to accidents at work, b) An emotional, mental, behavioral and physiological response to the harmful aspects of work, workplace environment and workplace organization. This is a state characterized by high levels of distress and often accompanied by feelings of inability to adapt to it, c) The reaction the employees have to excessive psychological and physical pressure at work and other requirements imposed by the employer. Mottowidlo, Packard & Manning (1986) have demonstrated that perceived stress at a subjective level determines anxiety, hostility, depression, and decreased performance at work, all of which are caused by specific life events. Research in the field of occupational stress and health, have been guided by some theoretical models (Van Vegchel, De Jonge & Landsbergis 2005) that proved to be useful in order to identify particular characteristics of the workplace, which are important for the well-being of the individual. Therefore, two important models in stress are: 1) The demands and control model (The Demand-Control Model) (Karasek, 1981; Karasek & Theorell, 1990); 2) The person-environment match model (French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982). These models integrate the role of personality traits and perceived stress. Stress is not influenced only by external circumstances, but also by the vulnerability, tolerance or adaptability of the individual or by some features of his/her personality. Thus, not everyone perceives some life situations as stressful and the causes related to the individual variables are connected with the personality traits: a) type A behavior: they tend to be ambitious, anxious, very involved in their work, oriented for personal achievement, they have the feeling that time is very valuable b) type B behavior: does not represent the features listed for type A: they lack a sense of urgency that comes together with impatience and they do not get angry easily (Friedman & Rosenman cited by Atkinson, 2005). Based on previous studies concerning stress in conditions of economic crisis the current paper aims to highlight a relationship between personality traits and stress factors.

2. Objectives and hypotheses

2.1. Objectives

The current study’s main objective is to analyze the relation between personality and organizational stress among entry-level employees through a quantitative study based on self-applied questionnaires.
2.2. Hypotheses

- There is a correlation between personality dimensions and satisfaction level for work.
- There is a correlation between personality dimensions and the level of stress experienced at work.
- High emotional stability is positively associated with physical health.
- There is a negative correlation between the years of work and the stress felt at work.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants were a number of 34 entry-level employees aged between 20 to 26 years old (M=23.74; S.D.=2.58), male and female, urban and rural areas.

3.2. Instruments

The personality inventory DECAS (Sava, 2008). There are assessed five personality dimensions measured by this instrument: 1) Openness: it identifies the independent, creative people with a wide general knowledge, ideas and discussion-oriented theories; 2) Extraversion: is typical for exuberant, sociable, energetic people which are easily observed in a group of people; 3) Conscientiousness is associated with disciplined people, with a high sense of duty and a strong need for professional achievement; 4) Agreeableness is specific to tolerant and considerate people who show team spirit. In contrast, we find individualistic people, lacking trust in others, with a high competitive spirit and task-orientated and therefore damaging human relationships; 5) emotional stability is associated with emotional maturity. These people are calm, have confidence in them and successfully cope with stress.

"CAPES" questionnaire (2010), adapted from Anitei, Chraif, Bârca, (2010). This questionnaire measures the level of occupational stress in the current economic climate.

4. Results

The mean specific for the subscale of satisfaction at work (m = 3.88), implies that, overall, the population tested is not satisfied with the conditions that work and its environment offers.

Lower physical health score (m = 2.94) indicates that respondents generally consider their health as a relatively good one. Average intensity of tension sources (m = 4.07) could indicate that the sources of tension felt by employees at work have a strong intensity which can also cause the level of perceived stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>43.20</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>56.92</td>
<td>9.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>26.70</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>55.33</td>
<td>11.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>29.40</td>
<td>73.20</td>
<td>49.39</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeability</td>
<td>35.90</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>51.60</td>
<td>9.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>37.70</td>
<td>73.20</td>
<td>50.78</td>
<td>8.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace satisfaction</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace stress</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of tension intensity</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To highlight the relationship between variables we conducted bivariate correlations matrix between personality dimensions (openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeability and emotional stability) and the level of satisfaction felt at the workplace. Analysing the correlations between personality dimensions and job satisfaction the data indicates a single significant correlation regarding job satisfaction. There is a significant positive relationship between the score for the emotional stability scale and workplace satisfaction (r = .482, p <0.05). Analyzing the data for the relationships between personality dimensions and the stress felt at the workplace, it can be noticed that, like it is the case for satisfaction, there is also a significant relationship for emotional stability (r = -.34, p <0.05). In addition, there is also a positive correlation for conscientiousness (r = .48, p <0.05).

In what it may concern the correlation between participants' emotional stability and physical health felt by them, the data shows that there is a negative average correlation of r = .56 for p <0.05.

The result obtained shows that people with a high degree of emotional stability tend to experience less stress at physical level and to somatise certain tensions. Being subjected to long-term stressful situations, they do not experience fatigue, dizziness or muscle problems.

Analysing the relationship established between years of work and stress felt at work there is a significant negative correlation at a threshold of p <0.05 (r=-.55; p=0.042). The coefficient obtained shows that the stress initially felt by employees in the first months of employment is decreasing in direct proportion with experience. When being hired, young people have the tendency to overstate certain tense situations and not relativize, getting in the end to create a wrong impression about the responsibilities at the workplace, about the relationships with superiors and the consequences that errors can lead to.

5. Conclusions

Data analysis shows that organizational stress is caused by several stressors and rarely by just one source of stress. The most important sources of stress for young employees, included in the current study are poor communication problems at work, lack of training for achieving new skills and therefore are no opportunities for promotion and last but not least the underrating felt at the workplace. Young people also argue that with the lack of adequate feedback, the tense organizational climate and discrimination or favoritism to which they are witnesses are also important sources of stress. Although the intensity of tension sources at the workplace varies according to different criteria, their combination leads to lower efficiency and performance at work.

Most of the times the tension sources act together, as demonstrated by the correlations obtained between the sources of stress introduced in the current study, which is significant at a lower threshold of 0.05, influencing each other, having negative effects both on employees and on the organization.

In terms of how the participants to the study prefer diverse coping strategies, they are mostly the same for everybody; among their preferences being the outdoor activities that help to disconnect the tense atmosphere at work. Although most respondents do not have a lot of experience in the labour market, they have chosen as the favorite way to cope with stressful situations, the objective approach of tasks and responsibility and to prioritize them according to certain criteria. The occupational stress has negative effects on job satisfaction and on the health of young employees (Chraïf, 2010; Chraïf & Aniței, 2011a). From the point of view of satisfaction or professional gratefulness, occupational stress often leads to dissatisfaction with the organization and the workplace itself.

In terms of health declared by the young, they have more problems related to mental satisfaction and energy, organizational stressors not having a strong impact on physical health (tempered behavior and physical energy). As shown in the correlation table between the personality dimensions included in the study workplace satisfaction, the strongest and statistically significant relationship is positively established between emotional stability and workplace satisfaction. This correlation supports the fact that young people with a higher degree of emotional stability will feel more satisfaction at work, they will face certain challenges and they will get through failures more easily.

In a similar way, stress correlates with emotional stability. One of the statistically significant correlation is established between them, negatively correlating at an average level. Being about a person characterized by
emotional maturity, they will know how to react to unforeseen circumstances and will consciously act in order to remedy the situation, without expressing and experiencing a higher level of stress. Another dimension that also positively correlates at an average level is conscientiousness. A person with a high degree of conscientiousness, who demonstrates a high sense of duty and a strong desire for professional development, tend at the beginning of the career to overburden and show a high degree of stress even if the situation itself should not be an issue.

Also, regarding the emotional stability, there is a significant negative correlation in terms of physical health problems experienced by employees. Respondents with a high degree of emotional stability are not affected by possible problems or tense situations at the workplace, rarely mentioning problems in this respect. In conclusion, emotional stability is associated with emotional maturity.

The last significant correlation was established between age and stress felt at work. Thus the more a person has more experience in the labour market, whether it is acquired through volunteer or internship, has a high resistance to stress, being able to cope with unforeseen circumstances.

References
