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ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED DETERMINANTS OF BURNOUT SYNDROME AND COPING STRATEGIES IN TERMS OF DEMANDING SITUATIONS IN MANAGERS

POSUDZOVANIE VYBRANÝCH DETERMINANTOVSYNDRÓMU VYHORENIA A COPINGOVÝCH STRATÉGIÍ Z HĽADISKA ZÁŤAŽOVÝCH SITUÁCIÍ U MANAŽÉROV

Abstract

Burnout syndrome may affect anyone of us, what is more, certain differences in its occurrence are noticeable, especially in personality traits, in gender and often in the behavior of managers. The main aim of the article is to assess the signals of burnout syndrome and coping strategies in terms of demanding situations in managers. The main determinants of burnout syndrome, Depersonalization, Emotional Exhaustion, and Personal Accomplishment were included in the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which consists of twenty-two questions, separately dealing with the mentioned, individual determinants. The Brief Cope Inventory was used to find out, which coping strategies individuals choose in demanding conditions or how they behave during stressful situations. It outlines fourteen approaches about how to cope with uncomfortable and chaotic situations. The research was carried on a sample of 113 respondents. The final outcomes of the analysis have confirmed the existence of statistically significant links between the determinants of burnout syndrome and coping strategies in terms of demanding situations in managers. What managers say matters, because every word matters. Those who are aware of this, use the right words to influence coping skills of employees in a positive way.

Keywords*: Coping strategies. Burnout syndrome. Maslach Burnout Inventory, The Brief COPE*

Kľúčové slová*: Copingové stratégie. Burnout syndróm. Maslach Burnout Inventory, The Brief COPE dotazník*

JEL classification*: M5, A140*

Introduction

Nowadays, burnout syndrome has become a serious problem and we can see, that humankind tends to experience feelings of being alienated, withdrawn, disturbed, unstable or angry, which can lead to often conflicts at the workplace [20]. Burnout is a psychological syndrome, which appears among persons, who work with other people in some capacity [21]. It mainly concerns responsible, capable, proficient, ambitious people who are used to put the greatest effort into their passion or work. It is like a gamble for persons so-called high achievers, who do not realize or ignore that they work for a very long time, they take on burdensome tasks and exert pressure on themselves [5]. The burnout syndrome is characterised by a model of emotional suffering.

It includes the three main categories of symptoms, the first aspect is Emotional Exhaustion (EE) described as the feeling of being emotionally drained, depleted, includes symptoms of fatigue, increased sensibility to stressors from the external surrounding or feeling of having very low energy, the second aspect is Depersonalization (DP) or cynicism, represents negative feelings,

having a lower empathy towards people, bad perceptions about the clients, patients, colleagues with the attempt to be distanced from them. This perception of the others, who are considered to be callous or dehumanized, may lead members of staff to see the clients, colleagues, patients, etc., as someway deserving of their troubles. The third aspect is Personal Accomplishment (PA) characterized as a negative self-evaluation, loss of satisfaction and motivation, and overall by a low efficiency on work-related actions [12]. The Harvard medical school study reported that about ninety-six percent of senior executives feel burned out. The remaining percent describes the state as an extreme burn out [23]. There exist a three types of burnout syndrome, overload syndrome – frenetic, due to perpetual demands and responsibilities, then under-challenged syndrome – demotivating, produces feelings that everything is developing in the bad direction, then it comes total apathy, and the last one is worn-out syndrome – wear out, brings chronical or repeated need to avoid or ignore all duties [17]. Burnout syndrome is considered as the result of being very stressed and not having a good support structure [13]. Beneficial and healthy relationships with an appropriate environment, with a good work organization, and the ability to use a free time properly, learn to be assertive, so all this is a perfect help from the perspective of prevention [18].

Incessantly changing efforts of cognitive and also behavioural character with the aim to manage specific internal or external demands, which are appraised as demanding or exceeding the resources of the person [8]. Or else, almost unmanageable situations or the ability to handle the unusually difficult tasks, characterises the concept of the ability to handle the unusually difficult tasks. The Latin word *colaphos*, known as a blow with the fist, represents the concept of dealing with a difficult situation as a higher level of adaptation that we need to have to cope with an extreme stress situation. Coping is changing for the same human over some time, and also it is changing according to the necessities of the situation [16]. It is described as an effort of an individual to handle difficulties which are perceived as an exceeding force of people [22]. According to [19] the problem-focused coping strategies, are much more effective because of making a direct effort to change or modify stressors from the external environment, as learning innovative skills or finding a new solution, e.g. confrontive coping, solving problem by making a plan [10]. According to [19] the emotion-focused coping strategies, are less effective because it involves the change of individual appraisals of the worrying situation with the main aim to eliminate a necessity to take the actions, as wishful thinking or seeking some emotional support, e.g. distracting, reappraisal in positive way [11]. To learn how to cope with a stressful occasion and how to regulate and control emotions, is like to understand the core aspects of development of human from childhood to adulthood [7]. These skills show how important is the role of them on the overall adaptational outcomes [4].

A negative impact on the mental health of an employees, results from stressful workplace. Links among stress, mental illnesses, unhealthy coping skills are visible afterward, and are considered as a major threat and concern to workforce and its productivity. Success depends on managers with empathy, with a solicitude to remove judgment or stigma, and on those who can understand the importance of the 'employee-manager' relationship [15]. The study from authors [1] shows the relationship between the practices of project managers, coping strategies of disposition and

control appraisals, used by project managers while dealing with demanding situations. Results showed that managers use more often Planning and Active coping as successful strategies. Also, it states that the level of maturity of organisational practices is often related to intensified using of coping strategies of Planning. Among managers, a stress develops an unhappy connotation, which implies the weakness. In a professional or corporate environment, an individual becomes

vulnerable. The unprecedented necessity in management presents self-management in all fields of manager life [6].

Research Methodology

The research was conducted through the questionnaires Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Brief COPE Inventory. The main aim of this research was to determine the existence of statistically significant links among selected determinants of burnout syndrome (EE, DP, PA) and coping strategies (14) in terms of the demanding situation in managers. The research participated in a total number of 113 respondents, of which 45 were men (39.8%) and 68 were women (60.2%). The respondents in terms of inclusion in the organization, were represented in number of 8 people as top managers (7%), 25 people as middle-level managers (22%), then 25 people as first-level managers (22%) and 55 people as employees (49%). From the point of respondents, we considered as important to find out the number of years of work experience in general, and the number of years of work in managerial practice. The maximum number of years of work experience in general was 37. The maximum number of years of managerial experience was 35. The average number of years of general work experience represented 13 years, and the average number of years of managerial practice represented 5.5 years. The first part of methodologies was focused on the strength of feelings of managers, because the burnout is characterised as a complex construct. The second part of methodologies examined how managers deal with stressful situations and which coping strategies they prefer to use.

The methodology of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) consists of 22 questions, items, that are divided into three main subscales, or also known as the aspects or predictors of Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). The questions are written in the form of proclamation about individuals' feelings or attitudes, e.g. 'I do not really care what happens to colleagues, clients, 'I feel burned out from work' and etc. [21]. The questions are answered by the opportunity to choose from the options on seven-point Likert scale 0 – never, 1 – several times per year, 2 – monthly, 3 – several times per month, 4 – weekly, 5 – several times per week, 6 – daily. For the aspect of Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and for the aspect of Depersonalization (DP) is typical a higher mean score that corresponds to the higher degree of experienced burnout. But in contrast to the mentioned aspects above, the Personal Accomplishment (PA) reaches a lower mean score, which corresponds to the higher degree of experienced burnout.

Tab. 1:   Evaluation key of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

Emotional Exhaustion	EE + PE (emotional + physical exhaustion)
low 0 – 16	average value 19,0
moderate 17 – 26	
high 27 and more	state of burnout
Depersonalization	DP (depersonalization)
low 0 – 6	average value 6,6

moderate 7 – 12	
high 13 and more	state of burnout
Personal Accomplishment	PA (personal accomplishment)
high 39 and more	
moderate 38 – 32	average value 36,8
low 31 – 0	state of burnout

Source: Authors

The methodology of The Brief COPE Inventory focuses on the detection of coping strategies of stressful situations. It is being detected, which strategies are chosen by individuals in certain stressful situations. The Inventory was designed by Carver in 1997 from the original The Full COPE Inventory. Due to its complexity was gradually reduced into lower number of items. In the research this methodology involves 28 items with four-point scale of answers, 0 – I have not been doing this at all, 1 – I have been doing this sometimes, 2 – I have been doing this often, 3 – I have been doing this a lot. The questions are from the point of content divided into fourteen subscales, that deal with a certain coping strategy, e.g. the subscale of Seeking Social Support is described by following coping strategy: 'Talked to someone who could do something specific about the problem' [26].

Tab. 2:   Subscales of The Brief COPE Inventory

subscale	coping strategy	question number in methodology
1	self-distraction	1 and 19
2	active coping	2 and 7
3	denial	3 and 8
4	substance abuse	4 and 11
5	emotional support	5 and 15
6	instrumental support	10 and 23
7	behavioural disengagement	6 and 16
8	venting	9 and 21
9	positive reframing	12 and 17
10	planning	14 and 25
11	humour	18 and 28
12	acceptance	20 and 24
13	religion	22 and 27
14	self-blame	13 and 26

Source: Authors

In the research, the attention was focused on identifying differences in terms of inclusion in the organization in the assessment of determinants of burnout syndrome (3). Also, the attention was focused on assessing of coping strategies (14) in terms of inclusion in the organization. Information acquired from respondents were verified in a statistical program SPSS 22 by using *t*-test for two independent selections, by which was identified the existence of statistically significant differences in the assessment of selected determinants of burnout syndrome in terms of inclusion in the organization (Table 1) and by which the existence of statistically significant differences in the assessment of coping strategies in terms of inclusion in the organization was detected (Table 2).

Research results

From the view of the analysis, a statistically significant differences in selected determinants (3) in terms of inclusion in the organization were reported (Table 1). Managers achieved a higher score in the all of three determinants, in Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment in comparison to employees. Respondents answered mostly with the third option 'monthly' and the determinant of Personal Accomplishment, achieved the highest score, because respondents approached the fourth possibility of the answer 'several times per month'.

Tab. 3: Differences in the assessment of selected determinants of burnout syndrome in terms of inclusion in the organization

determinants of burnout syndrome	inclusion	mean	standard deviation	test criterion	significance
Emotional Exhaustion	manager	2,264	0,757	1,999	0,050
	employee	1,969	0,895		
Depersonalization	manager	2,458	0,707	2,232	0,028
	employee	2,112	0,929		
Personal Accomplishment	manager	2,844	0,581	2,443	0,016
	employee	2,525	0,798		

Source: AuthorsA statistically significant differences in terms of coping strategies (14) were reported (Table 2).

In the strategy of Active coping, managers achieved a higher score in comparison to employees, since managers choose the third option of the answer 'I have been doing this often'. It means that they focus an effort to solve demanding situations actively, probably every day. Managers use a strategy of stress-management to control stressors via appropriately targeted behaviour and embracing responsibility for solving situations by using internal sources, that are available. Employees choose the possibility to answer with the option 'I have been doing this sometimes'. The second strategy is Venting in which managers achieved a higher score. The answers were at the turn between the options 'I have been doing this sometimes' and 'I have been doing this often'. Venting and its values refers to an unpleasant feeling or expressing negative feelings. It allows to validate and rationalize concerns, dreams, hopes, worries or fears of the managers. Employees achieved values which were very close to the second answer 'I have been doing this sometimes'.

In the strategy of Positive reframing was achieved a higher score by managers, because they approached the possibility to answer, 'I have been doing this often'. Developing this coping strategy helps them to build a resilience to stress, improve overall emotional or physical health. Managers use a technique to help them to realise motives and behaviour of the other people in a positive way. Often, they try not to think about the conflict in a negative way. Employees choose the possibility to answer with the option 'I have been doing this sometimes'. The strategy of Planning achieved a statistically significant difference in terms of managers, since they choose the third option with the answer 'I have been doing this often'. They take the initiative to plan everything in advance and not to be surprised by unexpected or demanding

situations. For managers, planning means the approach to support a healthy coping strategy, to improve overall well-being, and of course to avoid stress. Employees choose the possibility to answer by the second option 'I have been doing this sometimes'.

Tab. 4: Differences in the assessment of selected coping strategies in terms of inclusion in the organization

coping strategies	inclusion	mean	standard deviation	test criterion	significance
self-distraction	manager	1,224	0,656	0,025	0,980
	employee	1,227	0,651		
active coping	**manager**	**1,879**	0,572	2,629	**0,010**
	employee	1,590	0,593		
denial	manager	0,862	0,590	0,366	0,715
	employee	0,900	0,503		
substance abuse	manager	0,301	0,486	1,248	0,215
	employee	0,190	0,456		
emotional support	manager	1,491	0,672	0,284	0,777
	employee	1,527	0,669		
instrumental support	manager	1,422	0,724	0,262	0,794
	employee	1,454	0,563		
behavioural disengagement	manager	0,741	0,515	1,253	0,213
	employee	0,863	0,522		
venting	**manager**	**1,491**	0,678	2,741	**0,007**
	employee	1,172	0,546		
positive reframing	**manager**	**1,741**	0,732	2,321	**0,022**
	employee	1,445	0,613		
planning	**manager**	**2,146**	0,688	4,416	**0,000**
	employee	1,645	0,623		
humour	manager	0,931	0,824	1,356	0,178
	employee	1,118	0,623		
acceptance	manager	1,698	0,627	0,226	0,822
	employee	1,672	0,571		
religion	manager	1,448	1,142	0,641	0,523
	employee	1,572	0,899		
self-blame	manager	1,336	0,664	0,234	0,815
	employee	1,363	0,572		

Source: Authors

Discussion

In this research were recorded and investigated the opinions of 113 respondents. Afterward, the answers of respondents were analysed and evaluated in program SPSS 22 by using a *t*-test for two independent selections. Results of the research conducted by methodologies of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and The Brief COPE Inventory, has brought the conclusion in terms of demanding situations in managers, which confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences in assessing selected determinants of burnout syndrome (EE, DP, PA) and coping strategies (14). The results were conducive to the meaningfulness and to the significance of the contribution considering the increasing worldwide state of burnout syndrome among managers. Research findings confirmed the difficulty of working life in the society of nowadays, which is often over-saturated by many obligations.

In the determinant of Emotional Exhaustion, a higher score in the managers was achieved. They feel in constant pressure and emotionally drained from keeping their employees engaged. Here arises a chance to be more irritated from approaching 'the desk of the manager' by an employee, while a manager looks very busy. There starts to exist a bigger chance to be complaining about a demand of being available for a team all the time. Eventually, managers start to feel that they do not like their job anymore.

The determinant of Depersonalization also achieved a higher score in the managers. The results point to experiencing of losing the ability to concentrate, having a feeling of being disconnected from workers, and being unable to interact with colleagues. Managers suffer from lack of emotional support, but in spite of it, they are forced to put on professional behaviour even while they feel uncomfortable, demotivated, exhausted inside. They fear embarrassing themselves by losing control of the situation.

In the determinant of Personal Accomplishment was achieved a higher score in the managers. They battle for excellence at every level, try to be a suitable example to employees in everything they do. Reasonable managers try not to lose employees due to a bad relationship with them. Managers have a huge potential to influence employees positively. Having happy employees means for managers to become more efficient. Managers are satisfied with people who are able to get ahead in the companies, since they are really glad for inspiring them to make an important influence on the organization. And the managers should be congratulated for work well done.

The strategy of Active coping focusses an effort to solve situations actively, by appropriately targeted behaviour and responsibility for solving circumstances, by using all available internal sources. The strategy of Active coping is a sign, that managers use it for seeking professional help, for seeking information, for changing the environment, for seeking social support, etc.So, managers often rely upon their own resources to cope with many stressors. For the strategy of Active coping exists numerous empirical and theoretical frameworks, many different ways of categorising coping strategies. Generally, the strategy of Active coping refers to the usage of those behavioural and psychological coping efforts, which are described as an attempt to use our own resources to deal with a demanding situation [27].

The coping strategy of Venting means at some point in time a good and necessary feeling for managers. However, managers should be careful because actually they may feel worse. Venting in some way increases a level of anger and stress, instead of reducing it. Unsuccessful ways to cope with failures may seem literally counterintuitive to those managers, who have been taught

to share negative feelings with the aim to 'purge' them. Actually, it creates more stress because it keeps angry feelings and aggressive thoughts alive. Of course, managers say about venting that it feels really good, but the feeling does not last for a long time. In the end, it reinforces aggressive impulses. Psychologist Dr. Stoeber from the University of Kent in England, in [14] recommends to find some positive aspects and rethink, what positive happened during coping with a demanding situation. For example, focus on what has been achieved, rather than focus on what has not been achieved.

Via the coping strategy of Positive reframing, a sense of coherence in managers may be affected by a gratitude. With this strategy, managers try to identify the existing gap among two opposite viewpoints, and then to identify the issue which needs to be solved. This fact can help to focus on what really needs a good solution. Managers know some methods how to reframe uneasy situations from a positive perspective. They cannot control all circumstances in their lives, but they can control how they view it. Reframing a challenging circumstance in a positive way can decrease overall level of stress in managers. Afterwards, managers evaluate what they can take from the situation and try to see some useful opportunities in demanding moments, they try to remember to be tolerable, even if the situation is hectic. Managers during Positive reframing try to practice positive self-talk and be kind to themselves, try to be surrounded with positive people and try to use an optimistic vocabulary and in the end, they try to reduce a workload.

The study [24] has examined how perfectionism predicts which coping strategies managers use while dealing with failures, and how coping and perfectionism influence their satisfaction. The study was about differentiating strivings of perfectionists and concerns of perfectionists. The findings have suggested that coping strategies are helpful during dealing with personal failures in general, so Positive reframing is a strategy that works especially well for managers, who are prone to lack of satisfaction, better said for people of high perfectionistic concerns, who want to achieve greater satisfaction at the end of the day.

The strategy of Planning serves as a support for all managers with a tendency to be distressed. They see it as a part of mental health or future wellbeing. Reasonable managers have a tendency to make plans and organize schedules. It involves the setting of aims and being strong-minded to do the best to achieve them. Managers know that the essence of achieving goals is planning.

The study of [2] has reported the relationship between coping strategies of project managers while dealing with three types of stressors, personal health and home, work and the culture of managers. A total of 216 professionals from 30 countries have confirmed, that managers use more strategies of Planning and Active Coping regularly, while they attempt to cope with work, personal health and home, and stressful situations. Planning and Active Coping have positively correlated to the application of the skills of a project manager. The results have also indicated the existence of consistency in how managers choose to cope with stressors. The influencing factors, expressing the consistency, have been unclear from the study, however, the consistency in most general studies is unique. Outcomes have provided an understanding of how project managers cope with stressful situations, and how organizations can support them. In findings of different studies in terms of demanding situations in managers, or from the point of view of gender differences in managers, contrasts basically exist. According to [8] men often have a tendency to use the problem-focused coping strategies e.g., manifestations of behaviour. Women have more often a tendency to use the emotion-focused coping strategies e.g., classical emotional responses. These findings may be relevant to women working as managers. [9] have reported that women, in general, have a higher level of stress, since they are more often exposed

to obligations arising from their social and marital role. Another study has reported the opposite statement, so that women are more problem-focused and more active than men [3]. Research of Project Management Perspective has brought the information about the position of women managers, what requires abilities which are multitasking, reliability, a less number of unfinished projects, more frequent fulfillment of expectations or completed goals, adherence to schedules, good results in the budget the project, etc. [25].

Conclusion

The research and its results are considered to be beneficial, because it points to numerous cases of increasing burnout syndrome around the world. This research paper has contributed to raising awareness of stress, which may result in a serious problem of mental health.

Several factors of burnout are related to the work and lifestyle of the manager. Some preferences and tendencies to which they are accustomed, contribute to how managers react in demanding situations. Mostly, they are exposed to an increased risk of burnout syndrome, originated from e.g., unfulfilled goals, perfectionism, lack of self-belief, pessimism, bad relationships among colleagues or employees, emotional instability, mutual rivalry, which motivates to achieve better results but usually ends as a failure, loss of motivation, fear of risk-taking, etc. The point is that female or male managers may have a totally different approach to work since they handle the same situations differently. The style of work of every manager could be slightly influenced by previous experience and personality traits. The foundation of every success are strengths of managers, flexible and well-used methodologies, and appropriate coping strategies in the time.

As a limit of this research is considered the sample of respondents, but in the future, it is planned to enlarge the research sample by including new respondents. The plan is to enrich upcoming research with a new analysis of personality traits, that expose our society to a possible danger of burnout syndrome.

Acknowledgment

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