STRESS AND COPING AMONG NEWLY HIRED EMPLOYEES IN PRIVATE SECTOR IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract : Stress is unavoidable in human life, including in working environment. Many researchers have reported different source of the stress and coping methods for the employees in general. However, little has been done to explore the source of the stress and coping methods specifically for newly hired employees. This study, using qualitative design, tried to look at the source of the stress in working environment specifically for the newly hired employees. Data were collected through interview with 4 participants who are working in private sector in Malaysia. The result of the study shows that the source of stress ranging from the nature of the job, task related stressor, new environment and also unsupportive environment, and their coping methods including escapism, seek for social support and informational help. This result, however cannot be generalized, however, it may help in understanding and appreciate the uniqueness in employees perception of stressors and effective coping methods.

Keywords: *Stress, coping, qualitative, interview, thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is unavoidable in human's life, especially in a situation that demands high concentration and performance like in the workplace or what is called occupational stress (Ugwu, Egwu, Ochie, Ewunonu, Ovuoba, & Njoku, 2007). It is one factor that may shape one's well-being and quality of life (Iwasaki, McKay & Ristock, 2004). Swaminathan & Rajkumar (2013) defined stress as "a dynamic condition of an individual in which he/she aspires or what he/she expected to deliver and the outcome of which is perceived to be important but uncertain."

Stress can be good or bad. Good stress or eustress can be useful because it may increase the employees' performance and motivate employees whereas bad stress or distress can inhibit the employees' performance and affected the employees themselves in terms of physiology, psychology and behavior and also affected the organizations (McShane & Von Glinow, 2010)

Employees that experience stress and unable to cope with the stress may become easily fatigued and depressed, thus, affected their performance in the organization (Wong & Chan, 2010). Moreover in the case of newly hired employees, which are not used to the condition and environment in the organization yet, not being able to cope and react positively to the stress in their new environment may affect their health and well-being and also the organizations as a whole, for example, possibility of turnover and high absenteeism (Greiner, Krause, Ragland & Fisher, 1998). This is a big loss for the organizations when they spend budget and time in recruiting and selecting employees but there is a big chance of turnover and absenteeism.

The stress is also seems slightly worse for new recruited employees who work in private companies although it is not significant if compared to the public sector employees (Bano & Jha, 2012). This slight difference is probably because the companies in private sector have many competitions and need to be competitive so there is probably more demand from the company towards the employees. Thus, this study intends to focus on the stress and coping of the newly hired employees in private sector.

A need for this study arises given the impact that stress can imposed on individual and organizations. The result of this study may help identifying the source of the stress and how the new recruited employees able to cope with the stress and can be used as one of the consideration in designing less stressful work environment and policies to help them perform better in the workplace.

In relation to that, this research will be conducted with the purposes to explore the experience of stress among new recruited workers in private sector in Malaysia, especially in terms of the stressors and coping style among the workers.

Thus, the research questions of this study are:

1. What are the stressors for the newly hired employees in the workplace?

2. How do the newly hired employees manage the stress?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted in the field, both qualitatively and quantitatively to look at stressors in the workplace and how employees coping with the stress.

In term of stressors, the newly recruited employees are predicted to face challenges from new environment, new culture, new and unfamiliar tasks, potential interpersonal conflict and uncertainty about the job and environment (Wang, Zhan, McCune & Truxillo, 2011). In addition, high demand and low job control also may act as the stressors in the organizations for the newly recruited employees (Taris & Feij,2004). Those types of stressors for the new employees are mainly because of the new environment and tasks that the newly hired employees are facing.

In addition to that, there are other type stressors that the newly hired employees could face. Mazzola, Schonfeld and Spector (2011) concluded that there are two types of stressors in the workplace. The first type of the stressors is common stressors across job such as excessive workload, interpersonal conflict, role conflicts and ambiguity, organization constraint, lack of autonomy and work underload and the second type of stressors is specific job related stressors. For example, Wong and Chan (2010), who focused on male workers in social welfare sector, found out that communication, resources scarcity, customers' expectation and extra workload were perceived as the stressors in the organization. Another example is a research that has been done by Rutledge, Stucky, Dollarhide, Shively, Jain, Wolfson, Weinger and Dresselhaus (2009) which focus on nurses in hospital. They found out that one the stressors for the nurses and physicians is sleep

impairment. Thus, it can be inferred that the specific type of stressors is the result of the nature of the job that the employees do and the newly recruited employees probably will face the stressors that are unique based on the nature of their job as addition to the common stressors.

In terms of coping strategy, for the newly hired employees, Jesus Bravo, Peiro, Rodriguez and Whiteley (2003) suggested one of the coping strategies that can be adopted to reduce role ambiguity stressors is by enhancing the relations and seeking support and advices from the superiors. McShane and Von Glinow (2010) also suggested that newly recruited employees may manage the stress from the new environment and new tasks by setting goals and perform self-reinforcement which may change the employees' perceptions towards the stressors. McShane and Von Glinow (2010) also believed that by seeking emotional and informational support from the co-workers may help the newly hired employees may help them remove the

stressors considering their new status in the organizations.

In addition, different people with different background and different nature of the job may choose different way of coping with stress. For example, rescue workers like paramedics and fire fighter react and cope with their stress through sharing and praying (Prati, Pietrantoni & Cicognani, 2011). Therefore, similar to the stressors, the coping strategy will also depend on the nature of the job of the employees.

From the literature, it can be inferred that some stressors and coping strategies are common across jobs and some are unique based on the nature of the job and background of the individual. Newly recruited employees also expected to face some challenges that may cause additional stress to them. Thus, it is interesting to see what the newly recruited workers perceived as stressors and how they cope with the stress.

METHODOLOGY

The method adopted in this study was qualitative interview. Qualitative interview was chosen because it allows the researcher to get richer data and allow more exploration from the participants individually. In addition, the participants might feel more comfortable during the session to answer the questions because it is a one to one session with the researcher without others' presence like in the focus group discussion. Moreover, qualitative interview provide flexibility in time for both the researcher and participants compared to focus group discussion and ethnography.

Sampling & Subjects

The sampling method adopted in this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researcher to get participants that fulfill the criteria that may help the researcher collect richer data for this study. 4 participants were recruited to be involved in the study, 2 males (coded M1 & M2) and 2 females (coded F1 & F2).

The criteria of the participants that need to be fulfilled in this study are:

1. The participants should be a newly hired employees in their organizations (6-12 months working)
2. The organizations where the participants are working should be private organizations.

Apparatus

The tools that were used in this study are a set of interview questions guide, a voice recorder and also paper and pencil.

Procedure

The type of interview that was used in this study is semi-structured interview. First the researcher contacted the candidates for the participants to explain about the study and ask for their consent to involve in the study. Then, each of the participants was interviewed by the researcher regarding their experience of stress in the workplace and how they manage and cope with the stress. All the processes were recorded using voice recorder. The

recorded interview then transferred into transcript by using Microsoft Word application and then analyzed by using thematic analysis approach to look for the theme.

Thematic analysis is a method in qualitative research for examining, exploring, classifying the data collected and present it in form of themes or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, after analyzing the transcript from the interview session, the researcher tries to classify the data into several themes that may answer the research questions.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The findings are presented into two different sections which reflected the answers of the two research questions. The first section are the findings for research question 1 which is "What are the stressors for the newly hired employees in the workplace?" and the second section will explain the findings for research question 2 which is "How do the newly hired employees manage the stress?

Table 1 below contains themes that came out after coding and analysis process in trying to answer research question 1

Table 1. Stressors for newly hired employees

No	Theme	Sub-theme
1	Nature of the job	
2	Task related stressor	Deadline
		Extra workload
3	New environment	
4	Unsupportive environment	Unsupportive co-workers
		Inadequate facilities
		Lack of training

Themes that answer research question 2 are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. Stress coping methods by newly hired employees

No	Theme	Sub -theme
1	Escapism	
2	Social support	Friend's support
		Family support
3	Informational help	

1. Stressors

After gone through the analysis processes, the researcher found that there are four themes that reflect the source of the stress

for the newly recruited employees in the workplace, which are nature of the job, task related stressor, new environment and unsupportive environment.

1.1. Nature of the job

2 out of 4 participants mentioned in the interview that the nature of the job they are involved in are one of the cause of the stress they experienced. Every different jobs has their own unique characteristics and those unique characteristics become a stressor specific only to the employees of the job. One participant who works in an event management company reported that the nature of the job is meeting with deadlines and as a newcomer to the job he feels the urge to learn very fast to adapt to the job as well as the company.

"emm, actually because, emm, as I've said before, that the nature of business is basically meating deadlines deadlines and deadlines, so , therefore, since I'm a newcomer in the business, so I've to learn new things very fast" (M1)

Another participant who works as a treasurer mentioned that the monotonous routines of her job make her feel unchallenged and bored.

"after working here for few months, I found my job is quite monotonous, like I'm doing the same, the exactly same thing for everyday like, you know, like the the task like I've told you before, and those kind of things, I, I do it almost like a habit you know, so there are no, emm, no new challenge given like you know..." (F2)

1.2. Task related stressors

1.2.1. Deadline

Deadline is probably a common stressor among workers. Inevitably, 2 participants mentioned deadline of their tasks in the job as the source of stress to them. One participant described deadline as very demanding to him.

"I also feel that that the work that I'm doing emm it is, I view it as a pressure because we are dealing with deadline, because we have deadline so we need to meet the deadline, so deadline, so is very demanding.." (M1)

In addition, another participant also mentioned about deadline, however, it is the changing deadline that put pressures on him.

"*when it comes to administrative jobs. There are some jobs that need to be done according to the deadline but somehow the boss suddenly wants the things to be done as soon as possible "* (M2)

1.2.2. Extra workload

Besides deadline, 2 out of 4 participants in the study also mentioned about extra workload that their superiors gave them as the source of the stress in the workplace for them. A participant mentioned that when there are extra assignments given to him, his focus will be divided and it is very demanding.

"the pressure comes in, when your manager or emm when there is other work demanding

you work, to to give, emm, to, to work extra, meaning that you not, you are not only focusing on your task, I mean your own task....." (M1)

In addition, a participant from the interview stated that extra workload is a burden to her when she is not familiar with the task assigned.

"And then, emm, this is, emm, something to do with, emm, there are few times when my superior gave me task that I'm not familiar with. I found it really, if found it as a problem because I'm not familiar, I, I never did that before but the superior just ask me to accomplish…" (F2)

Workload and deadline are considered as common stressors which can be found across jobs as suggested by Mazzola, Schonfeld and Spector (2011). Thus the findings supported the suggestion because there are several participants that mentioned the same factor of their stress in the workplace

although they are from different working background.

1.3. New Environment

Wang, Zhan, McCune and Truxillo (2011) suggested that newly hired employees faced many challenges, including the need to adapt to the new environment of the job. The findings in this study supported that suggestion. A participant in the interview described the need to adapt to the new environment, information and tasks has become a pressure to him.

"since I'm a newcomer in the business, so I've to learn new things very fast, so I need to adapt myself with the new information, I have to practice it so that's because it is a new environment, it is a new information, it is a new thing for me so bcos I'm facing with something new I think is is it is it has become a pressure for me" (M1)

It is a challenge to adapt to the new environment, especially when the employees do not have previous working experience to

help him prepare with the challenges that he probably will face. A participant mentioned the hardship of adapting to the environment because it is his first time entering the working environment.

"for me it was very difficult. After I finished my SPM, I got the results and immediately looking for the job. I have no experience to works as a part-timer or a full-timer in any other places" (M2)

1.4. Unsupportive environment

Unsupportive environment was also mentioned by several participants in the interview as their source of stress in the workplace, for example unsupportive co-workers, inadequate facilities and lack of training given by the organization.

1.4.1. Unsupportive co-worker

One participant mentioned that one of the stressors that she faced in the workplace is the unsupportive co-workers. She mentioned that the co-workers there seems to avoid her and don't respond to her.

"...I met this other English teachers in school where I work. And then I said "salam.." then I smiled, but they don't reply or even smile back at me and even talk back anything to me, just like I was nothing to them just like avoiding me.." (F1)

1.4.2. Inadequate facilities

Inadequate facilities is also one of the reason of the employees may feel stress in the workplace. The inability of the organizations to provide the adequate environment was mentioned by 50% of the participants as the cause of their stress. A participant who works as a teacher mentioned that the place where she works is lack of lighting that she thinks can inhibits her teaching processes.

"..for the class I don't think they support the teaching process for the teacher or even for the students. Because in certain places or classes which lacking of lighting, it makes me hard to do my job as a teacher there. The classes are not that comfortable enough for the teaching" (F1)

Another participant mentioned in the interview that the inability of the organization to provide adequate facilities like water supply left bad impression to her as a new employee in the organization.

"......I was, emm, required to go to the nearby mosque to just perform my zuhur prayer at that time because the water supply is not adequate and I think this is something that, emm, left a bad impression to me" (F2)

1.4.3. Lack of training

One participant mentioned that she would like to provide training for the new employees to equip them with skills that are required in the job when asked if she is the manager of the organization where she is working, what will she do to do with stressful employees. This shows the lack of training and preparation from the organizations can be a source of stress to the new employees in the organizations.

"maybe I can provide the training first for the employee to acquire them the skill needed at

work, as for me, teaching skill. Because in my case, they don't, didn't train me first... a teaching skill, that causes me difficult to do my job right now" (F1)

2. Coping method

The researcher found out three themes that reflect the stress coping method of the participants, namely escapism, social support and informational help.

2.1. Escapism

75% of the participants mentioned about escaping the daily routine in work as their methods to cope with stress.

"usually what I did to cope with it is to play sports, to play sports and then to go out with my friends during weekends doing things that are not related to work......"(M1)

In addition, they also mentioned they are looking for entertainment when they are not in work so that they may release the stress. One participant mentioned that hanging out

with his friends can help him in handling the stress,

"usually, I'll ask my team mate to do some karaoke, mm.. you know just lepak-lepak, and sembang-sembang kosong , all those things that teenagers do. Because at that time, I was still young and I feel so stress and I feel like.. terikut-ikut laah"(M2)

Meanwhile, another participant sometimes chooses to have a time for herself and enjoy that time by watching movies or listening to the music.

"somehow, I also like to lock myself inside my room, being alone. Watching all the movies I have and listening to some music.."(F1)

2.2. Social support

75% participants mentioned that in coping with stress, they seek social support from their closest relatives, either from family members or friends.

2.2.1. Friends' support

One participant mentioned that she seeks support from her close friends when she is facing stress. She feels that sharing the burden and the problem with her close friends is effective way of coping for her.

"hanging out my close friends, I feel much better inside and not so burdened with work again,eh, anymore.. Because I already feel like I shared something to others. So I think it's quite effective for me"(F1)

Another participant described that his friend that happened to work in the same place with him did help him when he is facing problems that can cause stress, especially in making him more comfortable in adapting to the new environment of the job that he just entered.

"...I have a friend there who work there, I mean a friend who had, whom I had known during my university, during my study, so I think that person is like is actually, I mean, makes me feel more comfortable"(M1)

2.2.2. Family support

Besides the support from close friends, some participants preferred to seek support from their family. One participant mentioned that spending time with her family, sharing their problem with their them is helping her in reducing her stress.

"I also, like during weekend, ask my family out to have dinner to, you know, just have some kind of entertainment outside, you know, this outings with your family, this can help you, you know, let yourself heard, you can share a lot of things....."(F2)

Another participant added that advices and directions from her family member sometimes help her when she is facing the stress.

"when I talk to my family, I feel like something is going out of me. And they give like some advices, direction to do next"(F1)

2.3. Informational help

As newcomers, the participants are facing new environment, new tasks, and new way how to get the job done. Thus, they feel that seeking help and information on how to get the job done and learn from the co-workers do help them in adapting and understanding the job, thus decreasing pressure from the job.

"when I come to the company, the other staff was already working there for almost 5 years and above. So they are very experienced in their things. I do learn much from them, they teach me how thing to be done....."(M2)

One participant also mentioned about how learning from the co-workers helps her in adaptation to the new system in the workplace and she did that by observing her co-workers behaviors.

"Mmmm.. I think I just see and observe what my colleges do. How they do their tasks, how they deal with the students, how they behave in front of our boss"(F1)

This result is similar with what McShane and Von Glinow (2010) have suggested in which newly hired employees may reduce the stressors in their new workplaces by seeking informational support and emotional support from their co-workers.

CONCLUSION

The evidence from the interview with the participants suggests that the stressors for the newly hired employees in private sector in Malaysia ranging from the nature of the job, task related stressor, new environment and also unsupportive environment. Some result supported previous findings while there are also unique themes and sub-themes emerged for example the unsupportive environment and sub-theme unsupportive co-workers. For coping strategies, it was found out that to cope with the stress, the newly recruited employees perform escapism, seek for social support from family and friends and informational help from their peers.

This result, however, cannot be generalized; however, it may help in understanding and appreciate the uniqueness in employees' perception of stressors and effective coping methods.

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