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UNDERSTANDING ON PERSONALITY TRAITS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of coping strategies for assessing personality traits. The concepts of coping strategies and personality traits are viewed from numerous perspectives. This paper using systematic review to assess the significance of personality theories, dimensions of coping strategies, and discusses the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies. Results from earlier studies demonstrated a strong and consistent using the Big Five Personality Theory to measure individual personality traits and employing problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies for measuring coping strategies in numerous situations. So far, there has been little in depth discussion about the relationship between the effects of personality traits on coping strategies and factors that affect the assortment of coping strategies. Therefore, more research on coping strategies and personality traits need to be undertaken in order to obtain a better understanding of these relationships. The future researchers on this area should discuss and do more research on coping strategies and personality traits in wide context such as by using sojourners, tourist and students for respondent in their research

Keywords: Personality Traits, Dimension of Personality Traits, Coping Strategies, Dimension of Coping.   .

1. Introduction

Individuals are usually burdened with stress at work which ultimately requires coping strategies to reduce the stress. There are some individuals who allow stress to affect their level of mental and physical health. This statement is in line with the views of psychologists in the past that situations that cause stress can be varied by coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, the act of coping is viewed as a strategy and as an effort to adjust to the stress experienced by the individual. Coping strategies has its own level of effectiveness. In order to deal with stress, each individual will use different coping strategies depending on the environment (Wallace, Lee, & Lee, 2010) and the problems faced. An effective selection of coping strategies needs to be applied by an individual to control the stress faced by the individual (Hernández-Mogollon, Cepeda-Carrión, Cegarra-Navarro, & Leal-Millán, 2010) as well as to minimize problems which occur (Scott, Kimberly, Plunkett, Radmacher, & Moll-Phanara, 2000). Thus, studies on coping have gained the attention of several researcher psychologists like (Caverley, 2005; Ferlis B. Bullare @ Bahari; Balan Rathakrishnan & Rosnah Ismail, 2009; Flett, Baricza, Gupta, Hewitt, & Endler, 2011; Roberts, Smith, Jackson, & Edmonds, 2009; Sager, Thomann, Zollinger, van der Heiden, & Mavrot, 2014; Salhah, Sapora dan Dini Farhana 2012; Tsarenko & Strizhakova, 2013; Walsh, Fortier, & DiLillo, 2010).

Personality traits can predict actions of individuals in different groups. A personality trait mechanism has different dimensions between individuals with other individuals who are seen to affect a person's behavior in most situations (Ferlis B. Bullare @ Bahari; Balan Rathakrishnan & Rosnah Ismail, 2009). Generally, most behaviors are influenced by certain goals. The personality mechanism can give a positive picture of how an individual strategizes or acts in a certain way. In particular, the process of coping is born as a result of stressful situations while personality exists to explain how people react and behave in facing and handling problems that occur (Malkoç, 2011).

As the main pioneer of the coping concept, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that situations or environments that cause stress influence an individual in choosing a coping strategy. Costa and McCrae (1992) concurred that there is conformity in coping with personality traits. On the other hand, Bolger (1990) reflected that the act of coping is part of the personality. In fact, efforts, and strategies that are continuing according to personality traits to solve various problems or stressful situations caused by ourselves, the surroundings or environmental factors (Costa & McCrae, 1980) are supported by the method of thinking and behaving that are adjusted in stressful situations, either internally or externally (Gerber, Huber, & Mfl, 2010).

Salhah et al., (2012) conducted a study on the source of stress, coping strategies, and stress experienced by university students in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The study found a significant relationship between the cause of stress and stress experienced by the university students. That coping strategies act as a mediator in the relationship between the source of stress and stress experienced by the students. The study also showed that students who were emotionally stable were bound to have less stress, showed low pressure, and were wise in using appropriate coping strategies to deal with stress. Statements related to personality traits and coping strategies have been emphasized by researcher psychologists in empirical studies. These include studies by Rosniah (2007), Ab. Halim Mohamad (2009), Murberg & Bru (2005), Stahl & Caligiuri (2005), DeYoung (2006), Shi & Wang (2007), Sibley and Duckitt (2008), Mirsaleh, Rezai, Kivi, & Ghorbani (2010), M. S. Allen, Greenlees, & Jones (2011), Kingsbury, Coplan, and Rose-Krasnor (2013),

Mirnics et al., (2013), T. A. Allen and Deyoung (2015), Kuo & Tang (2014). Therefore, this study is a systematic review to see how far personality traits and coping strategies are related to each other.

2. Problem Statement

Coping strategies are focused directly on the problem and thus are able to change a situation or deal with an environmental problem caused by stress factors. This is because the act of focusing on emotions directly stabilizes the emotions and reduces the problems that are encountered (Jokela et al., 2013). However, previous researchers have found that the combination of the two dimensions of coping – emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies are needed to overcome, control, and minimize environmental or emotional problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Shi and Wang (2007), personality traits are inherent in an individual such as how he thinks, acts, shows emotion, and how he responds differently to others. Thus, coping strategies are very important for the individual in facing especially stressful situations.

Based on literature reviews by previous researchers, it has been found that interventions are needed in the approach to help individuals cope with problematic situations and stressful environments according to an individual's personality traits. This indirectly means that efforts and strategies are made to increase skills in selecting a coping strategy(s) to reduce stress and simplify the process of selecting an appropriate strategy for coping with stressful conditions and also the individual's personality. Therefore, this systematic review study is aimed at identifying personality theories and dimensions of coping strategies and also the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies.

3. Research Questions

The research questions of this conceptual paper are:-

3.1 What are the personality theories and dimensions of coping strategies?

3.2 Is there any relationship between personality traits and coping strategies?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify personality theories and dimensions of coping strategies. The second aim was to investigate the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies.

5. Research Methods

This research is a systematic review of research methods. A systematic review is a process to identify all reliable evidence regarding a scientific problem(s). It involves several steps such as: 1) deliberating the question(s) to be answered; 2) identifying a searchable database; 3) developing clear search strategies; 4) selecting the title, abstract, and manuscript based on standards of selection; and 5) perceiving data in an appropriate format. The main focus of this research is to find information concerning personality traits and coping strategies that are published in search engines, such as ProQuest, SAGE Publications, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, Wiley Online Library and Google Scholar. The research in this study was

only focused on journal publications from 2004 to 2016. Out of a total of 217 journals and articles, only 121 were related and used in this research. The 96 journals and articles were used to support this research. Keywords search used in this research were: 'personality traits', 'personality theories', 'coping strategies', 'dimensions of coping strategies' and 'relationship on personality traits and coping strategies'.

Data were collected from journals and articles and categorized into themes. The first theme is the selection of research methodologies that were used to conduct the research related to personality traits and coping strategies. This analysis looked at frequency and justifications on the selection of methodology.

The second theme is to assess journals and articles by title that were related to personality traits and coping strategies. This theme was categorized into two parts: 1) personality traits, 2) coping strategies. Analysis of this theme included considering the focus of previous research, year of publication, the authors and trends in research conducted by previous researchers.

6. Findings

6.1. Personality Theories

In order to identify each individual's personality traits, some previous researchers have developed theories on traits that differed from each other, such as Gordon Allport, Raymond Cattell, Hans Eysenck, Lewis R. Goldberg, Katherine Briggs, and Isabel Briggs. However, in most theories of personality developed by early researchers, the Big Five personality theory identified five dimensions of personality traits which were conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, emotionality, andopenness to experience (Conley, 1985; P. Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990; Wortman, Lucas, & Donnellan, 2012).

Extraversion refers to the level of comfort in the relationship that exists between the individual and other individuals. Among the features of personality that refer to individual personality dimensions, extraversion conveys being friendly, sociable, active, assertive, ambitious and energetic in doing an activity(s). Individuals who fall into this category of extraversion were found to have good communication skills and a positive aura that attract the attention of other individuals (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Goldberg, 1990; Watson & Clark, 1992). Agreeableness refers to the differences in personality characteristics found in individuals with other individuals. Among the features of personality on dimensions of agreeableness are: cooperative, gentle, tolerant, courteous, kind, humble, flexible, and civilized (Costa & McCrae, 1992; P. T. Costa et al., 1991; Digman, 1990). Conscientiousness refers to personality characteristics that can be trusted. The personality characteristics of conscientiousness are cautious, responsible, organized, tidy, hardworking, dedicated, and goal-oriented towards success (P. T. Costa et al., 1991; Digman, 1990). Neuroticism refers to how individuals control their emotions when dealing with stressful situations and problems. Individuals who fall into the category of emotional stability tend to have positive personality characteristics such as mental quiet, secure, relaxed, confident, not easily anxious, and able to handle pressure well (Costa & McCrae, 1992). On the other hand, individuals who have emotional instability, tend to have negative personality traits such as irritability, temperamental, hasty in making decisions, and feeling unsettled. The openness to experience refers to how individuals behave in a situation, whether in a state of calm or troubled. Individuals who fall into the category of openness of mind tend to

452

have personality traits such as curiosity, the desire to try something new, sensitive, creative, independent, like something unique, and open minded (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Costa et al., 1991; Digman, 1990).

Findings from the analysis on the articles by previous researchers found that Cattell (1943) developed Raymond Cattell's Theory of Personality. In the theory, Cattell used the factor analysis method, a type of multivariate to understand, and predict the behavior of individuals. In this theory, he used three types of data to determine factors on behavior. The first data is obtained from actual records of life histories or through observations of behavior in real conditions. The information obtained from these data is called Life Data or H-data. The second data is the S-data or data from the questionnaire. All information is obtained from a few true- false questions that refer to certain behaviors. While the third data is the US-data or also known as Questionnaire Test data. Information can be obtained through this data when the subject is given a behavioral situation. Cattell used all three sources of these data systematically to obtain some personality dimensions. Based on analysis and research carried out, Cattell finally developed 16 Personality Factors (16PF). However, a handful of researchers in the past criticized the 16 Personality Factors because there were too many elements and it could not pass the test variables replication (Goldberg, 1990). According to Cattell, during the construction of the 16 Personality Factors' questionnaire, the results of the questionnaire was only focused on four personality factors alone and this situation clearly demonstrated that the personality theory was not comprehensive and was limited to certain personality dimensions.

Accordingly, the subject of personality also received attention from Eysenck who introduced three factors in personality traits, that of extraversion, emotional stability, and psychotic (Eysenck, 1964). The extraversion dimension is divided into two parts, extrovert, and introvert. On the other hand, the emotional stability dimension refers to stable emotional control while psychotic refers to a combination of the traits, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Emergence of these three personality traits is naturally formed and known to be the biological characteristics of each individual. However, researchers and philosophers criticized the psychotic trait because the trait is a combination of two traits in the Big Five personality theory – agreeableness and conscientiousness (Mohd Zuri, Rahimi, Nik Rosila dan Aznan, 2008). Norhayati, Sharlene, Normah, Abdul Halim dan Rozmi (2015) argued that elements in Eysenck's three personality traits theory are similar to the Big Five personality theory developed by Goldberg (1980).

Brigg also developed a Type Indicator theory to measure personality traits. This Type Indicator theory consists of four main dimensions, namely Extraversion vs. Introversion, Thinking vs. Feeling, Judging vs. Perceiving, and Sensing vs. Intuition. The theory of Personality Type Indicator is very popular and often used by researchers and philosophers in the field of personality. However, some researchers criticized the legality, and validity of the questionnaire and the distribution function of the dimensions of personality such as categories of thought and acceptance (Dagher & Robbins, 2009).

In addition, the latest personality theory was developed by Ashton and Lee (2007) known as the HEXACO. This personality theory consists of six dimensions of personality: honesty, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. The HEXACO Personality theory is known as an adaptation of the Big Five Personality theory. The dimension of honesty is incorporated into this theory to explain the nature of honesty that must exist in individuals, in order to generate positive personality traits. Similar to other personality theories, the HEXACO Personality theory

also received criticisms from researchers and philosophers such as on issues related to generalization and the impersonation of another theory (De Raad et al., 2010).

Based on an analysis and review of the articles and journals by previous researchers, there are similarities on dimensions of personality traits such as dimensions of extraversion, open mindedness, and conscientiousness. The results of the analysis also found that there were researchers who adapted the Big Five Personality Theory to the HEXACO Personality theory. In addition, there were a few of researchers who added detailed explanations about the dimensions of the Big Five Personality Theory as a personality theory that was developed by Eysenck. Although there have been criticisms from some researchers towards the Big Five Personality Theory, it was found that this personality theory encompassed the entire taxonomy of right to measure personalities as compared to other personality theories (Allen & Laborde, 2014). This is proven based on findings that after 20 to 30 years, The Big Five Personality Theory is still popular, relevant, widely used and cited in the literature, worldwide (Bardi, Buchanan, Goodwin, Slabu, & Robinson, 2014; Demerouti, 2006; Judge & Cable, 1997; Wortman et al., 2012).

6.2. Dimensions of Coping Strategies

Coping is a set of cognitive and behavioral strategies used by the individual in handling stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping refers to cognitive and human behavior in managing, reducing or controlling demand that can threaten, harm or challenge (Boyar & Mosley, 2007). Coping is an important area to do research on because how individuals overcome stress or problems can affect several aspects such as well-being, self-confidence, ambition, and career success (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that coping is one of behavior strategies that occurs within each individual to manage, reduce, mitigate or control problematic situations with either positive or negative methods.

Coping strategies is divided into two parts, namely adaptive coping strategies, and maladaptive coping strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009). Adaptive coping strategies are more to reduce stressful situations, especially in the field of employment. Instead, maladaptive coping strategies tend to elicit a negative result and will in turn affect psychological and physical health. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) believed that coping with stress can be divided into two dimensions which are, problem-focused, and emotion-focused. Problem-focused refers to efforts to eliminate threats and to get rid of stress while emotion-focused are efforts to reduce negative feelings that increase the reaction to a threat. Similarly, Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) developed their own coping strategies which also comprised emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Some of the researchers in the past criticized the dimensions of the coping strategies developed by Billings and Moos (1981) since they were similar to the dimensions of coping strategies developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The analysis of the act of coping also received attention from Billings and Moos (1981) as they developed the dimensions of coping strategies which consisted of the dimensional approach and avoidance in writing. In the 1990s, Pienaar and Rothmann (2003) developed a coping strategy of engagement and disengagement. Just like other coping strategies, the coping strategies of Billings and Moos (1981) and Pienaar and Rothmann (2003) also received criticisms from a handful of researchers and philosophers as their coping strategies showed similarities with the dimensions of coping strategies proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as well as Frydenberg and Lewis (2009).

Analysis and research conducted on articles and journals on coping strategies found that most researchers used the coping dimension developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as a basis in their research. In addition, there were similarities in the dimensions of coping strategies between those developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) with other researchers such as Carver et al. (1989). There were also researchers such as Pienaar and Rothmann (2003) who developed a distinctive dimension of actions but still based them on the dimensions of coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Even though there were disagreements and criticisms from a handful of researchers in the past on the dimensions of coping (i.e. problem-focused and emotion-focused) by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), it has been found that these coping strategies are more comprehensive and flexible than others and are suitable for use in various situations and environments. This has been proven since the emergence of these dimensions in 1984 and until today, researchers are still guided by the dimensions of coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and these dimensions have been cited in various fields such as medicine, engineering, social sciences, and psychology (Neyer, Wrzus, Wagner, & Lang, 2011; Richards, 2012; Welbourne, Eggerth, Hartley, Andrew, & Sanchez, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008).

6.3. Relationship between Personality Traits and Coping Strategies

The study by meta-analysts Shi and Wang (2007) found that overall personality traits were not really associated with coping strategies such as engagement and disengagement. However, the five personality traits were related to coping strategies that were more specific. Results of the analysis found that the dimensions of extraversion and conscientiousness had a significant relationship with coping strategies in problem-solving, whereas the dimension of emotional stability had a significant relationship with the emotion-focused. An individual personality tended to influence behavior and coping strategies in dealing with a situation or problem.

A study conducted by Malkoç (2011) on the big five personality traits and coping styles of Turkish students at the University of Marmara, Turkey found that the dimensions of extraversion and conscientiousness showed a positive correlation with coping strategies while the emotional stability dimension showed a negative correlation with coping strategies. This study showed that personality traits and coping styles are significantly correlated with each other in describing the personality traits of an individual. The study used two instruments which were Styles Scale (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008) and Big Five Personality Inventory-Short Form NEO-FFI (Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

Accordingly Bardi, Guerra, and Ramdeny (2009) conducted a study in three stages – the first stage was on the Cope Scale measurement that involved 292 first-year university students in Britain. The first study focused on the comparison between problem-focused and emotion-focused. The study found that emotion-focused / avoidance tended to be used by respondents compared to problem- focused in addressing issues related to culture. This study used 15 subscales that were available in the Cope questionnaire (Carver et al., 1989). As for the second stage, the study was conducted on the cultural values as predictors of coping strategies. Bardi et al., (2009) only focused on two dimensions throughout this study, which were personality traits of extraversion, and conscientiousness. The study found that the dimension of conscientiousness had a significant relationship with emotion-focused / avoidance while the dimension of extraversion had a significant relationship with problem-focused. The instrument used in this study was the

Cope Scale (Carver et al., 1989) to examine coping strategies while the Big Five Inventory (BFI) was used to test personality traits (Okpara, 2016). Lastly, in the third stage, the study was focused on the relationship between cultural values and coping strategies which involved 179 respondents who were international students at a university in England. The results showed that personality traits played an important role and were related to coping strategies dealing with particularly problematic or depressing situations. The study used the Cope Scale instrument (Okpara, 2016) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

The study conducted by Camelia and Ioana (2015) on 60 respondents. The respondents were women who had been victims of domestic abuse. It was found that the women who were victims of domestic abuse had low levels of extraversion and openness and a high level of conscientiousness. They were more prone to using coping strategies focused on problems like active coping, suppression of competing activities, restraint, and use of instrumental social support. They also used an emotion-focused strategy which was focused on venting of emotions. There was a higher tendency in this target group to use a religious coping mechanism to address and control emotions after experiencing abuse. Consequently, the choice of coping strategy was dependent on the individual situation and the problems that occur. This study adopted a personality inventory DECAS instrument to assess personality structure based on the theory of the Big Five Personality while the Scale Cope (Carver et al., 1989) was used to assess the structure of coping strategies according to the 15 coping strategy mechanisms like positive reinterpretation and growth, mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, active coping, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, use of emotional social support, substance use, acceptance, suppression of competing activities, and planning.

7. Conclusion

The results of analysis from past journals regarding the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies showed that former researchers have recently begun to pay serious attention to the study of personality and dimensions of coping. This is because personality traits and coping strategies are related to each other. The selection of coping strategies in a situation is part of the personality in which the selection process of coping strategy is influenced by the behavior, thoughts, and feelings of an individual. However, it has been found that previous researchers did not explore much on the effects of personality in the selection of coping strategies and the factors that drive the choice of coping strategies among individuals suffering from stress and problematic situations. Hence, in depth empirical studies is required to investigate and analyze the effects of personality in the selection of coping strategy(s) and the factors that drive the choice of coping strategy(s) by way of the theory of personality and the dimensions of coping as discussed in the systematic review.

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