

BOND UNIVERSITY

Coping Strategies of Project Managers in Stressful Situations

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Alicia Jai Mei Aitken

Student Number: 12961966

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Abstract

Today the world is increasingly complex and fast paced, fuelling the potential for stressful situations to emerge and engulf individuals across all aspects of life. Stress is emerging as a prevalent affliction of the workforce and is extremely costly to individuals, organisations and economies. Understanding how individual's cope with stress is the first stage in developing effective programs for mitigating the risks associated with a particular work environment. Projects are fast emerging as one of the preferred methods of working for both individuals and organisations. Projects with their unique product and constraints of time, cost and quality are concentrated environments in which stress can manifest and potentially cause damage.

Project management brings with it a specific culture of identify, plan, action. This culture is embodied in the project management processes both at the individual and organizational level. This thesis explores the relationship between the selection of coping strategies by project managers when dealing with three (3) types of stressor, work, home and personal health and the culture of project management. This study provides the first empirical research on how project managers cope with stress and how this coping strategy selection is influenced by their sense of control and their emersion in project management culture.

Analysis of responses from 216 project professionals from over 30 countries in this study show that project managers consistently use more Planning and Active Coping strategies when attempting to cope with all three kinds of stressful situations, work, home and personal health. The use of Planning and Active coping are positively correlated to the application of project management skills. Results suggest that the more project management skills are applied to their work the more likely they are to use Planning and Active coping to manage stressful situations. Further analysis shows that this correlation also has some low levels of predictability for the use of Planning and Active coping. Not only is the use of project management skills associated with a higher level of Planning and Active coping strategy selection but that use of project management in the workplace is a predictor of a higher level of both coping strategies.

In addition to these two coping strategies project managers consistently use Acceptance as a means of coping across all three domains.

The results indicate that there is a consistency in how project managers choose to cope with stress across their life with a moderate relationship to the culture of project management. The influencing factors that determine this consistency are unclear from this study however the consistency is unique with most general studies on coping finding no consistency in selection of coping strategies across work, home and personal health. The outcomes of this research provide a foundation for understanding how project managers attempt to cope with stress which will inform and improve the ways in which organisations attempt to support project managers in their stress management.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made

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