

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

The Impact of Self-Efficacy and Cognitive Appraisal on Coping
Adaptability in Military Recruits: A Test of a Model and its Impact on
Organisational Outcomes

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts
in
Psychology

at Massey University, Albany
New Zealand

Bethany Loughran
2008

Abstract

The present research aimed to test a model of adaptation in RNZAF recruits which was similar in structure to transactional models of stress such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model. Using a longitudinal design and dispositional measures the study assessed the impact of general self-efficacy and cognitive appraisal at the start of recruit training on coping adaptability at the end of training. These variables were also assessed as to their impact on organisationally relevant variables including organisational commitment, perceived performance improvement and readiness for next career phase. Overall the study had two broad aims. The first was to confirm the relationships between appraisal, coping adaptability and outcomes as previously shown in transactional models of stress and coping. The second aim was to discover how self-efficacy impacted on the model, more specifically, whether it acted as a moderator, mediator or antecedent to the appraisal – coping relationship.

The results confirmed that challenge appraisal was associated with better organisational outcomes, this relationship was fully mediated by coping adaptability. Self-efficacy was strongly correlated with challenge appraisal however did not moderate the appraisal – coping relationship nor did it mediate the appraisal – coping adaptability relationship. The direct relationship between self-efficacy and coping adaptability was however, fully mediated by challenge appraisal.

Threat appraisal did not demonstrate strong relationships with the remaining variables in this sample. Additionally, general self-efficacy, challenge appraisal and coping adaptability were associated with organisational commitment and readiness but not with performance improvement.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Dianne Gardner for her encouragement and feedback during the writing of this thesis.

Secondly, I would like to thank the RNZAF and NZDF Psychology Directorates for providing me with access to their data. I would especially like to thank Sarah Overdale for her guidance.

I would especially like to thank my family, my partner and my friends for the amazing amount of support and encouragement they have given me throughout this year which I could not have done without.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter 1	1
Training in the Military	1
<i>Training Outcomes</i>	<i>1</i>
Predicting outcomes of military training.	2
<i>Objectives of the present research</i>	3
Organisationally relevant training outcomes.	3
Psychological predictors of training outcomes.	3
<i>Chapter summary</i>	4
Chapter 2	5
Model Development	5
<i>Models of stress</i>	5
Early Models.	5
Stressor-Strain models.....	6
Transactional model.	8
<i>The Present Research</i>	11
Amended Model.	11
Dispositional approach.	13
Longitudinal research.	14
<i>Chapter summary</i>	14
Chapter 3	16
Cognitive Appraisal and Coping	16
<i>Cognitive Appraisal</i>	16
<i>Primary Appraisal</i>	16
<i>Secondary Appraisal</i>	17

<i>Physiological effects of appraisal</i>	17
<i>Determinants of appraisal</i>	18
Components of relevance.....	18
Dispositions.....	19
Appraisal as a trait.....	20
<i>Coping</i>	21
What is coping?.....	21
<i>Types of coping</i>	22
Problem and emotion focused coping.....	22
Meaning and social-focused coping.....	23
Coping types and outcomes.....	23
Interaction between coping type and situation.....	24
<i>Coping adaptability</i>	25
Flexibility as a personal resource.....	25
How does coping adaptability relate to a transactional model of stress?.....	26
<i>Measuring coping adaptability</i>	27
Situation specific measurement.....	27
Measuring coping adaptability as a trait.....	28
Why is coping adaptability important for military recruits?.....	29
<i>Research implications for this study</i>	30
Appraisals and coping adaptability.....	30
Appraisals and perceived performance.....	31
Coping adaptability and outcomes.....	32
Coping adaptability as a mediating variable.....	33
<i>Chapter summary</i>	35
Chapter 4	36
Self-efficacy	36
<i>Social Cognitive Theory</i>	36
<i>Self-efficacy</i>	37
Determinants of self-efficacy.....	38
Differentiation from self-esteem.....	38
Self-efficacy and performance.....	39
The generality of self-efficacy.....	40
<i>Self-efficacy and the stress process</i>	42
<i>Research implications for this study</i>	43
Self-efficacy and appraisals.....	43
Self-efficacy and coping.....	44
Self-efficacy and organisational outcome variables.....	45
Self-efficacy as a moderating variable.....	46
Self-efficacy as a mediating variable.....	48

Self-efficacy as a determinant of appraisal.....	49
Chapter summary	50
Chapter 6.....	51
Method.....	51
Overview.....	51
Ethics.	52
Participants.....	52
Procedure	52
Questionnaire.....	52
Materials.....	53
General self-efficacy.....	53
Cognitive appraisal.....	54
Coping adaptability.....	55
Organisational Commitment.....	55
Perceived Performance improvement.....	56
Readiness for next phase of career.....	56
Data Analysis.....	56
Chapter Seven.....	60
Results.....	60
Descriptive statistics.....	60
Hypothesis testing.....	60
Correlations.....	60
Coping adaptability as a mediator.....	62
Self-efficacy as a moderator.....	65
Self-efficacy as a mediator.....	66
Self-efficacy as a determinant of appraisal.....	67
Chapter Eight.....	71
Discussion	71
Findings.....	71
Research aim: Confirmation of transactional model.....	71
Research aim: Exploration into the place of general self-efficacy in the model.....	74
Limitations.....	76
Areas for future research.....	76
Practical implications	77
Increasing general self-efficacy.....	78
Influencing appraisal.....	79
Improving coping adaptability.....	79

<i>Conclusion</i>	80
References	81

List of Tables

Table 1. Means and standard deviations.....	60
Table 2. Correlations (Pearson's).....	62
Table 3. Correlations (Spearman's)	62
Table 4. Coping adaptability as a mediator of the challenge appraisal - org commitment relationship	64
Table 5. Coping adaptability as a mediator of the challenge appraisal - readiness relationship	64
Table 6. Self-efficacy as a moderator of the challenge appraisal - coping adaptability relationship	65
Table 7. Self-efficacy as a moderator of the threat appraisal - coping adaptability relationship	66
Table 8. Self-efficacy as a mediator of the challenge appraisal - coping adaptability relationship	67
Table 9. Challenge appraisal as a mediator of the self-efficacy - coping adaptability relationship	68
Table 10. Threat appraisal as a mediator of the self-efficacy - coping adaptability relationship	69

List of Figures

Figure 1. Transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)	9
Figure 2. Amended model	12
Figure 3. Coping adaptability as a mediating variable	34
Figure 4. Self-efficacy as a moderating variable	47
Figure 5. Self-efficacy as a mediating variable	48
Figure 6. Self-efficacy as a determinant of appraisal	49
Figure 7. Mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986)	58
Figure 8. Moderation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986)	59
Figure 9. Final model of significant relationships	68