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An Appraisal-Coping Model of Occupational Stress Outcomes: Distress and Eustress.

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Jennifer McGowan
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Abstract

Occupational stress is a significant problem throughout the industrialised world. The prevalence of occupational stress is increasing and the negative consequences of stress for individual health and wellbeing are also acknowledged to be increasing. This attention to the negative aspects of stress is, however, one sided. Stress, if negotiated appropriately, can produce positive responses and outcomes (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). The present research returned to the original stress conceptualisation as proposed by Selye (1976) and addressed the positive response to the stress process, termed '*eustress*'.

The Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) was adapted by including eustress as the positive response to the stress process, in contrast to the negative response of distress. The model posits stress to be a process of transaction between an individual and their environment, and proposes two appraisal processes: cognitive appraisal of event meaning and appraisal of coping options. These aspects of stressor negotiation in turn determine the degree of eustress and distress experienced. Eustress and distress are further posited to be antecedents to positive and negative changes in long-term health, morale and social functioning.

One hundred and forty four employees from three New Zealand organizations completed a questionnaire that assessed cognitive appraisals and coping processes used to deal with a stressful event and state affective responses as representative of eustress and distress. Eustress was represented by the work-related affective states of high pleasure/high arousal and hope. The precursors of eustress were challenge appraisal, adaptive coping and increased motivation. A measure of distress and a model of precursors to distress were also proposed but require further research.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	9
 CHAPTER TWO: CONSEQUENCES AND PREVALENCE OF STRESS. 12	
2.1 CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS	12
2.1.1 <i>Physiological Consequences</i>	12
2.1.2 <i>Psychological Consequences</i>	13
2.1.3 <i>Workplace Consequences</i>	13
2.2 PREVALENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS	14
2.2.2 <i>Occupational Stress in New Zealand</i>	14
 CHAPTER THREE: DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING STRESS	16
3.1 THE STRESSOR-STRAIN MODEL.....	16
3.2 STRESS AS A PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE	17
3.3 STRESS AS AN INTERACTION	18
3.3.1 <i>Person-Environment Fit Model</i>	18
3.3.2 <i>Demand-Control-Support Model</i>	19
 CHAPTER FOUR: THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS.....	20
4.1 DEMANDS/STRESSORS	20
4.2 INITIATING THE STRESS PROCESS	21
4.3 PRIMARY APPRAISAL	22
4.4 SECONDARY APPRAISAL	24
4.4.1 <i>Coping Strategies</i>	25
4.4.2 <i>Consequences of Coping Choice</i>	26
4.5 REAPPRAISAL	27
4.6 MEDIATING/MODERATING VARIABLES	27
4.6.1 <i>The Context of the Stress Process</i>	28
4.6.2 <i>The Influence of Individual Differences</i>	28
4.7 OUTCOMES OF THE STRESS PROCESS	29
 CHAPTER FIVE: EUSTRESS	31
5.1 EUSTRESS	32
5.1.1 <i>Origins of the Eustress Concept</i>	32
5.1.2 <i>Eustress Revisited</i>	33
5.1.3 <i>The Concept of Eustress Refined</i>	34
5.1.4 <i>Definition of Eustress</i>	35
5.2 INDICATORS OF EUSTRESS	36

5.2.1	<i>Eustress Research</i>	37
5.3	ANTECEDENTS TO EUSTRESS	37
5.4	CONSEQUENCES OF EUSTRESS	38
5.5	FULL MODEL OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS.....	39
CHAPTER SIX: PRESENT RESEARCH		42
6.1	AIMS AND HYPOTHESES.....	42
CHAPTER SEVEN: METHOD		45
7.1	APPRAISAL AND COPING.....	45
7.1.1	<i>Identification of a Stressful Situation</i>	45
7.1.2	<i>Appraisals</i>	46
7.1.3	<i>Coping</i>	46
7.2	EUSTRESS AND DISTRESS.....	48
7.3	TASK ENGAGEMENT	48
7.4	SUBJECTIVE PERFORMANCE.....	49
CHAPTER EIGHT: RESULTS		50
8.1	PARTICIPANTS.....	50
8.2	DEFINING VARIABLES.....	50
8.2.1	<i>Coping</i>	50
8.2.2	<i>Eustress and Distress</i>	51
8.2.3	<i>Engagement</i>	52
8.2.4	<i>Subjective Performance</i>	52
8.3	ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFERENCES	53
8.4	CORRELATIONS.....	53
8.5	EUSTRESS	53
8.5.1	<i>Mediated Regression</i>	54
8.5.2	<i>Outcomes</i>	56
8.5.3	<i>Structural Equation Modelling</i>	56
8.6	DISTRESS	58
8.6.1	<i>Mediated Regression</i>	59
8.6.2	<i>Outcomes</i>	60
8.6.3	<i>Structural Equation Modelling</i>	61
CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION		63
9.1.1	<i>Measuring Eustress</i>	63
9.1.2	<i>Measuring Distress</i>	64
9.2	THE EUSTRESS PROCESS.....	65
9.2.1	<i>Challenge Appraisal</i>	65
9.2.2	<i>Adaptive Coping</i>	65
9.2.3	<i>Task Engagement</i>	66
9.3	MODELLING EUSTRESS	67
9.3.1	<i>Outcomes of Eustress</i>	68
9.4	THE DISTRESS PROCESS.....	68

9.4.1	<i>Threat Appraisal</i>	68
9.4.2	<i>Maladaptive Coping</i>	69
9.4.3	<i>Strain</i>	70
9.5	MODELLING DISTRESS.....	70
9.5.1	<i>Outcomes of Distress</i>	71
9.6	LIMITATIONS	71
9.7	FUTURE RESEARCH.....	72
9.8	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE	74
9.9	CONCLUSIONS.....	74
REFERENCES		76
APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE.....		83
APPENDIX B: CORRELATION MATRIX FOR QUESTIONNAIRE VARIABLES.....		90
APPENDIX C: FACTOR ANALYSIS.....		93
APPENDIX D: CORRELATION MATRIX FOR DEFINED VARIABLES.....		95

List of Tables

Table 1. Reliability Values for Ways of Coping Scale, p 47.

List of Figures

Figure 1. A Model of Occupational Stress Simplified, p 10.

Figure 2. A Model of Occupational Stress, p 41.

Figure 3. The Predicted Model of Eustress, p 55.

Figure 4. AMOS Graphic for the Model of Eustress, p57.

Figure 5. The Predicted Model of Distress, p 60.

Figure 6. AMOS Graphic for the Model of Distress, p 61