

Job stress, coping strategies and professional deformation of Human resource managers

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Abstract: Human resource manager role is related with human resource management and has high sense of responsibility, therefore it is important to assess the degree that personal managers suffer from overload, emotional burnout, professional deformation. Overload result - stress affects work productivity, quality, work error and trauma amount. The aim of the research is to determine the level of the job stress, coping strategies and professional deformation features of HR managers. Three questionnaires were used in the research: Professional Life Stress Scale, Strategic Approach to Coping Scale, questionnaire about work stress and professional deformation and correlation analysis. HR managers are suffering from mid-level of stress, and research shows that the main difficulties that HR managers are facing during their professional activity are workload and inadequate deadlines. HR managers are using the following coping strategies - „Assertive Action” and „, Social Joining”, it means that HR managers can defend their rights without oppression of others, and stress situations are managed by joining together with others to deal with the situation together. There is a possibility that many of HR managers have professional deformation features. The Research findings can be used for ongoing studies on job stress and professional deformation in psychology and to reduce job stress and professional deformation amongst HR managers.

Keywords: job stress, coping strategies and professional deformation, HR managers.

Introduction

On daily basis, the position of a personnel manager includes interpersonal communication as well as management of human resources (resource planning, assessment, planning of training, talent management, career planning, change management, registration of work time, dealing with problems of the employees in various problem situations, etc.). The personnel manager has a high degree of responsibility because they act as intermediaries between the business interests of the company and the interests and needs of the company employees. This, in its turn, places this profession among the high-risk profession with regard to occupational stress and professional deformation. Much is being talked about occupational stress in employees, but less about personnel managers, and, for this reason, the authors of the paper wish to analyse this problem with regard to personnel managers.

The aim of the article to find out the level of occupational stress, stress management strategies and signs of professional deformation in personnel managers.

In literature occupational stress is usually defined as the employee's feelings with regard to their job – difficulties at work, concern, anxiety, disappointment, emotional depletion and tension (Armstrong, Griffin, 2004, Wickramasinghe, 2010). Occupational stress means changes in an individual which occur as result of external forces – subjective event experience (Le Fevre, Matheny, Kolt, 2003). Stress, which is a result of excess mental load, influences work productivity, quality, number of errors admitted at work, and the number of on-job injuries. Stress is an unavoidable component of life, but it may lead to frustration, depression, and tension (Kofoworola, Alayode, 2012). Stress in employees increases if the requirements at work are not approved by managers and colleagues of the respective level (Wickramasinghe, 2010).

Stress management strategies. Coping is defined as a process for overcoming external and/or internal requirements which are usually rated as reducing the personality resources (Bartlett, 1998). According to R. S. Lazarus, there are several types of managing stress by humans (Lazarus, 2000). The psychological stress model of Lazarus (2000) relates to overcoming stress which results in the use of a

certain strategy of managing stress. The stress model of S.Hobfoll, in its turn, represents a multiple-axle model of management. The axes distinguish between action-oriented stress management and the relation of the individual with other people. The active – passive dimension includes self-reliance or exercising control over others.

The axis of social dimension implies that the process of stress management cannot do without the help of social interaction. Prosocial stress management includes adaptive acts whose purpose is caring about others. Antisocial stress management includes activities which deliberately harm people around or reflect general indifference towards harm done to others. Axis: directness – indirectness, indirectness more relates to active social stress management, which means that priority is given to maintaining harmony rather than protection of own needs (Hobfoll, 1998).

Professional deformation. Professional deformation of a personality means changes in the personality traits which occur during performance of professional duties and manifest in professional jargon, manner of behaviour and the physical image (Еникеев, 2010). The professional activities and individual properties change the level of manifestation of professionally significant properties, and this has negative impacts on the quality of the activity. The specifics of the professional occupation, in its turn, may, under certain conditions, cause negative impacts on the psychological structure of the personality by deforming it. There are own stressors and traumatic factors in every profession, professional deformation has the highest impacts on the personality in professions in which the job is related to working with people – personnel managers, medical personnel, pedagogues, psychologists, social workers etc. (Зееп, 1997).

Methodology

The following methods were used within this study to research the problem:

- 1) Professional Life Stress Scale by Fontana (Fontana, 1989);
- 2) Stress Strategic Approach to Coping Scale by Hobfoll (Hobfoll, 1998);
- 3) Survey Among Personnel Managers on Occupational Stress and Professional Deformation
- 4) Correlation analysis.

The following questions were posed in the study:

- 1) What are occupational stress levels in personnel managers?
- 2) What stress management strategies are pursued by personnel managers?
- 3) Can signs of professional deformation be seen in the work of personnel managers?

In order to assure a better understanding of the problem, the secondary data on personnel managers and personnel specialists in Latvia were viewed in the first place. According to the data provided by the Central Statistics Authority, on 1 March 2011, there were 3,866 employees (3,263 females and 603 males) among the employed inhabitants in Latvia whose job was related to human resources.

Table 1

Employed Inhabitants of Latvia by Profession/Position in Main Job on 1 March 2011
(Central Statistics Authority Data, Source: www.csb.gov.lv) (Centrālās Statistikas..., 2013)

Code in the Classifier of Professions	Name of the Position	Total	Females	Males
1212	Personnel managers	1,057	825	232
2423	Personnel and career, quality management system senior specialists	2,374	2,104	270
2424	Training and personnel development senior specialists	311	224	87
4416	Personnel record keeping employees	124	110	14
	Grand total	3,866	3,263	603

As can be seen in Table 1, there are predominantly women in professions related to human resource management in Latvia. As on 1 March 2011, there were 1,057 people employed under position name „personnel manager” in total in Latvia. Of these, 78% were females and 22% were males. The largest group among those involved in management of human resources are senior personnel and career, quality management system specialists. 71 respondents (personnel managers) participated in the empirical study conducted by the authors: 68 females (96%) and 3 males (4%). This study confirms the fact that more women work in the sector of human resource management in Latvia, 65% of the respondents currently study personnel management.

Results and discussion

In order to answer research questions, work authors gathered primary data on personal manager work stress, used stress coping strategies, professional deformation by conducting empirical research. By analyzing the primary data and respondent answers, the following results were achieved.

Professional Life Stress Scale by Fontana (1989). The following results were obtained from evaluation of the responses given by the respondents and calculation of the number of points for each respondent: The responses provided by 58% of the respondents suggest that the level of occupational stress among personnel managers is low, and the job-related stress has no negative impacts on the physical or psychological condition of the respondent. 41% of the respondents have a medium occupational stress level, which suggests that job-related stress may have negative impacts on the physical and psychological condition of the individual. Referring to theory, occupational stress most often occurs in employees whose job involves human resources services. (Schaufeli, Enzmann, 1998).

Stress Strategic Approach to Coping Scale by Hobfoll (1998). The following results were obtained by summarising the responses given by the respondents on each of the subscales: personnel managers most frequently use such stress management methods as Safe, insisting (assertive) behaviour - 38% of the total number of respondents and Social consolidation - 17% of the total number of respondents, which means that personnel managers are able to defend their rights without using aggression and suppressing the rights of others. This confirms that personnel managers opt for a stress management strategy that is adequate to their position. Stress management strategy „social consolidation” indicates that, when dealing with situations and carrying decisions, personnel managers are willing to find out other opinions. This strategy suggests that personnel managers need opportunities for sharing opinions and experiences with others. Personnel managers most rarely opt for the stress management strategy of „avoiding”, and this might suggest that behaviour targeted at avoiding a problem is not typical in personnel managers. According to Hobfoll, use of this strategy allows the individual to reduce their psychoemotional tension without changing the stress situation itself. Personnel managers do not use antisocial behaviour in their professional activity.

Correlation analysis. The Pearson correlation ratio was used to find out the correlations between the results obtained during the surveys and the age and years of service of the respondents. The following results were obtained: There is no statistically significant link between the age of the respondents and the level of stress ($r = .22, p > .005$), between the age and professional deformation ($r = .11, p > .005$), between years of service and professional deformation ($r = .31, p > .005$).

There is statistically significant, medium tight correlation between the age of the respondents and the years of service in the position of a personnel manager ($r = .52, p < .005$), which suggests that respondents choose long-term performance in their current profession.

Surveys into professional deformation and occupational stress. The respondents' (18%) number of points was 3 (out of 5), and this suggests that professional deformation may develop, 11% of the respondents have professional deformation, which suggests that the respondents have inadequately high assessments of their professional knowledge and skills, do not question their decisions, and consider themselves to be irreplaceable employees.

The largest percentage (69%) of personnel managers have specified that the biggest challenge at work they have encountered has been workload, 44% of the respondents have specified work performance timelines, and 34% have specified unclear job assignments and requirements. According to Dyer and

Quine (Dyer, Quine, 1998), the number of worked hours and the obligations are potential occupational stress factors. Employees having excessively high loads and too many obligations find it more difficult to manage them (Schaufeli, Enzmann, 1998; Teoh, Yau, Chong, 2011). 83% of the respondents acknowledge that they feel emotionally distressed if they have to carry a decision regarding a company employee. Thus, there is a possibility that the carrying of such decisions may result in causes of occupational stress (Teoh, Yau, Chong, 2011). The decisions carried by them and the actions taken are believed to be correct and to be the only correct action by 30% of the respondents, 54% of the respondents have indicated that they tend to evaluate their relatives or acquaintances using their professional skills and competences. According to Trunov (Трунов, 2004), this might be suggestive of professional deformation as consequences of being active in the profession for many years and deformations occurring in the process of specialisation.

Conclusion

1. Personnel managers have medium and low occupational stress levels, which suggests that job-related stress may have negative impacts on the physical and psychological condition of the individuals.
2. Most frequently, personnel managers use such stress management strategies as Safe, insisting (assertive) behaviour and Social consolidation. This means that personnel managers are able to defend their rights without using aggression or suppressing the rights of others.
3. Personnel managers most rarely opt for the stress management strategy of „avoiding”. Thus, behaviour targeted at avoiding a problem is not typical in personnel managers.
4. Personnel managers (11%) have professional deformation, which means that the respondents have inadequately high levels of assessment of their professional knowledge and skills, do not question their decisions, and believe themselves to be irreplaceable employees.
5. There is statistically significant, medium tight correlation between the age of the respondents and the years of service in the position of a personnel manager ($r = .52, p < .05$), which suggests that respondents choose long-term performance in their current profession.
6. The most significant stressors personnel managers have had to encounter include workload, work performance timelines, unclear job assignments and requirements.
7. Personnel managers (83%) feel emotionally distressed if they have to carry a decision regarding a company employee. Thus, there is a possibility that the carrying of such decisions may result in causes of occupational stress.

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