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Dispositional Factors in Cognitive Emotional Response among Employees of Telecommunication Companies: Implication for Counseling.

John O. Ekore, Ph.D & Adedamola O. Amusan.

Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Tel: +234 8023007369.

Email: jekore@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examined dispositional factors in cognitive emotional response among employees in telecommunication companies in Nigeria. This was necessitated by the desire to understand the coping strategies of employees and the factors that influence their choices which have not been considered in performance improvement studies of the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. A sample size of 253 was selected through accidental sampling technique from two telecommunication companies in Lagos. Instruments used for data collection are: cognitive emotional response questionnaire (CERQ), self-esteem and the proactive attitude scales. Pearson correlation and t-test were used to test the hypotheses generated. Findings revealed significant relationship among proactive attitude, emotion focused coping strategy and problem focused coping strategy. Self-esteem significantly influenced the choice of emotional- focused coping strategy. Age of employees was also found to be a factor in the type of coping strategy adopted. Based on these, it implies that adjustment of employees largely depend on personal factors they bring to the workplace. Therefore, it was recommended that there is the need to incorporate intervention services in the organizations to offer employees opportunities for result-oriented counseling that would guide them in choosing coping strategies when faced with stressful experiences at work.

Key words: *cognitive coping strategy, dispositional factors, self-esteem, proactive attitude.*

Introduction

The telecommunication industry in Nigeria has been rated as the fastest growing in Africa. It has also become the most dynamic in terms of job creation and profitability. The effectiveness of each organization is largely a function of how adjusted the employees are in terms of job demand and capacity. The challenge of an effective organization is in successfully matching the task, determine the required skills and assemble a team that complements each other's skills thereby creating an enriching and effective team. Such efforts could be challenging.

In a bid to adjusting to the challenges arising from organizational assignments, employees try to cope. A generally accepted definition of coping is given by Monat and Lazarus (1991). They see coping as individual's effort to master demands (conditions of harm, threat or challenge) that are appraised (or perceived) as exceeding or tasking his or her resources. Being able to cope in an organization does not necessarily mean that the individual is not going through stress in the workplace. Individuals are complex beings that have the ability to project a certain unfavorable situation into another entirely different situation. An employee who is having marital problems or other personal problems at home might project this into his or her work environment thereby affecting organizational behavior. This requires the choice of coping method(s). Coping can therefore be regarded as the set of internal and external actions that individuals carry out voluntarily and consciously in order to face stressors appraised as threatening to physical and psychological well-being.

Consequently, scholars have identified several strategies that are of interest to employees. These are termed coping strategies. They come in different forms and dimensions. Among the increasing popular strategies in developed and emerging economies is the cognitive emotional response. It is also referred to as cognitive coping strategies. Typically, cognitive emotional response is made up of two dimensions that concern the way individuals adjust to uncomfortable situations they find themselves. They are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. According to Compas, Orosan & Grant, 1993, the coping strategies are aimed at regulating and addressing the emotions associated with the stressor. Both strategies seek to control one's stress level. In problem-focused coping, people try to short-circuit negative emotions by taking some actions to modify, avoid, or minimize the threatening situation. They change their behavior to deal with the stressful situation. In emotion-focused coping, people try to directly moderate or eliminate unpleasant emotions.

When an employee decides to complain about or revolt against a

particular stressful situation, it is a form of problem-focused coping. On the other hand, when an employee thinks positively about that same stressful situation, because an annual leave is just around the corner, it is classified as emotion-focused coping. Individuals differ in several ways. Thus, it becomes salient to consider their characteristic differences when examining the choice of coping strategy. There are different variables outside the workplace that might make it necessary to adopt a coping strategy in order to perform well in the organization. In other words, not all coping strategies are developed because of problems within the organization. For example, if a manager in a major telecommunication organization is going through some problems in personal life, such as the death of a spouse, financial or health problems, he or she is likely to take this to the workplace. It may not only affect him or her but also the other employees through his or her interaction with them. It is important to understand that whatever happens to one person in an organization is likely to affect the other members of that organization. This is largely true due to the inevitable interaction that exists among employees in the workplace as a social setting and the organization as a system.

As a coping strategy, cognitive emotional response serves as a guide for both employers and employees on ways by which they can deal with stressful situations and adapt to the challenges of organizational life. In business organizations, there are several factors that play important roles in the way employees react or respond to workplace experiences. These are dispositional and situational factors. For the purpose of this study, dispositional factors are considered in terms of self-esteem, proactive attitude, age, and gender. They are the internal factors that define individual's tendencies and behaviours in his or her environment. As factors that separate one individual from another, dispositional factors become important in the attempt to investigate choice of coping strategies in the Nigerian workplace. Specifically, the role of these factors in employees' choice of coping which can aid career adjustment has not enjoyed noticeable attention in the emergent telecommunication industry that is regarded as the fastest growing in Africa. Hence, this study which could have implication for managers of telecommunication companies in developing workplace policy and stress intervention programmes for employees.

Literature Review

In the body of literature that provides a direction to the understanding of cognitive emotions, the appraisal theory developed by Arnold (1950) is outstanding. It states that emotions are extracted from our evaluations (appraisals) of events that cause specific reactions in different people. Essentially, our appraisal of a situation causes an emotional or affective response that is going to be based on that appraisal. Reasoning and understanding of one's emotional reaction becomes important for future appraisal. The important aspect of the appraisal theory is that it accounts for individual variances of emotional reactions to the same event. This theory has expanded exponentially with the dedication of two prominent researchers (Arnold and Lazarus).

The appraisals of emotions that follow general arousal have been of great research interest to Arnold as far back as the 1950s. Specifically, Arnold wanted to 'introduce the idea of emotion differentiation by postulating that emotions such as fear, anger, and excitement could be distinguished by different excitatory phenomena' (Arnold, 1950). With these new ideas, she developed her "cognitive theory" in the 1960s, which specified that the first step in emotion is an appraisal of the situation. According to Arnold, the initial appraisals start the emotional sequence and arouse both the appropriate actions and the emotional experience itself, so that the psychological changes, recognized as important, accompany and also initiate the actions and experiences (Arnold, 1960). For example, if an employee in a very competitive organization works very hard throughout the year and ends up winning the award for the best employee of the year, the felt emotion of happiness will motivate the employee to keep working hard with the hope of receiving that same award next year.

Following closely to Arnold in terms of appraisal theory examination was Lazarus who continued to research emotions through appraisal theory. Since he began researching in the 1950s, this concept evolves and expands to include new research, methods, and procedures. Although Arnold had a difficult time with questions on the topic, Lazarus and other researchers discussed the bio-psychological component of the appraisal theory.

Specifically, he identified two essential factors in an essay in which he discusses the cognitive aspects of emotion: first, the nature of the cognitions (or appraisals) which underlie separate emotional reactions (e.g. fear, guilt, grief, joy, etc.). Second, the determining antecedent conditions of these cognitions (Lazarus, Averill & Opton, 1970). These two aspects are absolutely crucial in defining the reactions that stem from the initial emotions that underlie the reactions. Moreover, Lazarus specified two major

types of appraisal methods which sit at the crux of the appraisal method. They are primary appraisal, which is directed at the establishment of the significance of meaning of the event to the organism, and secondary appraisal which is directed at the assessment of the ability of an individual to cope with the consequences of the event. These two types go hand in hand as one establishes the importance of the event while the following assesses the coping mechanism which Lazarus divided into two parts: direct actions and cognitive reappraisal processes.

In a study aimed at defining stress and the role of coping conducted by Dewe (1991), significant relationships between primary appraisal, coping, and emotional discomfort were recorded. It was proven that primary appraisal was the main contributor of predicting how someone will cope. This finding provides opportunity to understand the emotion that will be elicited by a certain event and may give rise as an easier way to predict how well someone will cope with their emotion. The above position explains the relationship between the appraisal theory and coping strategies. This shows that the appraisal theory can be used to explain how Nigerian employees in the telecommunication industry would cope when they are faced with stressful events.

The level of stress experienced in organizational context, and the extent to which adverse effect such as psychological and other strains occur, depend on how effectively the individual copes with stressful organizational situations (Bhagat et al., 2001). Research supports the contention that the ways people cope with stress and daily living affect their psychological, physical and social well-being (Ben-Zur, 1989; Cohen & Lazarus, 1979; Friedman & Vandebos, 1992; Greenglass, 1996; Violanti & Paton, 1999). Coping strategies represent the efforts, both behavioral and cognitive, that people invest in order to deal with stressful encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping has been differentially conceived in several ways (Livneh, Antonak & Gerhardt, 2000): as personality trait and situation-determined response, a dynamic process and a static construct, a strategy that is mature, adaptive and flexible. It is also a reaction which is neurotic, maladaptive and rigid, a global, generally dichotomous concept with an intricate, hierarchically structured, multilevel concept.

Findings by Marshal, Cripps, Anderson and Cortoni (1999) in a study that assessed the social self-esteem and coping styles of child molesters, non sex offenders and non offenders found that child molesters had lower self-esteem than other participants and they made use of emotion- focused coping strategies. McLead (2010) also revealed that people with low self-esteem typically use emotion- focus coping strategies.

Another study carried out by Adel et al (1991) and Bendnar et al (1981) showed that low self-esteem has been identified as impacting negatively on performance and motivation resulting in disengagement from problem- focused coping strategies. This means that the level of self-esteem of an individual will influence the type of coping strategy adopted.

Studies have shown that high self-esteem people are better equipped to reduce dissonance than those with low self-esteem (Neilands, 1995). According to Neilands (1995), people with low self-esteem are better equipped to reduce dissonance than people with high self-esteem. In other words, people with low self-esteem report lower level of dissonance than those with high self-esteem. This means that individuals with self-esteem will pay more attention to emotion- focused coping strategies. It can be assumed that when individuals are low on self-esteem, they would adopt the emotion- focused coping strategy

Donaldson, Prinstein, Danovosky, Spirito (2000) found that older adolescents (15-18 years) when compared to younger adolescents (9-14 years) tended to use a broader range of coping strategy. Their position may have been due to the adolescent population they studied. A group that has less life experience without work experience. In Rossman (1992) study, younger children tended to use less emotion regulation strategies. This means that age is a factor in the adoption of problem-focused coping strategies. Rogers & Holmbeck (1997) explored a previous finding that "the psychological impact of inter-parental conflict on children is influenced by children's cognitive appraisals". The researchers hypothesized that cognitive appraisal and coping would help moderate variables for the children. Therefore, the emotional impact of parent conflict would vary based on the nature of the child's "appraisal and coping strategies" Rogers & Holmbeck (1997). They tested coping strategies and measured child adjustment based on the children's self-reported emotional and behavioral adjustment determined from levels of self-worth and depression Rogers & Holmbeck (1997). The results demonstrated a significant negative main effect of problematic cognitive appraisal on self-worth and a significant positive main effect of problematic cognitive appraisal on depression. This shows the impact of cognitive appraisal on children emotional well being and ability to deal with inter-parental conflict Rogers & Holmbeck (1997). This means that age of the employees do affect the type of coping strategy they adopt.

Other demographic factors such as race and gender have also been emphasized as influential in coping responses (Coyne & Downey, 1991, Kessler, Price & Wortman, 1985), and in reported sources of work stress (Patterson, 2000), whereby coping is indirectly influenced. Furthermore,

several demographic factors have been shown to interact with age (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimpley & Novacek, 1987) and gender (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) to affect coping responses among individuals. This means that demographic factors can influence the type of coping strategy that would be used by individuals in the workplace.

According to Moos, Holahan and Buetler (2003) there are two main perspectives in the conceptualization of coping: dispositional coping and contextual coping. Dispositional coping emphasizes the stable factors of personality that influence the coping styles. Contextual coping emphasizes the variability of coping depending on the type of stressor to be faced. From the dispositional perspective of coping, it is assumed that people can develop habitual ways to cope with stressing situations, therefore a pattern of stable answers or styles of coping may be observed. These coping styles may influence new situations (Carver & Scheier, 1994). From this approach it is assumed that coping is temporally stable and cross-situationally consistent. As stated by Ptacek, Pierce and Thompson (2006) temporal stability implies the favoring of a certain strategy at two different moments. Assuming that the stressors are similar to one another, cross-situationally consistent in coping, a person should cope in a similar way when faced with different classes of stressors, whether or not they are experienced at different times).

The most familiar and widespread coping taxonomy is the one proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980). These authors described coping as either problem-focused or emotion-focused. Parker and Handler (1992) demonstrated that these dimensions have been recovered in nine out of 13 studies. Problem-focused coping strategies aim at actively dealing with the problem. In contrast, emotion-focused coping is directed at dealing with the emotional distress that is evoked by the problem. A study by Schwarzer (1999) showed that there is a correlation between the proactive attitude and cognitive coping strategies. There was also a significant relationship between proactive individuals and the type of coping strategies adopted. This shows that proactive attitude and coping strategies go hand in hand. However, the direction of this relationship was not specified. Greenglass (2002) conducted a study on the attitude of classroom teachers and how they cope with their jobs. The results showed that coping is moderately related to a proactive attitude. Results also showed that emotion-focused coping correlates positively with proactive attitude. In view of this, it can be hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between proactive attitudes, emotional-focused coping and problem focused coping

among employees in telecommunication industries in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

- 1) There will be a significant relationship among proactive attitude, emotional focused coping strategy and problem focused coping strategy among employees in telecommunication industries in Nigeria.
- 2) Employees lower on self-esteem will adopt more emotion- focused coping strategies than those who report higher on self-esteem.
- 3) Younger employees will adopt more emotion-focused coping strategy than the older ones.

Methodology

Participants

A sample size of 253 was drawn from two telecommunication industries (Glo and MTN) in Lagos using accidental sampling method. One hundred and twenty (47.4%) of the participants were drawn from Glo while one hundred and thirty three (52.6%) were drawn from MTN. One hundred and twenty seven respondents were males (50.2%) while one hundred and twenty six respondents were females (49.8%). Their mean age is 30.9 (SD=4.96) with a range of 21 – 45 years. One hundred and eleven (43.9%) were single, one hundred and twenty four (49.0%) were married, while eighteen (7.1%) were engaged.

Measures

Questionnaires were used for data collection. Each questionnaire contained the cognitive emotional regulations questionnaire (CERQ), self-esteem scale developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) and the proactive attitude scale by Schwarzer (1999).

Section A consisted of information on relevant demographic characteristics about each respondent, which include: age, gender, duration of employment, highest level of education and marital status.

Section B had the cognitive emotional regulations questionnaire (CERQ). It is a 36 item scale developed by Nadia Garenfski, Vivian Kraaij and Philip Spinhoven (2001). It consists of 9 different subscales, which are: self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, and refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, and other-blame. For easy interpretation, the nine dimensions of the CERQ were factor-analysed to fall under two main types of coping strategies which are the problem focused and the emotion focused coping strategies. For this

study, the Cronbach's alpha for the CERQ was .68. After the nine dimensions had been rotated, the Cronbach's alpha for the problem focused coping was .78 while that of the emotion focused coping was .85. Self blame, acceptance, rumination, putting into perspective, catastrophizing and other blame fell under the emotion focused coping strategies while positive refocusing, refocusing on planning and positive reappraisal fell under problem focused coping.

Section C consists of a scale which measured self-esteem as perceived by the respondents. The scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965). It was scored on a 4-point Likert response format. Originally, the scale was made up of 10 items with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .77 to .88. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha derived was .76.

Section D consists of the proactive attitude scale developed by Schwarzer (1999). The scale consists of 8 items and the response format being used is the Likert type scaling. This scale has been used in numerous research projects where it typically yielded internal consistencies between alpha .75 and .90. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .687.

Results

The first hypothesis which predicted a significant relationship among proactive attitude, emotion focused coping and problem focused coping among employees was tested using Pearson r correlation. The result is presented on table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Correlation results showing the relationship among proactive attitude, emotion- focused and problem- focused coping strategies.

Variables	1	2	3	X	Sd	r
1. Proactive attitude	-			23.02	2.73	.69
2. emotion -focused	-.23**	-		59.83	13.32	.85
3. problem -focused	.28**	-.15**	-	40.93	7.82	.78

** (correlation is significant at 0.01 level)

The result above indicates a significant relationship among proactive attitude, emotion focused coping strategy and problem focused coping strategy among employees in the telecommunication industries in Nigeria. Proactive attitude and emotion focused coping strategy recorded a negative relationship at df (211); $r = -.23$; $p < .01$. The strength of the relationship is weak but significant which means that when proactive attitude increases, there is decrease in the use of emotional- focused coping strategy among the employees. On the other hand, a positive relationship was recorded between proactive attitude and problem focused coping strategy among employees in the telecommunication industry at ($r = .28$; $p < .01$). This

implies that as proactive attitude increases, there is increase in use of problem focused coping strategy by the employees. These results therefore confirmed the hypothesis as predicted.

The second hypothesis which stated that employees with low self-esteem will adopt more emotion focused coping than those high on self-esteem was tested using t-test for independent samples and the result is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Summary results of t-test for independent samples comparing high and low self-esteem on emotion- focused coping strategy

Emotion focused	Self-esteem	N	X	Sd	df	t	p
	Low	148	62.79	12.21	195	5.84	<.05
	High	49	50.91	12.64			

The result indicates that self-esteem had significant influence on the choice of emotion- focused coping strategy at $t(195) = 5.84; p < .05$. The low self-esteem had $x=62.79$ and high self-esteem had $x=50.91$. This implies that employees with low self-esteem adopted more emotion- focused coping strategy than employees with high self-esteem in the organizations covered. Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed.

The third hypothesis proposed that younger employees will significantly adopt more emotion-focused coping strategies than older employees. This hypothesis was also tested using the t-test for independent samples. The result is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Summary results of t-test for independent measures comparing young and older employees on the choice of coping strategy.

Emotion focused	Age	N	X	Sd	df	t	p
	Young	98	62.12	13.24	195	2.424	<.05
	Old	99	57.57	13.08			

The result indicates that the age of the employee would affect the type of coping strategies adopted. Looking at the mean scores of young employees (62.12) and older employees (57.57), the result implies that younger employees adopted more emotion-focused coping strategy than older employees at $t(195) 2.42, p < .05$. Therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

The study was carried out to investigate dispositional factors in cognitive emotional response among employees in telecommunication industries in Nigeria. Findings showed that the first hypothesis which predicted a significant relationship among proactive attitudes, emotion

- focused coping strategy and problem-focused coping strategy in the telecommunication industry was accepted. Results showed a significant relationship among proactive attitude, emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping strategies by the employees. This result supports Schwarzer (1999) who earlier found a correlation between proactive attitude and coping strategies. It showed a strong association between proactive individuals and the type of coping strategies they adopted although the direction of this relationship was not specified. This is an indication that proactive attitude and coping strategies go hand in hand.

The second hypothesis which stated that employees with low self-esteem will adopt more emotion-focused coping strategies than employees with high self-esteem was accepted. The predicted position supports the findings of Marshal, Cripps, Anderson and Cortoni (1999) in a study that assessed the social self-esteem and coping styles of child molesters, non sex offenders and non offenders. They found that child molesters had lower self-esteem than other participants and they made use of emotion- focused coping strategies. McLead (2010) also revealed that people with low self-esteem typically use emotion focus coping strategies. Another study carried out by Adel et al (1991) and Bendnar et al (1981) showed that low self-esteem has been identified as impacting negatively on performance and motivation resulting in disengagement from problem- focused coping strategies. This means that the level of self-esteem of an individual will influence the type of coping strategy adopted.

Studies have also found that high self-esteem people are better equipped to reduce dissonance than those with low self-esteem (Neilands, 1995). According to Neilands (1995), people with low self-esteem are better equipped to reduce dissonance than people with high self-esteem. In other words, people with low self-esteem report lower level of dissonance than those with high self-esteem. This means that individuals with self-esteem will pay more attention to emotion- focused coping strategies. This study has shown that employees with low self-esteem paid more attention to emotion- focused coping strategy than problem- focused coping strategy. There seems to be a common position that when individuals are low on self-esteem, they adopt the emotion- focused coping strategy.

The third hypothesis which stated that younger employees will adopt more emotion-focused coping strategy than older employees was also confirmed. However this hypothesis contradicted the findings of Donaldson, Prinstein, Danovosky, Spirito (2000). In their study, they found that older adolescent (15-18 years) when compared to younger adolescents (9-14 years) tended to use a broader range of coping strategy.

Their position may have been due to the adolescent population they studied. A group that has less life experience without work experience. The current finding also contradicted the position of Rossman (1992). In that study, younger children tended to use less emotion regulation strategies. This means that age is a factor in the adoption of problem-focused coping strategies. Rogers & Holmbeck (1997) explored a previous finding that "the psychological impact of inter-parental conflict on children is influenced by children's cognitive appraisals". The researchers hypothesized that cognitive appraisal and coping would help moderate variables for the children. Therefore, the emotional impact of parent conflict would vary based on the nature of the child's "appraisal and coping strategies" Rogers & Holmbeck (1997). They tested coping strategies and measured child adjustment based on the children's self-reported emotional and behavioral adjustment determined from levels of self-worth and depression Rogers & Holmbeck (1997). In this study however, younger employees were found to have adopted more problem-focused coping strategies than emotion-focused coping strategy. The study was carried out within a restricted population which may cause the differences between the results obtained in this study and those of others in the literature.

Conclusion

A major conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that significant relationships exist among proactive attitude, emotion focused coping strategy and problem focused coping strategy in employees of telecommunication industries in Nigeria. This shows that there is a strong association among the variables. Another conclusion from the findings is that being male or female is not a factor in employees' choice of coping strategy. The level of self-esteem is an important factor in the choice of emotion focused coping. Finally, age of an employee plays a key role in the choice of coping strategy adopted. This shows that the younger an employee is, the higher the tendency to choose emotion focused coping strategy. Therefore, proactive attitude, self-esteem and age are important factors in determining the type of coping strategy adopted while gender is not an important factor.

In this study, self-esteem, proactive attitude, and age were all significantly related to the choice of coping strategies adopted by the employees. This study has implications for the management of the organizations, scholarship and policy formulation. For the management of the organization, the study implies that it will be easier to design training packages and intervention

programs because there will be a better knowledge and understanding of what type of packages to design for the different categories of employees. For scholarship, the study implies that there will be a better knowledge and understanding of the different coping strategies adopted by employees and more studies can be done in this area. This study showed the importance of personality and age on employees' cognitive emotional response. All these have implications for organizational policies on employees coping and adjustment to task to ensure performance improvement. There was no clear cut distinction between gender and the type of coping strategies adopted. It implies that the same coping programs will be developed for both male and female employees since gender is not a factor to be considered.

Recommendations And Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions discussed above, it is recommended that organizations need to embark on periodic employee survey. This would give employees who are having a hard time with coping with the internal and external stressors a chance to express their worries and fears. The survey will enable management to understand the level of adjustment challenges experienced by the employees and design appropriate intervention strategies. It would go a long way in helping to promote employees' well being which translates to organizational effectiveness and profitability. Future studies can be carried out on a larger scale by covering the entire operators in the telecommunication industries and other parts of the country. Other business organizations and sectors apart from the telecommunication industries should be considered in future studies in the area. Indigenous and foreign telecommunication companies can be compared for the purpose of having a better understanding in the area of cognitive emotional response. Other dispositional factors and even situational factors can be included in future studies. This would broaden the scope of factors that can possibly play roles in choice of cognitive emotional response as a coping method.

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