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Emotional Costs, Self-efficacy and Coping Strategies among Unemployed Individuals during Professional Internship

Abstract

The study investigates the emotional costs experienced in the new workplace and general self-efficacy (GSE) as predictors of coping during the first period of reemployment. The study was conducted among 69 unemployed during professional internship. Questionnaires battery was administered in two waves (T1 and T2) within the first two weeks of this kind of reemployment and after 3 months. 35 respondents participated in T2. The results showed GSE and emotional costs as predictors of coping strategies using in the work re-entry phase. Further regression analysis showed a significant relationship between problem solving (T1) and GSE, and emotional costs (T2).

Keywords: emotional costs, self-efficacy, coping strategies, reemployment

Introduction

The current tendencies of the labor market show an emphasis on employment as an obligatory prerequisite for social integration. Individuals who cannot lead a life that meets social standards suffer from lack of material and social well-being. Thus, failure to enter or re-enter the workforce increases a feeling of marginality and being of little value to society (Kieselbach, 2003). Accordingly, the unemployed are a group of particular risk in this issue. In his study, Andersen (2002) shows common problems specified by the unemployed, such as the fear of being outside of society or stigmatization. The anxiety of losing qualifica-

tions and not being able to return to a job were considered as most important (Andersen, 2002).

Since unemployment is harmful to mental and physical health and general well-being (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al. 2005; Ratajczak, 2004), jobless people might suffer most on work re-entrance. Particularly for younger workforce entrants unemployment and temporary employment are increasingly common. It is suggested that the first job is a critical factor in determining one's future career status as a continuation of education process and beginning of organizational socialization (Linneha&Blau, 1998, Goszczyńska&Ratajczak, 1993). The presented study concerns unemployed individuals during professional internship. The analyzed internships were organized by the local job office with cooperation with different organizations. This kind of activity aims at increasing professional and interpersonal skills of the unemployed registered in the job office. The time duration of the internships is in general from three to six months. Even though this kind of activation could be seen as 'window dressing', without any guarantee for further employment, some employers regard that as a preliminary phase of selection process. During temporary employment the professional interns could, however, face stigmatization from organizational members generating difficulties in a new workplace. Thus, the concept of self-categorization among the unemployed reviewed by McFadyen (1995) plays an important role in experiencing emotional costs also after reemployment, and is affected by several factors, e.g. how the individual perceived the stigma of unemployment.

Emotional costs, self-efficacy and coping strategies

One of the consequences of recent organizational trends is an increase in job insecurity (Probst & Lawler, 2006). Bauer and Erdogan (2011) made a prognosis which indicates that individuals will change their jobs approximately 10 times over 20 years, which means every two years. The socialization research has underlined that entering a new organization is often accompanied by some degree of disorientation and reality shock. The newcomers who enter the organization have a strong need to make sense of the new environment and clarify their own place in it (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Organizations can offer different socialization tactics to their newcomers to help them in their work adaptation process, however new employees also play an active role in their own socialization and sense making by, e.g., seeking useful information through which they examine organizational rules and can then response to them.

Since unemployment influences a person in a specific manner, organizational reintegration could be particularly difficult for newcomers previously unemployed.

Job insecurity has been defined as perceived low stability and continuance of one's employment (Probst & Lawler, 2006). It could be thus expected that professional interns perceive higher job insecurity because of temporary organizational engagement and no guarantee for further employment. As suggested by Probst & Lowers (2006), individuals who are threatened with job loss perceive higher job uncertainty and ambiguity of their own professional future.

Unfavorable work atmosphere might cause further deterioration in their well-being at work. Job insecurity has been identified as a major source of, e.g., job stress, lower organizational commitment, or more negative job safety outcomes (Probst & Lower, 2006). The lack of direct control over the social and institutional practices individuals seek usually their well-being and security by seeking and using different resources. One of the personal characteristics that helps to cope with negative feelings in the workplace is general self-efficacy (GSE). Higher self-efficacy beliefs lead to, e.g., longer perseverance on difficult tasks (Bandura & Locke, 2003). In this study, the role that GSE plays in the individual's well-being will be examined:

Hypothesis 1: Higher GSE will be positively related to lower emotional costs experienced during professional internship.

GSE refers to the belief that a person has his/her own capacity to perform successfully (Bandura 1977). Bandura (1997) showed people with a low sense of efficacy as avoiding difficult tasks. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to their goals, and concentrate on obstacles, the consequences of failure, and their personal deficiencies when facing difficult tasks. In contrast, people with high perceived GSE consider difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats that motivate them to activity rather than avoidance. In their study, Shirom et al. (2008) found a higher level of GSE as leading to more positive employment outcomes. Wiener et al. (1999) indicated that the interactions between GSE, well-being and performance were not well understood, however GSE was demonstrated to be an important determinant of behavior in general.

It is emphasized that coping strategies used by a person may be impacted by his or her personality predispositions, described also as individual-differences resources or coping resources (Wanberg, 1997). Coping has been usually described as ongoing changes of behavioral and cognitive efforts to manage specific internal or external demands that are appraised as exceeding the individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Albion et al., 2005). The kinds of coping strategies considered in this study are problem-focused coping (problem solving) and escape-oriented coping (avoidance). Using problem-focused coping the individual

attempts to directly manage or modify the problem causing distress, whereas escape-oriented individuals focus on escaping or avoiding the situation by trying not to think about the appearing difficulties (Kinicki & Latack, 1990). Coping may play an important role during professional internship or work re-entry. Accordingly, avoidance has a negative influence on well-being, whereas problem solving is positively related to overall health (Pisarski et al., 1998; Huijs et al. 1999). Thus, successful reemployment would be more frequent among employees with an active coping style, while an avoidant coping style might lead to reemployment failure.

The presented study assumed the relationship between both, GSE and emotional costs experienced during professional internship, and work-related behaviors. The following hypotheses were proposed involving the relationship between emotional costs experienced by the professional interns, their level of GSE, and their tendency to cope with appearing difficulties:

Hypothesis 2: Problem solving will be (1) positively related to GSE and (2) negatively related to the emotional costs of professional internship;

Hypothesis 3: Avoidance will be (1) positively related to the emotional costs of professional internship and (2) negatively related to GSE.

The moderating role of social support

There is also a tendency to blame the unemployed for their joblessness, which causes poorer available support (Feather & O'Brien, 1986; Sarason et al., 1990). It is however underlined that individuals who have well developed psychosocial resources, including social support, are more likely to cope effectively with emerging difficulties. Social support has been defined in various ways, e.g., as resources provided by others, coping assistance, or as an exchange of resources (Sarason et al., 1990). This study investigates several types of social support, such as instrumental, referring to assistance with a problem; tangible, involving goods donation; informational, as giving advice, and emotional support concentrated on giving reassurance (Cutrona et al., 1990). Different kinds of social support might be appropriate depending on the recipient's specific situation (Viswesvaran et al., 1999). Accordingly, adequacy of social support plays an important role. The social support evidence shows perception, availability, and activation of social support during a life crisis as a major moderator in successful dealing with stress (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007). Accordingly, attachment or embeddedness may buffer the negative effect of stress. The following hypothesis concerning the moderating effect of social support has been formulated:

Hypothesis 4: Social support received during reemployment will moderate the relationship between emotional costs experienced by the professional interns and their tendency to use problem solving as a coping strategy.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 69 organizational newcomers within the first 3 months in the new workplace. All the participants were unemployed classified as professional interns (without employment guarantee after internship). 79.4% of the sample were women, and the mean age was 27.5 years ($SD = 11.03$, range = 19–65). The average length of unemployment before internship was 13.38 months (range = 1–180 months), which classified them as long-term unemployed. 35 respondents took part in the second wave (T2). 85.7% of them were women, with the mean age of ~24 years ($SD = 6.42$, range = 19–51). The average length of unemployment before getting internship was 9 months (range = 1–36).

Materials

The study used the following questionnaires (cf., Table 1, for means, standard deviation, ranges, and reliability values).

Emotional costs, consisting of 14 items referring to negative feelings at work (e.g. sense of insecurity, disappointment, inferiority). The participants answered each item on a 5-point rating scale (1-not at all, 5-very often). Higher scores indicate higher emotional costs.

The General self-efficacy scale (GSES), (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1979; Polish version: Schwarzer, Jerusalem & Juczynski, 2008) assesses a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim to predict coping with difficulties as well as adaptation after stressful events. Responses to 10 items (e.g. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough) are made on a 4-point scale (1 = not at all true; 4 = exactly true). Higher scores indicate higher GSE.

The Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI), (Amirkhan, 1990; Polish version, Chudzicka-Czupala, 2004) examines coping strategies (problem solving, seeking support, avoidance). The respondents determined the extent of certain coping strategies responding to 33 items; 11 for each subscale. Problem solving is denoted by items such as “tried to solve the problem”; seeking support: “confided your fears and worries to a friend or relative”; and avoidance: “daydreamed about better times”. The presented study used the scores for Problem solving and Avoidance scales.

Social support. The scale (Ślebarska, 2010) contains questions about four kinds of support (emotional, valuable, informational, and tangible). Each question has two parts: received support (Part A) and needed support (Part B). In Part A, the participants were asked to report the amount of support they receive from others, using a 5-point rating Likert-scale from 1—“Not at all” to 5—“To a great extent”. In Part B, the respondents reported the amount of support they need/would like to receive on the respective rating scales. Adequacy of received support was defined as the difference between received and needed support, and all discrepancies were considered as inadequate. Thus, the adequacy measure describes the absolute difference between the level of social support received and the level of social support wanted.

Demographic Data. The questionnaires included age, gender and period of unemployment.

Table 1. Psychometric Properties of the Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
Emotional costs	25.41	89.95	14–55	.92
GSE	31.81	18.21	20–40	.89
Problem-solving	27.94	11.23	18–33	.77
Avoidance	19.51	11.34	13–27	.66
Social support	11.91	2.26	2.65–3.21	.78

Research design and procedure

The study was designed as longitudinal. The questionnaires battery was administered in two waves (Time1 and Time2). The interns were approached in the first month in the new workplace. 69 participants were given the questionnaires to complete and they were asked to write down the minimum personal data to contact them at T2. After T1 35 individuals were chosen for T2. The second measurement point took place three months later; the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires for the second time. The 3-month follow-up was chosen for reasons that were both theoretical (e.g., this time frame allowed for the longer term consequences of the coping behaviors reported at T1 to be observed) and practical (e.g., to maintain the engagement of the respondents). The results were recorded, and the participants' contact data removed to ensure anonymity. The data were then coded.

Results

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix of emotional costs, GSE, coping and demographic variables (time out of work, age, and gender).

Emotional costs (T1) were negatively related to GSE on T1 and unemployment period, and positively associated with subsequent costs (T2). Higher level of negative emotions experienced on T2 was further correlated with higher tendency to avoid difficulties. A positive relationship between GSE (T1) and problem solving in both measurement points, and unemployment period was observed. The focal variable was negatively related to emotional costs (T1 and T2) and avoidance (T2). The correlation matrix shows the significant relations between demographics and coping strategies. As could be seen, both age and unemployment period were positively related to problem solving, and gender was positively associated with support seeking.

Graph 1 presents the regressions analysis used to test the research hypotheses. As can be seen, during the first period of reemployment (T1) higher level of GSE was negatively related to emotional costs experienced in the new workplace. That indicates that GSE is a significant factor in minimizing emotional costs among professional interns. GSE had a positive impact on active coping: problem solving. Emotional costs were positively associated with avoidance and negatively related to problem solving. The results obtained on T1 confirmed the hypothesized relations. Thus, hypotheses 1–3 regarding the effects of GSE on emotional costs and coping, and the effect of emotional costs on coping have been confirmed.

In the next step, the impact of coping strategies used on T1 on GSE and emotional costs on T2 were analyzed. As can be seen in Graph 1, the significant prediction of problem solving on focal variables on T2 has been found. Furthermore, problem solving (T1) was positively related to GSE (T2) and negatively associated with emotional costs (T2).

The relationships between the analyzed factors were changed on T2. The results indicated the positive prediction of GSE on problem solving, and emotional costs were positively predicted avoidance. The relationships between GSE and emotional costs, and between emotional costs and problem solving were not significant.

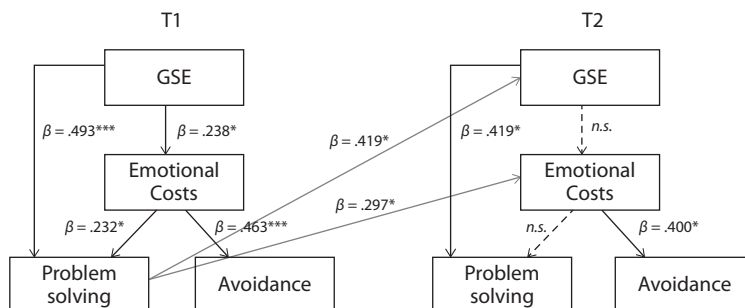
The descriptive statistics show the level of emotional costs experienced by the professional interns in the new workplace just after being hired and after three months (cf., Figure 1). Figure 1 shows negative feelings experienced by a person in the first period of reemployment. As can be seen, emotional costs slightly increase over time. The highest increase can be observed in both the sense of coercion and the feeling of being exploited.

Table 2. Correlation between Emotional costs, GSE, Coping, and Demographics

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional costs T1	23,00	6,35	-							
2. GSE T1	32,23	3,63	-.421*	-						
3. Problem solving T1	27,66	3,65	-.128	.552	-					
4. Avoidance T1	18,86	3,07	.229	-.013	.108	-				
5. Emotional costs T2	24,20	9,93	.615**	-.354*	-.297*	.268	-			
6. GSE T2	31,57	3,55	-.235	.505**	.419*	-.170	-.240	-		
7. Problem solving T2	27,77	3,87	-.113	.322*	.681**	.124	-.189	.288*	-	
8. Avoidance T2	18,86	3,75	.200	-.172	-.083	.624**	.400*	-.327*	-.039	-
9. Age	24,14	6,43	.163	.186	.228	-.038	.168	.164	.333*	.048
10. Gender*	1,86	0,36	0,00	0,09	0,28	0,05	0,05	0,10	0,20	0,11
11. Unemployment period	9,03	9,01	-.372*	.431	.294*	.153	-.195	.107	.220	.198

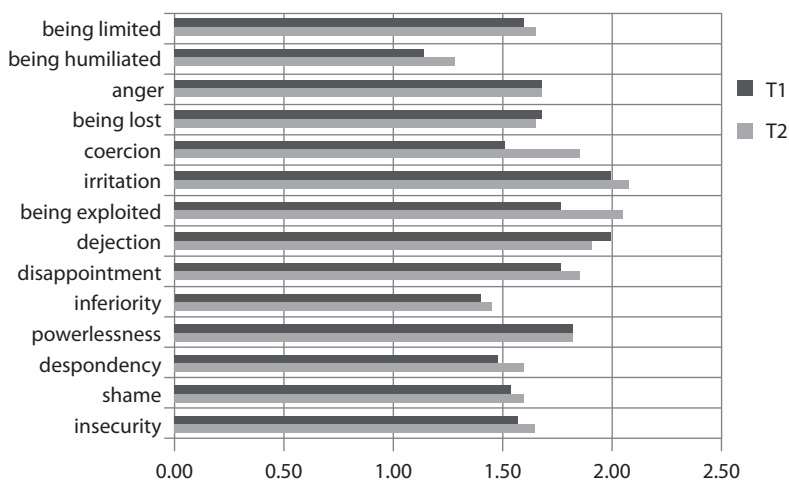
Note. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; * Spearman correlation + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Graph 1. Relationships between analyzed variables (T1, T2)



Note. β = standardized beta coefficient. + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

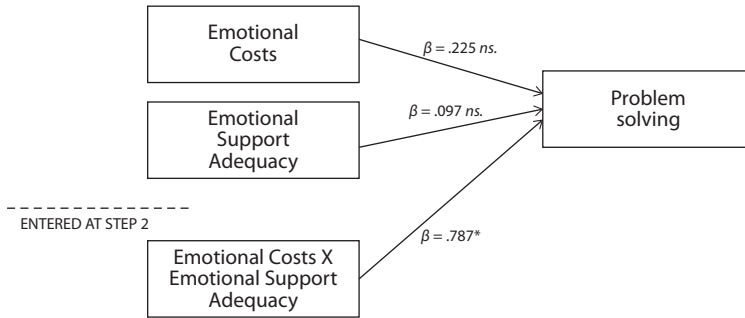
Figure 1. Emotional costs mean (T1 and T2)



Finally, the moderation effect of social support on the relation between emotional costs and coping strategy: problem solving (hypothesis 4) was examined. In accordance with non-significant relationship between emotional costs and problem solving on T2, the moderation effect of emotional support adequacy received by the professional interns was then tested by the hierarchical regression technique in which the interaction term, consisting of the product of emotional costs and emotional support adequacy deviation scores, was entered at the second step of the regression, following the entry of the first order variables at step 1. The inclusion of the interaction term significantly added to the prediction of problem solving ($\Delta R^2 = 0.072$, $p < 0.05$),

indicating the presence of a moderation effect, i.e., the influence of emotional costs on coping: Problem solving varied significantly according to the emotional support adequacy received by the respondents (cf., Graph 2).

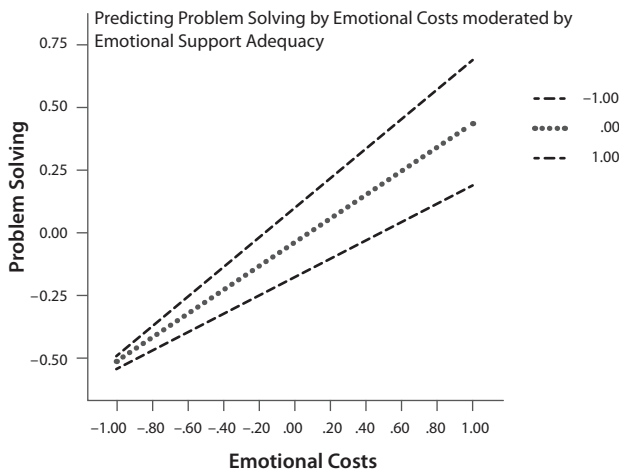
Graph 2. Moderation effect of emotional support adequacy on the relationship between emotional costs and problem solving (T2)



Note. β = standardized beta coefficient. * $p < 0.05$

Figure 2 shows the respective interaction pattern. Adequacy of social support seems to have a positive effect on coping. Hypothesis 4 regarding the moderating effects of the relationship between emotional costs and coping was partially con-

Figure 2. Centered regression plot of emotional support adequacy as a moderator of the relationship between emotional costs and avoidance



firmed. The interaction term was significant only for adequate emotional support. As can be seen, individuals who receive emotional support adequate to their needs evince a higher tendency to use active coping strategies: problem solving, even if they experience high emotional costs.

Conclusions

The presented study investigated the emotional costs experienced in the new workplace and GSE as predictors of coping in the work re-entry phase. The first step was to examine the impact of GSE on newcomers' well-being and coping. Wiener et al. (1999) suggested that GSE predicted well-being. Moreover, GSE made the strongest contribution toward predicting psychological health. Self-confidence has been often considered as a component of mental health (Warr & Jackson, 1984) and needs to be taken into account when considering the well-being of reemployed individuals. As expected, GSE contributed to the prediction of well-being and led to lower experience of emotional costs in the new workplace. The results also indicated that people with higher GSE are more active copers. They are more likely to use problem-focused coping, whereas individuals experiencing higher emotional costs in the new workplace reported a higher tendency to use avoidance as a coping strategy.

Since the professional internship does not guarantee further employment, professional interns should use active coping strategies, involving continued job search process, however the quality of reemployment, work conditions, and quality of job are associated with well-being and coping (Kinicki et al., 2000). Following, the internship as a kind of temporary employment could be related to higher emotional costs, e.g. a sense of job insecurity, being exploited or under external pressure, and thus leads to escape-oriented coping. As the results show, those who experienced a higher level of negative emotions in the new workplace might then evince a tendency to use ineffective coping strategies, such as avoidance.

The study indicated the important role of problem-focused coping in increasing GSE and reducing emotional costs in the future. The regression analysis showed a significant effect of problem solving in the first period of employment (T1) on higher efficacy beliefs and lower emotional costs experienced after three months in the new workplace (T2).

Since the relationship between emotional costs and problem solving on T2 was not significant, the moderation effect of social support received by the reemployed on the focal relation was analyzed. The results partially supported this premise. The

significant effect has been found only for adequate emotional support. The results indicated that professional interns who receive adequate emotional support are likely to use problem solving, regardless of emotional costs experienced in the workplace.

The obtained results could play an important role for both unemployed individuals beginning professional internship and host organizations. The interns should be informed about possible emotional costs following the temporary work-entrance and trained in respective coping strategies whereas the knowledge about the temporary newcomers' well-being and adaptation skills could be useful for the organization to tailor their socialization tactics to this kind of new employees.

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