

## Links between Perceived Leadership Styles and Self-reported Coping Strategies

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### Abstract

The focus of this study was the relatively unexplored link between perceived leadership styles and employees' current levels of workplace stress and coping strategies. The participants were 442 employees in five IT organisations in Slovenia. The theoretical background for leadership styles was taken from the full-range leadership model. Data were collected using three questionnaires: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Ways of Coping Questionnaire, and a single questionnaire item on the current level of workplace stress. Correlations and linear regression were used to test whether leadership style influences the employees' stress-coping strategies.

Lower levels of stress at work were found for employees whose leader showed more transformational or transactional leadership behaviours. The results showed low to moderate correlations between the three basic leadership styles and coping strategies such as positive reappraisal, seeking social assistance, and negative escape/avoidance. These coping strategies were more frequently used by employees whose leaders often used transformational and transactional leadership styles. Employees whose leaders frequently used passive-avoidant leadership style more often approach to stress situations with escape, avoidance, and rarely with positive reappraisal. But the regression models explained only 2% to 7% of the variance for certain coping strategies.

**Keywords:** leadership styles, occupational stress, coping behaviour, employees

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## Introduction

Leadership represents one of the key factors of the success or failure of an organisation. The importance of the leader for the successful functioning and operation of an organisation is also confirmed by the findings of Andersen Consulting's Institute for Strategic Change (Bennis, 2000) – namely, that the behaviour or actions of a leader affect the value of a company's shares. Swedish researchers have demonstrated, through a study of 25 units of organisations, that leaders also affect organisational climate (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1994). The influence of leadership can also be indirect. Katzell (1987, as cited in Bass & Bass, 2008) showed that although leaders' direct influence on their subordinates was modest, they exerted indirect influence on them. By providing rewards, relating rewards to performance, and treating employees equitably, they improved employees' morale. Another question that arises, however, is that of the leader's contribution to employees' experience of stress. Is the behaviour of leaders reflected in employees' experience of stress and in their strategies for coping with it? This was the question our research attempted to answer.

### *The Full-range Leadership Model*

The study of leadership today attempts to combine the findings of the past and, by adding the latest discoveries, formulate modern theories. Thus the charismatic leadership theory was a kind of basis for the development of the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership and the full-range leadership model on which our research is based.

Bass integrated two complementary leadership styles – transformational leadership and transactional leadership – on the basis of the common characteristic that unites them: a connection with the achievement of goals. Transactional leadership is based on exchanges between the leader and followers, where the leader sets demands, conditions and potential rewards in the case of these demands being met. Transformational leadership raises leadership to a higher level, since the leader inspires followers to commit themselves to common goals, challenges them to solve problems innovatively and, as coach and mentor, provides them with both intellectual challenges and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactions are the basis for transformations, since only the latter can lead from the achievement of goals and expectations to motivating followers to perform beyond their goals and expectations (Avolio, 1999).

The full-range leadership model consists of nine factors that combine to form three basic leadership styles. There are four components of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006): a) *Idealised influence*: leaders serve as role models for followers, who admire them, identify with them and trust them. This component includes two aspects: the behaviour of the leader and the characteristics

attributed to the leader; b) *Inspirational motivation*: leaders increase motivation, inspire others to work by giving sense and meaning to work, have an optimistic orientation and, by setting clear goals, create a desire to achieve a shared and attractive vision of the future; c) *Intellectual stimulation*: leaders encourage efforts for greater innovation and creativity in approaching problems in a new way, encourage others to submit their own ideas and include others in the process of addressing problems and seeking solutions; d) *Individualised consideration*: leaders take into account needs for achievements and growth, enable others to develop their own potential, recognise individual differences in desires and needs, listen attentively and delegate individualised tasks, monitoring and providing support as necessary.

Transactional leadership consists of two components (Bass & Riggio, 2006): a) *Contingent reward*: constructive transactions, where leaders set conditions and concrete consequences of achieving them (promising rewards for achievements, etc.), and b) *Management by exception (Active)*: corrective transactions, where leaders set standards and rules and monitor any deviation from them in order to take corrective action before mistakes or deviations occur.

The passive-avoidant style of leadership contains the following two components (Avolio & Bass, 2004): a) *Management by exception (Passive)*: setting standards and corrective action only after a mistake or deviation from standards; leaders do not monitor events on an ongoing basis, and b) *Laissez-faire leadership*: absence of leadership, avoidance of responsibility and the taking of decisions as leader; the most inactive leadership style.

A fundamental characteristic of the model is that every leader displays each leadership style to some degree. An optimal leadership profile should contain infrequent use of passive-avoidant leadership, slightly more frequent use of transactional leadership and most frequent use of the various components of transformational leadership.

### *Stress in the Working Environment*

Stress at work is often a function of the individual's understanding of organisational events and the importance he attributes to them (Schuler, 1980). How much importance employees will attribute to specific circumstances often depends on people who are important to them, for example leaders and mentors (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). A leader or mentor who manages the importance of organisational events for an employee simultaneously influences the way in which the employee understands, interprets and reacts to events connected with work (e.g. stressful events). The leader in this role uses different behaviours that can facilitate understanding and reduce feelings of uncertainty connected to threatening events, while on the other hand a leader can, through his behaviour, have the opposite effect on employees and thus fail to make it easier for them to cope with difficulties

that arise. Various studies have shown consistent links between the three major leadership styles in the full-range leadership model and the stress felt by subordinates in relation with perceived specific leadership style (Seltzer, Numerof, & Bass, 1989; Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010). The transformational leadership style is negatively linked to symptoms and feelings of stress and also to burnout among subordinates. The situation is similar, although not so consistent, in the case of transactional leadership. Conversely, in case of the passive-avoidant style of leadership, research suggests that people exposed to this style of leadership show more symptoms of stress and burnout. In our study we predict that the transformational and transactional styles of leadership will have a negative correlation with the current level of workplace stress, and that the passive-avoidant style of leadership will have a positive correlation (Hypothesis 1).

#### *Links between Perceived Leadership Styles and Self-reported Coping Strategies of the Employees*

The leader takes the time to transfer his knowledge to followers, develops their strengths, acts as a kind of mentor or coach, taking into account the individual's needs and desires (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Through inspiration and vision he can influence followers and their understanding of problem situations, enabling them to see stressful situations from a positive point of view and believe in their positive resolution (Lyons & Schneider, 2009; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). The leader can encourage them to use more effective strategies for coping with stress by promoting alternative, fresh views of problems and their resolution.

The most effective coping methods include: seeking help, communicating feelings, taking rational action, drawing strength from adversity, using humour and maintaining faith, self-confidence and feelings of control (McCrae & Costa, 1986). Methods that have proved to be less effective include hostility, indecisiveness, self-reproach and attempts to escape or retreat from a situation. Greater emotional distress is experienced by those who more frequently resort to the use of feelings of despair, self-reproach, denial and running away from difficulties. Less distress is experienced by people who, in order to cope select an active problem-solving approach with positive feelings of self-reliance (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Individuals who reported better outcomes achieved this above all by keeping calm, making a plan for the resolution of difficulties, and using stressful experiences as opportunities for personal growth. Those with less successful outcomes, on the other hand, mainly used coping mechanisms such as impulsiveness, aggression, ignoring the problem or minimising its importance (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). In Hypothesis 2 we predict a correlation between the transformational style of leadership and stress-coping strategies, particularly accepting responsibility, planful problem-solving, positive reappraisal, seeking social assistance (positive correlation) and escape/avoidance (negative correlation).

Bass and Riggio (2006) believe that employees exposed more frequently to transformational or transactional leadership use more effective strategies for coping with stress (Hypothesis 3). These strategies include a systematic approach, taking rational action, seeking help and other strategies (Monat, Lazarus, & Reevy, 2007). A leader who more frequently uses transactional leadership in the working environment creates a specific operating structure which gives employees a working framework within which desirable and undesirable behaviour are defined. The actions of the transactional leader are based on clear communication and cooperation with employees, and the approach to problems is immediate and analytical, which could influence employees and their everyday method of coping with stressful situations. By creating a structure and operating conditions and monitoring events, the leader appears responsible, analytical and systematic, which may also be reflected in employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The prevalent features of passive-avoidant leadership styles are an absence of communication and willingness to accept responsibility, and a lack of care for employees, which can in a way become a model or example for employees and their methods of coping with stress. Because the leader does not explain events and retreats from responsibility, employees are more likely to experience feelings of fear and uncertainty in stressful situations (Bass, 1998, as cited in Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Perhaps as a result of his non-involvement, the leader fails to equip his employees with mechanisms that could perhaps help them with a more proactive and problem-oriented addressing of stressful situations. For this reason we predict less frequent use of effective, proactive and problem-oriented stress-coping strategies among employees who are frequently exposed to passive-avoidant leadership (Hypothesis 4).

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The participants in the research were employees of five successful Slovene companies in the IT and other technology sectors. Three of the companies are large enterprises with more than 250 employees, while two are medium-sized enterprises with between 50 and 100 employees.

The full set of questionnaires was completed by a total of 442 employees, of whom 75% were men and 25% were women. Men occupy the majority of positions in the participating organisations, since they require education or skills in fields (mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, information technology, etc.), which are chosen by a higher proportion of men than women.

Table 1. *Age and Education Structure of Participants*

		<i>f</i>	%
Age	18–30	81	18.3
	31–40	168	38.0
	41–50	145	32.8
	51–60	40	9.1
	Missing data	8	1.8
Education	Elementary or secondary	141	31.9
	Post-secondary or higher vocational	98	22.2
	Bachelor's degree	168	38.0
	Master's degree or doctorate	28	6.3
	Missing data	7	1.6
	Grand total	442	100.0

The age of participants is given in the form of age groups (Table 1), which we formulated by agreement with the companies. They expressed the concerns of employees with regard to the communication of sensitive data, from which certain employees could be recognised on the basis of a specific sample of demographic variables. The largest number of participants is in the 31–40 age group, while approximately one third were aged 41–50.

Only 6 participants finished the elementary school. In subsequent analyses we merged them with participants who finished the secondary school. The education structure indicates (Table 1) that the largest proportion of employees hold a bachelor's degree, while the smallest number possess a high level qualification (master's degree or doctorate).

### *Instruments*

*The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)* is the most widely used instrument to assess transformational leadership theory (Kirkbride, 2006). We used the MLQ Form 5X version (Avolio & Bass, 2004), which was translated into Slovene by Katja Senica as part of her master's thesis (Senica, 2009). The questionnaire contains 36 items and measures nine leadership styles (Table 2) - four items for each style. All items of the MLQ use a five-point Likert response scale ranging from 5 - *Frequently, if not always* to 1- *Not at all*.

Table 2. *Sample Items from the MLQ Form 5X*

	Sample item
<i>Transformational leadership</i>	
Idealised influence (Attributed)	I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group.
Idealised influence (Behaviour)	I consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.
Inspirational motivation	I talk optimistically about the future.
Intellectual stimulation	I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.
Individualised consideration	I help others to develop their strengths.
<i>Transactional leadership</i>	
Contingent reward	I make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved.
Management by exception (Active)	I keep track of all mistakes.
<i>Passive-avoidant leadership</i>	
Management by exception (Passive)	I wait for things to go wrong before taking action.
Laissez-Faire	I avoid making decisions.

We also used a Slovene version of the scale from the *Ways of Coping Questionnaire* (WCQ II; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lamovec, 1994). It features 66 items. When completing the scale, respondents state how typical specific actions are for them when faced with stressful events (0 – *not at all*; 3 – *very*). This gives us eight categories of coping: *confrontation* (6 items; "Stood my ground and fought for what I wanted."), *distancing* (6 items; "Made light of the situation; refused to get serious about it."), *self-control* (7 items; "Kept others from knowing how bad things were."), *seeking social support* (6 items; "I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice."), *accepting responsibility* (4 items; "I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time."), *escape/avoidance* (8 items; "Wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with."), *planful problem-solving* (6 items; "I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my effort to make things work."), *positive reappraisal* (7 items; "Changed or grew as a person in a good way.").

To these two questionnaires we added a stand-alone item that asks employees about the level of stress they are currently experiencing in the *workplace*. This questionnaire item is designed above all as a control to verify the level of stress felt by employees at the time of completing the questionnaires. The item comes with the instruction: 'Rate your current level of workplace stress.' The rating takes the form of a 5-point scale (0 – *zero*; 5 – *very high*).

### *Procedure*

We began in the early 2011 by sending out invitations and requests for cooperation to numerous companies in Slovenia. Five organisations from the field of information technology were then selected from among the companies that agreed to participate. The next stage was to agree on a method for completing the questionnaires. Two organisations opted to complete the questionnaires in electronic form, while three opted to complete them on paper. With the help of human resources personnel we obtained information on the organisational structure of employees, grouping employees together in terms of leaders or the departments headed by these leaders.

Once data had been gathered from all the organisations, we treated them as a whole for the purpose of calculating basic descriptive statistics and verifying measurement characteristics. For the analysis of leadership styles, we grouped participants together at the level of the departments to which they belonged. In this way we obtained the evaluation of several respondents for their department leader (unit of measurement). We also offered the participating organisations the possibility of individual feedback on the results of the measurement.

### **Results**

The descriptive statistics for both questionnaires used can be found in Table 3 and Table 4. The Cronbach alpha produced,  $\alpha=.86$  for the original MLQ and  $\alpha=.80$  for the translated MLQ, the reliability values were from .58 to .85 indicating an acceptable statistic testing level.

The internal consistency measures obtained in our sample were relatively low for WCQ-II, but the authors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lamovec, 1994) attributed this to different situations that could be imagined by the participants during completing questionnaire. In the next steps only measures with internal consistency higher than .60 were included.



Table 3. *Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency, and Interscale Correlations – MLQ*

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Idealised influence (Attributed)	-								
2. Idealised influence (Behaviour)	.58**	-							
3. Inspirational motivation	.66**	.67**	-						
4. Intellectual stimulation	.75**	.58**	.60**	-					
5. Individualised consideration	.82**	.55**	.59**	.78**	-				
6. Contingent reward	.78**	.61**	.66**	.75**	.80**	-			
7. Management by exception (Active)	.13*	.23**	.13**	.17**	.05	.16**	-		
8. Management by exception (Passive)	-.55**	-.32**	-.37**	-.51**	-.53**	-.55**	-.06	-	
9. Laissez-faire	-.69**	-.42**	-.48**	-.63**	-.67**	-.70**	.01	.72**	-
<i>M</i>	2.35	2.24	2.46	2.35	2.19	2.42	1.93	1.66	1.17
<i>SD</i>	0.98	0.73	0.78	0.86	0.97	0.93	0.56	0.77	1.03
$\alpha$	.85	.56	.76	.81	.83	.82	.58	.85	.85

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4. *Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency, and Interscale Correlations – WCQ-II*

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Confrontation	-							
2. Distancing	.19**	-						
3. Self-control	.19**	.38**	-					
4. Seeking social support	.38**	.06	.19**	-				
5. Accepting responsibility	.27**	.19**	.26**	.31**	-			
6. Escape/avoidance	.26**	.29**	.36**	-.06	.19**	-		
7. Planful problem-solving	.23**	.12*	.22**	.39**	.32**	-.25**	-	
8. Positive reappraisal	.24**	.20**	.27**	.41**	.46**	-.06	.50**	-
<i>M</i>	1.20	1.24	1.56	1.80	1.90	0.69	2.15	1.73
<i>SD</i>	0.43	0.42	0.41	0.53	0.49	0.46	0.44	0.45
$\alpha$	.47	.42	.45	.66	.42	.69	.70	.64

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### *Correlation between Employees' Level of Perceived Stress and Leader's Leadership Style*

440 respondents completed the questionnaire item on the current level of stress in the workplace. The average score was 3.21 with a standard deviation of 1.09 ( $min=1$ ,  $max=5$ ). The results were slightly negatively skewed ( $As=-0.2$ ). Flatness was  $-0.6$ .

Table 5. *Pearson's r Correlations between Major Perceived Leadership Styles and Current Level of Workplace Stress (N=440)*

	Level of workplace stress
Transformational	-.26**
Transactional	-.23**
Passive-avoidant	.25**

\*\* $p<.01$ .

Table 5 shows moderately high correlations between leadership styles and the level of workplace stress felt by employees. Transformational and transactional leadership correlate negatively with the level of stress, while passive-avoidant leadership causes the most stress in employees. This confirms *Hypothesis 1*.

### *Correlation of Perceived Leadership Styles and Employees' Stress-Coping Strategies*

Table 6. *Pearson's r Correlations between Perceived Leadership Styles and Stress Coping Strategies*

<i>Leadership style</i>	<i>Stress-coping strategies</i>			
	Seeking social assistance	Escape/Avoidance	Planful problem-solving	Positive reappraisal
<i>Transformational leadership</i>	.18**	-.13**	.13**	.25**
Idealised influence (Attributed)	.14**	-.13	.12*	.22**
Idealised influence (Behaviour)	.12*	-.07	.08	.22**
Inspirational motivation	.16**	-.14**	.01*	.23**
Intellectual stimulation	.18**	-.12*	.09	.21**
Individualised consideration	.13**	-.13**	.13**	.19**
<i>Transactional leadership</i>	.11*	-.10*	.07	.20**
Contingent reward	.14**	-.18**	.13**	.24**
Management by exception (Active)	.02	.07	-.03	.04
<i>Passive-avoidant leadership</i>	-.08	.22**	-.11*	-.14**
Management by exception (Passive)	-.09	.18**	-.13**	-.14**
Laissez-faire	-.06	.22**	-.09	-.41**

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ .

*Transformational leadership* displays a statistically significant and positive correlation with the following stress-coping strategies: seeking social assistance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal; and a statistically significant negative correlation with the strategy of escape/avoidance. These results confirm *Hypothesis 2* in which we predicted a positive correlations between transformational leadership and the positive coping strategies and escape/avoidance (negative correlation).

The *transactional leadership style* shows a statistically significant and positive correlation with positive reappraisal and seeking social assistance; and a statistically significant negative correlation with the strategy of escape/avoidance. This therefore confirms one of the predicted correlations in *Hypothesis 3*, while the strategies of planful problem-solving do not correlate significantly with transactional leadership as expected.

*Passive-avoidant leadership* shows a statistically significant correlation with the strategy of escape/avoidance, where the correlation is positive. The negative correlation was confirmed with two effective coping styles – planful problem-solving and positive reappraisal. These results fully confirm *Hypothesis 4*.

We also checked the correlations between the reported level of stress in the workplace and different ways of coping with stress. Among eight coping strategies only three were statistically correlated with perceived level of stress - *planful problem solving* ( $r=-.10$ ;  $p<.05$ ), *positive reappraisal* ( $r=-.11$ ;  $p<.05$ ), and *escape/avoidance* ( $r=.11$ ;  $p<.001$ ). All mentioned correlations are very low.

In the final step we conducted four regression hierarchical analyses. Sex, age, and level of education were entered as control variables. To test the hypothesis four coping strategies were entered as independent variables and three leadership styles as dependent one.

Table 7. *Pearson's r Correlations between Demographic Variables, Perceived Leadership Styles and Reliable Coping Strategy Measures*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sex	-								
2. Age	.14**	-							
3. Education	-.09	.01	-						
4. Transformational l.	.05	-.10	-.03	-					
5. Transactional l.	.08	-.01	-.04	.76**	-				
6. Passive-avoidant l.	.08	.15**	-.01	-.68**	-.56**	-			
7. Seeking social assist.	.14**	-.03	.07	.18**	.11*	-.08	-		
8. Escape/avoidance	-.06	-.06	-.01	-.13**	-.10*	.22**	-.06	-	
9. Planful problem solving	-.06	-.02	.18**	.13**	.07	-.11*	.39**	-.25**	-
10. Positive reappraisal	.09*	.08	.10*	.25**	.20**	-.14**	.41**	-.06	.50**

Note: l.=leadership style; assist.=assistance.

\*  $p<.05$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ .

Table 8. *Results of Regression Analysis for Four Coping Strategies*

Predictors	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Seeking social assistance</i>			
<b>Step 1</b>		.03*	
Sex	.13**		
Age	-.06		
Education	.09		
<b>Step 2</b>		.05**	.02
Sex	.12*		
Age	-.04		
Education	.09		
Transformational	.21*		
Transactional	-.06		
Passive-avoidant	.01		
<i>Escape/avoidance</i>			
<b>Step 1</b>		.01	
Sex	-.06		
Age	-.06		
Education	.01		
<b>Step 2</b>		.06**	.05
Sex	-.08		
Age	-.09		
Education	.00		
Transformational	.05		
Transactional	.02		
Passive-avoidant	.26**		
<i>Planful problem-solving</i>			
<b>Step 1</b>		.03**	
Sex	-.04		
Age	-.04		
Education	.18**		
<b>Step 2</b>		.05**	.02
Sex	-.04		
Age	-.02		
Education	.18**		
Transformational	.10		
Transactional	-.04		
Passive-avoidant	-.08		
<i>Positive reappraisal</i>			
<b>Step 1</b>		.03*	
Sex	.10		
Age	.03		
Education	.13**		
<b>Step 2</b>		.11**	.08
Sex	.08		
Age	.06		
Education	.14**		
Transformational	.25**		
Transactional	.04		
Passive-avoidant	.00		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

In the hierarchical regression (Table 8), the control variables entered in Step 1 explained 3% of the variance in seeking social assistance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal. The main effects entered in Step 2. Sex ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t=2.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and perceived transformational leadership style ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $t=2.43$ ,  $p<.05$ ) together explained 5% variance in seeking social assistance. The control variables entered in Step 1 failed to explain any variance in escape/avoidance coping strategy. The main effect entered in Step 2 explained an additional 5% of the variance in escape/avoidance, but only perceived passive-avoidant style was significant and explained unique variance ( $\beta=.26$ ,  $t=3.83$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Education ( $\beta=.18$ ,  $t=3.59$ ,  $p<.01$ ) of the employees was statistically significant and explained unique variance in planful problem solving.

The main effect explained an additional 8% of the variance in the positive reappraisal coping style ( $\Delta R = .08$ ,  $F_{3,395}=7.67$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Education ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $t=2.88$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and perceived transformational leadership style ( $\beta=.25$ ,  $t=3.02$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were significant and together explained 11% of variance.

## Discussion

The central role in the present research was played by the perceived leadership styles, which we linked to the perceptions of employees – i.e. the perceived level of stress – and ways of coping with it.

We predicted a correlation between leadership styles and the level of stress felt by employees on the basis of studies researching, each in its own way, the subject of leadership styles and stress, and also burnout among individuals who are exposed to these styles of leadership (Seltzer et al., 1989; Skakon et al., 2010). Our findings show that employees felt a lower level of workplace stress when under leadership with stronger transformational or transactional characteristics. Employees who were more exposed to passive-avoidant leadership, on the other hand, felt a higher level of stress in the workplace. Despite statistically significant correlations ( $r$  between  $-.26$  and  $.25$ ), it should be emphasised that we only measured the stress level by means of a single questionnaire item, for which reason it does not correspond to the most desirable measurement characteristics. We included it for the purpose of supplementing the information obtained through other measuring tools, while at the same time we did not wish to further extend the already very extensive overall range of the questionnaires. For this reason we only asked about stress in this short form.

*Hypothesis 2* related to the transformational style of leadership and the scales that constitute it. On the basis of the results in Table 6, we can fully confirm this hypothesis. The results do, however, indicate an unforeseen but statistically significant link between the leadership style and seeking social assistance, planful

problem solving, and positive reappraisal as the strategies of coping with stress. Of the transformational leadership scales, two – inspirational motivation, and individualised consideration – show a relatively low and positive correlation with all observed coping strategies. All the scales of transformational leadership show a statistically significant correlation with the strategies of seeking social assistance, and positive reappraisal, with correlations ranging from .12 and .25. Significant correlations of idealised influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, and individualised consideration with the strategy of escape/avoidance are also evident, where the correlations are negative and moderately low. We correctly assumed that employees led by a transformational leader more frequently display more active and relatively more effective coping strategies such as, for example, planful problem solving, and positive reappraisal. One of the characteristics, in fact, of the transformational leader is that he listens to the individual needs of employees, tries to develop their potentials and encourages them to think unconventionally and creatively and approach problems differently. His behaviour is supported by a positive orientation towards a common vision and future (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This can explain the more frequent use of the strategy of positive reappraisal among his employees. As already established by Sosik and Godshalk (2000), the transformational leader is distinguished by a high level of mentor-type behaviours through which he is able to obtain the trust of his subordinates and become a model for them, and, in this way, a source of influence on them. The more frequent use by employees of the strategy of accepting responsibility could derive from the transformational leader's investment in and orientation towards vision and objectives. This can trigger a greater sense of responsibility among employees, which they internalise over time and which becomes part of them, even when they are required to face stressful situations themselves. Our results also show that employees in relation with perceived transformational leadership style more rarely use the strategy of escape/avoidance. It is apparently rare for them to cling to hope and wait for a situation to resolve itself rather than do something about it. The transformational leader, in fact, emphasises a positive orientation towards the future, but at the same time transforms the situations that arise into a challenge, which is something that a person deals with rather than merely hoping for a successful final outcome.

*Hypothesis 3* can only be partially confirmed, given that differences appeared between the two scales that constitute transactional leadership. We failed to predict the significant correlation of management-by-exception (active) with all included strategies. In the case of perceived contingent reward leadership style we can claim a predicted positive correlation with positive reappraisal, planful problem solving, and seeking social assistance, while we also confirmed the expected negative correlation with escape/avoidance coping strategy. In view of the differences of the two scales, experts in fact recommend separate treatment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Management-by-exception (active) was shown by calculations of reliability to be

rather unreliable, and therefore the results of this scale must be taken with a certain amount of reserve. Management-by-exception (active) is characterised by intervention and looking for deviations from rules and standards even before problems arise. A leader who monitors events could trigger a feeling of responsibility in employees, but by doing so the leader probably does not make a significant contribution to more analytical and systematic coping with stress on the part of his employees. On the other side there is the contingent reward scale, which some see almost as part of transformational leadership or at least as an indispensable basis for it (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Riggio, 2006). This leadership style creates a structure and conditions of operation, which requires a certain amount of discipline and responsibility from employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This is also why employees in relation with perceived transactional leadership style more frequently use the strategies of positive reappraisal and seeking social assistance. Similar correlations were also apparent in the case of transformational leadership, where we likewise correctly predicted a negative correlation with the strategy of escape/avoidance. Employees with a leader who contingently rewards followers could therefore gain a different view of stressful situations. The important thing would be what they can obtain and learn from the situation, and not so much hoping for the automatic resolution of a problem.

In *Hypothesis 4* our predictions were similar to those we made for transformational and transactional leadership, but in the opposite direction. We found that to a large extent the results do confirm our assumptions with regard to passive-avoidant leadership and coping with stress, and that this leadership style should be taken merely as the opposite pole to the other two leadership styles. It was shown that employees in relation with perceived passive-avoidant leadership more rarely use the strategies such as planful problem solving and positive reappraisal. A leader who frequently makes use of passive styles of leadership has inadequate communications with followers and does not display responsibility for his leadership role. In this way he offers an entirely different model to his followers and perhaps indirectly causes a similar pattern in them when it comes to coping with stress. Our findings suggest that employees whose leader only intervenes when problems arise less frequently use a strategy whereby they attempt to achieve personal growth or a positive outcome from a stressful situation. We also found that a leader whose leadership is entirely passive, without involvement in events (*laissez-faire* leadership), does also have a significant correlation with how employees cope with stress.

#### *Limitations of the Research and Conclusion*

The limitations of this study are related to the used methodological approach. For measuring stress and coping with it we used self-reported measures, and for evaluating leadership styles we used perceived leadership style by employees and

not self-reported questionnaire assessed by leaders themselves. The information collected is single-source data, which may lead them to susceptibility to common method bias. Indeed, the high correlations between the observed variables suggest that this may be a factor.

It should further be noted that job stress was measured with a single item, instead of with an available multi-item scale. Moreover, internal consistency of coping measures were relatively low and if anything, more reliable scales of these constructs would have been likely to heighten the interrelations that were found in this study. The present study is therefore grounded only on four coping strategies (seeking social assistance, escape/avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal) measured through the scales that met appropriate internal consistency.

For a better insight into the interaction of leader-employees-working environment we would also need data on current situations and specific characteristics in a given organisation (e.g. organisational changes, proximity of deadlines, project work, etc.). Subsequent research could include, with regard to leadership styles, both the assessments of employees and the self-assessment of the leaders themselves, since the MLQ also permits this. We could also link leadership styles to other organisational outcomes, both at the level of the performance and efficiency of the company and at the level of the group or team of employees and their relationships.

Through this research we attempted to establish whether a link exists between the perceived leadership styles, current levels of stress among employees, and employees' method of coping with stress, although we cannot talk about relations of cause and effect. The results of the present research do, however, confirm that the leader plays a part in creating conditions in the working environment through his approach and leadership style. The difference between active and passive styles of leadership is particularly apparent, in that it is a characteristic of the latter that employees are more often than not left to their own devices without a proper leadership role above them.

The field of leadership styles and, on the other hand, variables at the employee level still leave many opportunities for research. Interest in this field has been growing recently, in part as a result of the many stories about poor leadership, which have usually ended badly for the organisation and employees. It is important to emphasise that no one leadership style is universally best. Rather, the art of good leadership lies in finding the right leadership style and adapting it to circumstances (the situation in the organisation, characteristics of employees, conditions in the market, etc.).



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## **Veze između percipiranih stilova rukovođenja i samoprocjena strategija suočavanja sa stresom**

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### **Sažetak**

Cilj je ovog istraživanja bio ispitati dosad neistraženu vezu između percipiranih stilova rukovođenja, stupnja radnog stresa zaposlenika i strategija suočavanja. U istraživanju su sudjelovala 442 zaposlenika iz pet IT organizacija u Sloveniji. Teorijsku osnovu za mjerenje stilova rukovođenja predstavlja model cijelog raspona rukovođenja. Podaci su prikupljeni trima upitnicima: Višefaktorskim upitnikom rukovođenja, Upitnikom suočavanja sa stresom i jednom česticom koja je ispitivala trenutnu razinu radnog stresa. Korelacijama i linearnim regresijama ispitano je ima li stil rukovođenja efekt na zaposlenikove strategije suočavanja sa stresom.

Niže su razine stresa na radnom mjestu pronađene kod zaposlenika čiji rukovoditelji iskazuju ponašanja koja karakteriziraju transformacijsko ili transakcijsko vodstvo. Rezultati također pokazuju niske do umjerene korelacije između triju osnovnih stilova rukovođenja i strategija suočavanja kao što su ponovna procjena i traženje socijalne podrške (pozitivne strategije), te bijeg/izbjegavanje (negativna strategija). Te su strategije suočavanja češće kod zaposlenika čiji rukovoditelji imaju transformacijski ili transakcijski stil rukovođenja. Zaposlenici čiji se rukovoditelji češće koriste pasivno-izbjegavajućim stilom u većoj mjeri pristupaju stresnim situacijama bijegom ili izbjegavanjem, a manje pozitivnom ponovnom procjenom. Regresijski modeli objašnjavaju samo 2% do 7% varijance pojedinih strategija suočavanja.

**Ključne riječi:** stilovi rukovođenja, stres na radnom mjestu, suočavanje, zaposlenici

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