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BROADENING THE SCOPE OF PROACTIVE COPING STRATEGIES THROUGH EXAMINING THEIR LINKS WITH DISPOSITIONAL SELF-EVOLUTION RESOURCES

Анотація. Теоретично обґрунтовано та емпірично підтверджено можливість цілеспрямованого вибору проактивних стратегій стресоподолання залежно від рівня сформованості особистісних ресурсів. Доведено, що стратегія самоінвалідації – прагнення пояснювати зовнішніми обставинами можливі невдачі – може бути концептуалізована як неконструктивна проактивна копінг-стратегія. За допомогою кореляційного аналізу виявлено додатний зв'язок конструктивних проактивних стратегій подолання зі складниками диспозиційної характеристики саморозвитку особистості та від'ємного кореляційного зв'язку самоінвалідації з умовами саморозвитку та загальною характеристикою саморозвитку особистості. Результати дослідження відкривають нові перспективи для концептуалізації феномену проактивного психологічного подолання.

Ключові слова: самоінвалідація, неконструктивні проактивні копінг-стратегії, стратегічні, рефлексивні, превентивні копінг-стратегії.

Аннотация. Теоретически обоснованы и эмпирически исследованы возможности целенаправленного управления выбором проактивных совладающих стратегий преодоления стресса в зависимости от уровня сформированности личностных ресурсов. Последние были операционализованы в терминах диспозиционной характеристики саморазвития личности. В ходе проведенного корреляционного исследования установлена значимая положительная связь конструктивных проактивных копинг-стратегий с характеристиками саморазвития личности, а также негативная связь самоинвалидации как неконструктивной проактивной копинг-стратегии с условиями и общей характеристикой саморазвития личности. На основании результатов исследования предлагается рассматривать самоинвалидацию как неконструктивную проактивную копинг-стратегию.

Ключевые слова: самоинвалидация, неконструктивные проактивные копинг-стратегии, стратегические, рефлексивные, превентивные копинг-стратегии.

Problem identification

Coping has been defined as a cognitive and behavioral efforts made to manage psychological stress (Lazarus, 1993). Traditionally, coping research distinguished between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). The essential aspect of the active problem-solving efforts is *perceived control*, which is described as the belief that one can determine one's own behavior and control challenging environment. Those, who believe that they control future outcomes, are more likely to employ active problem-focused coping strategies than those who ascribe outcomes to chance (Schwarzer, 1992; 1993; Folkman, 1984; Bandura, 1992). Emotion-focused coping strategies are targeted at minimizing psychological distress caused by stressful events. A recent review of coping literature revealed more than 100 coping categorization schemes (Skinner et al, 2003; Connor-Smith & Flachsbar, 2007).

However, though distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies is an important one, it has not captured the multi-faceted aspects of coping and positive psychological states (Greenglass et al, 1999). Accordingly, a new conceptualization of coping has been proposed by Schwarzer and Taubert (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002) that focuses on proactive, adaptive and goal-oriented aspects of coping. Proactive coping theory suggests that people are able to recognize signs of an approaching stressor and take steps to deal with it before it occurs. This process of proactive behavior can eliminate great deal of stress, as people tend to see upcoming events as opportunities and challenges, not as threats or potential losses. Individuals are

seen to take not a reactive but a proactive approach, creating opportunities of success and self-growth (Greenglass et al, 1999).

Research findings suggest that individuals who have well developed psychological resources, such as feeling of personal control, high self-esteem and optimism, are more likely to use proactive coping strategies thus minimizing the effects of stress (Greenglass, 2002). As a result, using proactive coping enhances a perspective on life that involves a positive attitude toward future events in the form of optimistic expectancies and enhanced feelings of self-worth (Griva & Anagnostopoulos, 2010).

However, some people are less pertinent to accumulating assets and preparing for the inevitable life stressors. Goal striving and achievement can be undermined when individuals are more concerned with avoiding likely failure: they may ignore negative information or even purposefully undermine their own performance (McCrea & Hirt, 2008). Such strategy is known as self-handicapping and involves creating or claiming obstacles to success in order to protect self-esteem in the face of possible task failure. In a recent study a new conceptualization of self-handicapping as a non-constructive proactive coping strategy has been proposed (Nosenko, Arshava & Nosenko, 2014). We have substantiated that the phenomenon of self-handicapping can be conceptualized not only as a motivational strategy but also as a form of maladaptive coping behavior. In the above mentioned research it was found that the individuals, prone to self-handicapping, are characterized by low level of ego-involvement an ego-identity and, vice versa, the subjects with high levels of ego-involvement and ego-identity tend not to resort to self-handicapping.

The objective of the present study

The objective of this study was to further explore relationship between dispositional self-evolution variables, constructive and non constructive coping strategies. We hypothesized, that dispositional self-evolution resources are likely to predict the use of constructive versus non constructive coping strategies. We expected that those, who had high levels of dispositional self-evolution resources, would be more likely to use constructive proactive coping resources, and, vice versa, those who realized a deficit of their internal dispositional resources for self-evolution would more likely resort to non-constructive proactive coping strategies, operationalized in this research in terms of self-handicapping.

In order to test the above formulated hypothesis, we used a recently developed by Ukrainian psychologist S. Kusikova (as a part of her Ph.D. thesis) a new Inventory for assessing dispositional personality resources of becoming an *agent of one's personality self-evolution* (personality growth) (Kusikova, 2012). In her research, Kusikova has identified three constituents of dispositional self-evolution: *needs*, *conditions* and *mechanisms*. The first constituent, *needs* of self-evolution, is described as an awareness of the individual in the necessity of self-growth, self-evolution, openness to changes, interest in the events of the surrounding world, and one's own inner world. The *conditions* of self-evolution are defined in the terms of autonomy, positive self-perception, strength and maturity of the self-image, awareness of one's goals, active life strategies. Finally, the third constituent, *mechanisms* of self-evolution, is described in terms of self-comprehension (a strive to authenticity), self-reflection (self-analysis), awareness of the discrepancies between the real and the ideal self, sensitivity to the feedback from other people.

*Method**Participants*

The sample included 120 participants, aged 18-21 (mean age 19 years), undergraduate students of Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University, currently continuing their education during the 2013-2014 academic year. Of the participants, 85 are female and 45 are male. Informed consent was obtained.

*Data tools**Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI)*

PCI consists of 6 subscales, 55 items total (Greenglass, Schwartz & Taubert, 1998, adapted to the Ukrainian culture by E. Starchenkova, 2002, and modified by M. Yaltonsky, 2009). The six subscales of the Ukrainian adapted version of PCI are: The Proactive Coping Scale ($\alpha=0.85$), the Reflective Coping Scale ($\alpha=0.79$), the Strategic Planning Scale ($\alpha=0.71$), the Preventive Coping Scale ($\alpha=0.83$), the Instrumental Support Seeking Scale ($\alpha=0.85$), and the Emotional Support Seeking Scale ($\alpha=0.73$).

Self-handicapping Scale

The Self-Handicapping Scale is comprised of 25 statements designed to assess an individual's proclivity to display self-handicapping behavior (Jones & Rhodewalt, 1982). For each statement subjects were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a six-point scale. Large group testing sessions indicate that the scale exhibits acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .79) and test-retest reliability ($r = .74$ after one month) (Rhodewalt, 1990). The predictive ability of the scale is confirmed by a number of studies (e.g., Rhodewalt, 1990, 1994; Strube, 1986). The instrument was translated into Ukrainian for the first time by an experienced researcher with a first degree in translation and then checked by the research team, who were fluent in both English and Ukrainian. Care was taken to ensure each item translated retained meaning as close as possible to the original version by means of a back translation process.

Dispositional Characteristics of Personality Self-Evolution

To assess the individual's awareness of oneself as an agent of self-evolution, we used a new Ukrainian thought-out inventory "Dispositional Characteristics of Personality Self-Evolution" (Kusikova, 2012). The Inventory consists of 30 statements rated on a five-point Likert Scale (with 5- "very much like me" and 1- "not like me at all"). The statements are formulated like: "I believe in my potential abilities and strive to self-actualization"; "I enjoy doing things that require maximum commitment and efforts"; or "In my life I am guided by the ideals of truthfulness, goodness and beauty" etc. The Inventory has 3 scales: "Needs for self-evolution", "Conditions of self-evolution" and "Mechanisms (functional means) of self-evolution. The author reports internal consistency of the Inventory $\alpha=.70$.

Procedure

The research data was acquired from the students at Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University during 2013-2014 academic year. The participants were included in the study following a short brief about the research and then were asked to fill in suggested questionnaires individually and provide their demographic details to the author of this research. The analysis of the data was carried out via IBM PAWS SPSS 18 (SPSS, 2009). Two types of research procedures have been carried out: the correlation analysis (r -Pearson product moment correlation coefficients) was assessed between proactive coping strategies and measures of dispositional self-evolution.

Findings and Conclusion

As a result of the correlation analysis it was determined that there were significant

relationships between all the variables in the model, supporting the hypothesis. Correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1 below.

Table. Correlation coefficients between the proactive forms of coping and measures of dispositional self-evolution resources

Proactive coping strategies	Overall measure of dispositional self-evolution resources	<i>Needs</i> of dispositional self-evolution	<i>Conditions</i> of dispositional self-evolution	<i>Mechanisms</i> of dispositional self-evolution
Proactive	.364**	.107	.570**	.048
Reflexive	.235**	-.141	.329**	.229**
Strategic	.180*	-.072	.252**	.141
Preventive	.060	-.200**	.194*	.078
Seeking of emotional support	.162*	-.007	.067	.270**
Seeking of instrumental support	.230**	.108	.187*	.157*
Self-handicapping	-.203*	-.072	-.313**	.022

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

As predicted, statistically significant positive correlations were found between constructive proactive coping strategies and constituents of dispositional self-evolution. Proactive coping significantly correlates with dispositional self-evolution resources ($r = 0.364$, $p \leq .01$) and conditions of dispositional self-evolution ($r = 0.570$, $p \leq .01$). Reflexive and strategic proactive coping strategies had the same significant correlations, shown in Table 1. Significant negative correlation was found between needs for dispositional self-evolution and preventive coping ($r = 0.200$, $p \leq .01$). The possible explanation will be discussed further. Also, in addition to significant positive correlations with dispositional self-evolution and conditions of self-evolution, seeking emotional and instrumental support had strong correlations with mechanisms of dispositional evolution ($r = 0.270$, $p \leq .01$ and $r = 0.157$, $p \leq .05$ respectively).

As to the relationship between the constituents of self-evolution and self-handicapping strategy, significant negative correlations were also found between the self-handicapping scores and the overall score of dispositional self-evolution ($r = -0.203$, $p \leq .05$) and the *conditions* of self-evolution ($r = -0.313$, $p \leq .01$).

Research results suggest that dispositional self-evolution resources are important for understanding the essence of the proactive coping ability. Constructive and non constructive coping strategies are used by people for preventing and lessening emotional distress regarding upcoming stressful situations. Our findings have shown that those individuals, who have strong self-image and positive self-perception, operationalized in terms of the *conditions* of self-evolution, use constructive proactive coping strategies in their behavioral repertoire. On the other hand, individuals with low conditions of self-evolution and thus unstable and immature self-concept are more likely to resort to self-handicapping.

The finding that the *needs* of dispositional self-evolution have no correlations with constructive and non constructive proactive coping can be explained, in our opinion, by the fact that the tendency itself to resort to proactive coping signifies a certain degree of worrying about the possible changes in future and the attempts of the individual to prevent them. The meaning of the construct of dispositional self-evolution involves openness to new experience as one of its key components. The negative correlation of

this construct with preventive coping reveals the nature of proactive coping, since the key function of it (to prepare for the possible changes in future) might cause negative appraisal of the likelihood of changes which initiate attempts as of means comforting oneself in the face of the possible future changes.

Emotional and instrumental support seeking have strong positive correlation with the scale mechanisms of self-evolution, which is manifested, among other, as sensitivity to the feedback from other people, which may offer an explanation for these significant positive correlations.

The positive correlations of all the forms of proactive coping with *conditions of dispositional self-evolution*, which imply sense of self-worth, strong self-perception, positive image of oneself, are quite compatible with the results obtained. The fact that self-handicapping has significant negative correlations with the overall measure of dispositional self-evolution resources and the component of *conditions* of self-evolution in particular, convincingly supports the hypothesis of our research that self-handicapping could be conceptualized as a form of non constructive proactive coping and the data of many other authors who stress the relationship of this phenomenon about the relation of this phenomenon with the sensitive ego.

As far as the correlations of the constructive forms of the proactive coping with the mechanisms of dispositional self-evolution are concerned, one can claim that this relationship exists for the constructive forms of proactive coping (seeking emotional support, seeking instrumental support) and the fact that these relationships are significant can be interpreted as the adequacy of our approach to the conceptualization of proactive coping as an array of strategies related to the individuals' self-comprehension, self-reflection and sensitivity to the feedback from other people.

Based on these data, it was shown that the proactive individual accumulates resources, takes steps to prevent resource depletion and is capable of mobilizing resources when needed (Greenglass, 1998). The individuals, low on internal self-evolution resources, are likely to resort to non constructive proactive coping which is aimed at protecting self-image but has detrimental long-term effects on psychological well-being (Arshava, Nosenko & Nosenko, 2013).

Conceptually the proactive coping is multidimensional and occurs on several levels, including cognitive, behavioral and emotional ones.

These results make a contribution into the body of research that historically lacks consensus as to the role of personality traits in the coping process. Considering the data discussed in this paper it is possible to conclude that constructive proactive coping strategies are used by individuals who see themselves as full of resources for growth while self-handicappers are unable to find constructive means of coping with anticipated problems.

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