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**REVISIT THE EFFECT OF TYPE A AND B PERSONALITY, AND ITS  
EFFECT ON JOB-RELATED STRESS IN THE ORGANIZATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

“Stress is no longer a choice”. In today’s world, stress has become a part of everyday’s life and it can be boon as well as bane. In organizational context, stress is seen as “evil”, which will only result in strain. Over the past decades, most of the studies on stress had merely focusing on stressors and its effect towards individuals. However, numerous studies began to explore the role of personality and its interaction with situational demand to the perceived stress and ways of coping with it. Moreover, Lazarus Transactional Model of Stress had shed an understanding on how one individual tax their demand differently than the other. Therefore, this study aims to assess the role of personality, specifically personality type A and B, and the effect of job-related stress. It also attempts to explore the effects of stress such as physiological strain, psychological strain, and behavioural strain for each personality types.

**Keywords:** Job stress, Type A and B Personality, Strain

**1.0 Introduction**

“Stress” is one of the most discussed topics by managers and researchers across the globe (Faulkner & Anatoop, 1997; Alice et al., 2013; Samuel et. al, 2015; Muzaffar, 2016). As the businesses are rapidly evolving, the employees are pressured to be more effective and efficient. Unfortunately, while business owners are only focusing on growth and globalization, employees’ mental and physical health were put aside and left to deteriorate. While stress is seen as something that is common in an organization, it does not imply that it should be ignored or debilitated as more often than not, countless studies proved that it has major impact towards organization. In fact, researcher Azizi, Noordin, Kamariah, Jasmi, Saini, and Zurihanmi (2009) had found the indirect effect of job stress on the employees’ intention to leave and job satisfaction in Companies Commission of Malaysia. Another example, a study conducted in University of Tehran found a high level of stress experience among its employees. Among of the listed effects from this study are low morale, low output, increased overtime payment, and poor product quality (Keshavarz & Mohammadi, 2011). These studies led to believe that stress should not be taken lightly, while managers need to take proactive action to curb this issue and ensuring the interests of organization are protected.

According to Lazarus and Launier (1978), stress is an unfavourable person-environmental relationship, and the coping of such stressful situation is depending on one’s thinking styles or personality traits (Lazarus, 1996; Darshani, 2014). Since, personality includes unique values, beliefs, and experiences of an individual, these differences can affect how one perceives his or her demand.

In other words, employee's personality can either reduce or increase the impact of organizational demands by their way of coping styles. For example, a study conducted by Azman, Noorshafine, Tusof, Ainon, Rizal and Norish (2015) conducted a study in a private investment bank in Peninsular Malaysia. This bank had restructured its organization due to expansion of services, which then redesign more challenging jobs to its employee causing an increase in both physiological stress and psychological stress. However, the ability of these employees in managing, regulating, and controlling their stresses in executing job has led to an enhanced job performance in the organization. Despite the contradicting findings from Keshavarz and Mohammadi (2011) where stress leads to the low morale of employees, studies from Azman *et al.* (2015) showed quite differently. Therefore, stress would not always lead to job dissatisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, hinders performance, and voluntarily turnover (Muzaffar, 2016). It can be managed through employees' personality and coping styles, on the other hand, managers take partake by introducing an effective stress management so that organization and its employees are cared for.

As mentioned earlier, employee's personality plays an important role in determining the performance of an organization. This paper will be utilizing the personality types developed by Friedman and Rosenman (1977), where employees can be identified as two types, i.e. competitive, passionate workers with a sense of time urgency (Type A personality) versus easygoing and relax workers (Type B personality). Still, there is a little exposure and knowledge of this personality types and their coping styles compared to other personality types in the organization, which could be one of the many contributions to the ineffective workforce and stress management. Thus, this paper will examine the role of Type A and B personality, in moderating the relationship between stress and its effects. Undeniably, by analyzing and predicting the employee's behaviour would benefit in designing an appropriate work environment, jobs, and rewards that will improve efficiency, productivity, and satisfaction among employees towards their jobs.

## **2.0 Job Stress**

Transactional Theory of stress by Lazarus (1996), explained the two types of stressors which are hindrance stressors and challenge stressors. Hindrance stressors are responsible for reducing the effectiveness of an individual's in attaining their goals, which often triggers anxiety, depression, and anger. For example, role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and daily hassles. In contrast, challenge stressors are stressful demands are seen as opportunities for learning, growth and achievement. For example, time pressure, work complexity, and work responsibility. These stressors are important as they fulfilled human needs such as self-esteem and self-actualization.

Another construct by Selye (1964) identified stress into two types. Firstly, eustress is a type of stress that has positive impact towards a person, i.e. motivation and challenge. Another type of stress is called distress, where it has negative effect that hinders employee's performance, while inviting coronary artery disease, asthma, migraines, backaches, alcohol and drug abuse (Tejinder & Pamela, 2013). Generally, it is believed that stress increases the severity of these diseases and behaviour (Beehr & Bhagat, 1985; Quick *et al.*, 2003).

In any organization, stress is often a bear of bad news. This is the case in a study conducted by Faulkner and Patiar (1997), where employees in four hotels located in Queensland, Australia identified a high level stress among frontliners, which contributes to job dissatisfaction, increased absenteeism, declining quality of output, and increased customer dissatisfaction. This is further supported by Samuel *et al.* (2015), their study found a relationship between job stress from role conflict and role ambiguity, had a significant and negative affect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Furthermore, it is concluded that job stress has indirect effect towards turnover intention among employees.

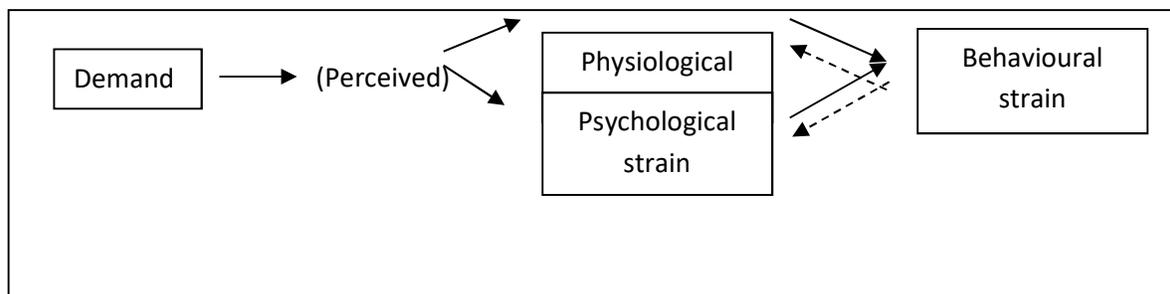
Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all stress would lead to negative outcomes. In fact, one study by Karatape, Beirami, Bouzari, and Safavi (2014) proved that work overload and job responsibility are positively related to affective organizational commitment and job performance among hotel employees in Northern Cyprus. Besides this, another study conducted in China by Alice, Wilco, and Lin (2013) examined that challenge stressors such as time pressure and work overload were able to increase employee's creativity in delegating their tasks more efficiently.

Based on these findings, it is established that job stress can be either eustress (challenge-stressors) or distress (hindrance stressor). Whereas, the effect of job stress could be dependent on personality and coping styles, thus, the individual's perception on his or her environmental demand could be seen as a threat or opportunity. Inevitably, by apprehending these stressors, managers can increase employees' organizational performance and commitment.

## 2.1 The Effect of Stress (Strain)

Strain or more commonly known as burnout, is the effect of continuous exposure to high level of stress. Another definition of stress by Richard Kahn (1970) is the perceived demand on a person that results in physical and psychological strain. This theory further extended by Schuler (1980) and Beech (1982), where they included behavioural strain as one of the effects of stress. The researchers added that physiological and psychological effects leads to behavioral strain, of which will worsen the physiological and psychological effects (as seen in figure 1).

Basically, physiological strains reduce the body's immune system, harm the body's cardiovascular system (Karasek *et al.*, 1981; Karasek *et al.*, 1988; Johnson & Hall, 1988), musculoskeletal system (Juhn, Cho & Park, 2004) and also gastrointestinal problem (Miller & Miller, 2005). For example, a study conducted by Lee, Moon, Lee, and Kim (2014) among hotel workers in South Korea, concluded that job stress caused by emotional dissonance elevated fatigue levels, which leads to an increased risk of accidents in the organization (Takashi *et al.*, 2001; Kohet *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, accidents do not only incur more costs to the organizations, but also, the performance of the company as well.



(Adopted and modified from A.J. Geare (1989), "Job stress: Boon as well as Bane", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 11(1), pp. 24)

Other than that, psychological strain or burnout causes depression, anxiety, anger, hostility, reduced self-confidence, irritability, and irrationality. Based on an Italian sample, the employees were reported to have anxiety and depression, in relation to their highly stressful jobs (Zurlo & Pes, 2012; Zurlo *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, a study conducted in India found that job stress does affect the employees' mental well-being, thus unable to concentrate with work and reduced their efficiency (Kotteeswari & Sharief, 2014). Similarly, a study conducted by Upadyaya *et al.* (2016), showed that depression is negatively associated with work engagement and positively associated with work burnout. Since, work engagement have a positive relationship with job performance (Selmer & Lauring, 2016), this conclude that depression will

reduce job performance among employees. Meanwhile, behavioural strains includes excessive smoking (Westman, Eden &Shirom, 1985), vandalism (Matteson &Ivancevich, 1987), absenteeism (Mohre *et al.*, 2005), alcohol and drug usage (Chen &Cunradi, 1981; Chen & Spector, 1992). To illustrate, depression due to job stress is commonly related to absenteeism and presenteeism, it is found that depression is associated with work performance deficit and also contributed to productivity loss (Lerner & Henke, 2008). In the United States, it is estimated that total depression costs attributed to presenteeism and absenteeism are approximately US\$51.5 billion (Greenberg *et al.*, 2003).

As discussed earlier, strain occurs when an employee is constantly exposed to a demanding situation. More often than not, the outcome of strain is associated with reduced job performance due to depression, absenteeism, and fatigue. Therefore, it is important to take heed into this matter since it involves costs and productivity of the organization, along with employee's physical and mental well-being.

### **3.0 Personality**

Modern theories described personality as one's traits that affect their perception and behaviour towards environment (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). It also plays an important in determining the reaction and responses when exposed to a stressful situation such as coping style and behaviour. For example, narcissistic individuals have high expectations on their job design and career advancement, when these expectations are not met despite of their efforts, it will increase their level of stress thus causing burnout (Schwarzkopf *et al.*, 2016). There are several theorist that presented different types of personality to easily categorized employees. Among of those are, i.e. Personality types A and B, Myers-Brigs 16 personality types, Big Five personality traits, Eysenck's personality, and locus of control. There has been a limited research on the influence of personality factors on strain (Schwarzkopf *et al.*, 2016), as such, this study will examined its function as a mediator between stress- strain relationships, particularly, by using Type A and B personality

### **4.0 Type A and Type B Personality**

This personality types are proposed by Friedman and Rosenman (1959), these researcher found that individuals can be categorized into two types, i.e. Type A and B personality. Firstly, Type A personality is identified as coronary-prone due to its higher risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). Meanwhile, Type B is known as non-coronary prone (Brand *et al.*, 1976). Generally, Type A is said to have a higher risk of CHD because of the aggressive behaviour such as impatient, and competitive. Whereas, Type Bs are known to be the exact opposite of Type A, they are easygoing and non-competitive.

#### **4.1 Type A Personality**

The individuals who have behaviour such as time urgency, highly competitive, perfectionist and tense are closely link to type A personality (Jenkins *et al.*, 1978; Lobel, 1988; Watson *et al.*, 2006). Additional studies by Matthews (1988) showed that certain trait of Type A such as anger, impatience, irritability has higher probability of experiencing health issues than achievement, despite of their competitiveness in the organizations (Bluer, 1990; Robbins *et al.*, 1991). A rather interesting finding by Iwanaga, Yokoyama, and Seiwa (2000) found that when Type As were exposed to time constraint challenge, they would respond to the situation faster as it would determine the success of their group. This study concluded that Type A personality are affected by responsibility.

Other than that, researchers found that type As are more comfortable to work with someone who has the same capabilities (Keinan and Koren, 2002). These researches constructed several games that requires teamwork and assigned 4 group members with different ratio of Type A and B employees. Apparently,

group members with higher ratio of Type A have higher productivity and better performance in a competitive situation. In addition to this, Type As expressed satisfaction with similar personality type. This study also concluded that Type As are highly competitive, likes challenges, and able to execute task efficiently under pressure. Although previous studies proved that Type As can perform better in challenging task, however, the results are contradicted for easy tasks (Gastorf *et al.*, 1980; Lee *et al.*, 1988). Type As are not showing signs of struggling when the situation presented is not a win or lose challenge (Robert *et al.*, 1992). This further supports that Type A individuals prefer to be in a challenging situation (Fazio *et al.*, 1981).

Alongside, Type As like to be in control of everything around them, therefore, they tend to be team leaders that are hard to please due to their perfectionism (Darshani, 2014). Also, a noteworthy finding by Keenan and McBain (1979) showed that Type As has significantly stronger association with role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction. Thus, concludes that Type A individuals dislike uncertainties in their line of work. In addition, Type A individuals were said to be ambitious, this is proven by a study by Ward and Eisler (1987), where upon reviewing on goal-setting behaviour, individuals are more likely to set a higher goal than the previous regardless of their capability measured from previous accomplishments. This not only shows ambitiousness but also display risk-taking behaviour.

#### **4.2 Type B Personality**

On the contrary to Type A personality, Type Bs are more relaxed and dislike hostility (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974; Rosenman, 1978; Cherie *et al.*, 2013), They have the ability to enjoy leisure time without guilt (Rastogi & Dave, 2004). Similarly, Type B individuals have the confidence to work steadily without rush, finishes work on time, and obtain good results but in a different manner (Mahajan & Rastogi, 2011). An example, Type Bs professionals were found to score better compared to Type As in stressful situations, i.e. family conflicts, daily hassles, and criticism (Janjhua & Chandrakanta, 2012). This findings further justified that Type Bs are open to criticism (Darshani, 2014), which explains why they could score higher in the study.

Furthermore, some suggested type B were better than type A in problem-solving when there is no time constraint (Glass *et al.*, 1974; krischner *et al.*, 1989). To support this, previous studies by Keinan & Koren (2002) showed that team composition type B individuals rather teamed up with those who are pleasant with good interpersonal skills. In contrast, a study by Janice (1995) supported this finding as she found that Type Bs executive in the finance sector are more affected by their interpersonal relationship.

Ultimately, another trait of Type Bs is they are highly motivated when incentives are presented (Manuck & Garland, 1979; Houston, 1983; James *et al.*, 1983). A study by James *et al.* (1983), concluded that when the situation did not made clear on the rewards, Type Bs individuals showed a rather normal response compared to when the reward was made explicit. This study showed that type B prefer to be rewarded, regardless of extrinsic or intrinsic rewarded.

#### **5.0 Type A and B Personality and Job Stress**

Previous studies established that Type A personality is highly vulnerable to stress. Although, it is noteworthy to add that Type Bs are able to experience stress in similar situations exposed to Type A individual, however, they are prone to have lower stress levels compared to Type As. To illustrate, a study conducted by Janice (1995), concluded that both personality types reported stress for work overload, role ambiguity, poor colleague relationship, and lack of challenge. But, Type As perceived level of stress is higher than type Bs. Based on this study, it is found that poor relationship with colleagues is reported to have higher impact on Type Bs than do Type As. Therefore, it is concluded that Type Bs can

be affected by stress when it comes to poor interpersonal relationship. Meanwhile, type As were found to be easily stressed with uncertainties (Kenaan&McBain, 1979), unchallenging situation (Keinan&Koren, 2002), and work overload.

Another study by Iwanaga *et al.* (2000) on Type A and Type B psychological stress response to a task, found that under high and low responsibility, Type Bs showed a higher level of stress from the tension and apprehension for appraisal of that particular situation compared to Type As. Once again, this finding showed that Type Bs care for what other thinks as they longed to have good interpersonal relationships with everyone. While, the tension experienced by Type Bs could be correlated with appraisal as the felt the need to perform better in order to be accepted by others. On the same study, Type A were found to have higher level of stress from tension, boredom, and competition when they are given high-responsibility.

Hence, it is worth mentioning that both personalities are prone to stress. Although, it seems that Type As will experienced higher level of stress than Type Bs in most of the situation, due to their traits i.e. perfectionist, competitive, hostility, and aggressiveness. But, it does not entail that Type Bs should be given less attention in the organization as their responds to stressful situations are less concerning. Just as important, interpersonal relationship is a major stressor for Type Bs, therefore by providing the social support needed, it can enhance the job performance of employees (Shabbir&Navqi , 2017).

## **6.0 Discussion**

The aim of this paper is to role of Type A and B personality between stress and strain relationship. As discussed earlier, job stress plays an important role in the organization. Despite the fact that stress itself bring negative outcomes such as absenteeism, depression, and reduced job performance (Keshavranz&Mohammadi, 2011; Muzaffar, 2016), it is also crucial to take note that stress can be used properly to improve employee's productivity and effectiveness (Alice *et al.*, 2013; Karatapeet *et al.*, 2014; Azman, 2015). Meanwhile, personality Type A and B is found to have a moderating role for stress and strain relationship, whereas, each personality will results in either higher or lower level of stress experienced by an individual. Although, Type As characteristics such as hostility, aggressiveness, competitive, and perfectionist (Darshani, 2014; Keinan&Koren, 2002), are seen to have more correlation with stress, surprisingly, Type Bs do have their major stressor that is higher than Type As such as poor interpersonal relationship (Janice, 1995).

This study draws the attention to the need of apprehending the impact of stress on employees and the organization, as a whole. With regards to this, it is found that coping strategies implemented by these types of personality will be an important predictor to strain. In fact, researcher claimed that most coronary heart disease patients are Type As individual and were found using dysfunctional coping, i.e. alcohol and drug usage to avoid confronting the problem (Kohlmann *et al.*, 1996). This behaviour will only worsen the physiological and psychological state. However, there is limited research on the coping strategies of Type Bs since researcher often disregards the ability to experience stress due to their easygoing and relax characteristics. Regardless of that, this study establish that Type Bs are more towards people-oriented, therefore, it is only natural that they would find comfort or consolation from the supports of others. Aside from that, there is also a controversy between coping style and gender, where women can cope better than men (Ptaceck, 1992) because women tend to seek social support while men will cope by problem-focused style.

On a side note, perhaps social support from interpersonal relationships could contribute to the characteristic of Type Bs as they are aware of the unconditional support from colleague, family, supervisors, and friends. This might correlated to previous study that showed a rather high level of stress

when it comes to appraisal from others (Iwanaga *et al.*, 2000). A further research could help to identify the factors that shaping the Type B characteristic, so that it can be used to control the level of stress experienced by Type A individual.

Next, leadership is known to foster reduction of stress among employees (Safaria *et al.*, 2013). Among of the practical leadership style for Type A and B personality is autocratic leadership and participative leadership. Generally, autocratic leadership is seen as authoritarian that focuses on the productivity, while, participative can be referred as democratic style that invites input from all employees (Nadeem *et al.*, 2012). Autocratic leadership is suitable to use against Type As individual as their behaviour can produce significant improvement on performance through productivity-oriented and risk-taking behaviours. Besides, Type As' hostility, anger, impatience and aggressiveness will become a drawback in a participative discussion. Whereas, Type Bs should be managed by using democratic styles as they are people-oriented, easygoing, and non-competitive behaviour. These behaviours will assist in a smoother discussion among others, thus boosting organizational morale.

## 7.0 Conclusion

It is important to fully examine the relationship between Type A and B personality and stress since the effect of stress would not only be harmful to the individual, but also endangering the position of an organization. Although Type Bs are often seen as non-threat to the organization, managers should be aware of the impact of interpersonal relationship towards their level of stress. Meanwhile, Type A individuals should not be taken lightly as effect of strain will worsen their job performance. These personalities should be utilized effectively as both possess important traits that are crucial to the organizational performance. Also, personality is found to have moderating role between stress and strain relationship. Managers should look into effective coping strategies and leadership style based on their personality types.

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