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Coping with Stress of (Non)conformist Employees

Radzenie sobie ze stresem pracowników (non)konformistycznych

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of non-conformism as employees' personal potential for innovative behaviors in the context of coping with stress. Poland belongs to the countries with the highest percentage of stressed employees in Europe. Destructive stress can destroy the potential of employees in the workplace. The main research objective was to check whether nonconformist employees are different from conformists in terms of how they deal with stress? The results of 100 employees aged 25–48 years were analyzed. The research included the Creative Behavior Questionnaire (KANH III), the Coping Orientations to Problems Experiences (COPE). The results of statistical analyses allow to conclude that conformists predominate in the group of employees occupying positions in belt-system production. These styles of coping with stress do not show statistically significant correlations with the conformism–non-conformism dimension. There are no significant differences in styles of coping with stress between nonconformist and conformist workers. Only in using one strategy of coping with stress conformists differ from non-conformists. Non-conformists use the Discontinuing Action strategy.

Keywords: nonconformity; conformity; coping with stress; employee

NONCONFORMISM

Presenting the research areas very synthetically (Bernacka, 2017), it should be stated that nonconformism can be analyzed in four research areas, namely: human behavior, behavior of social groups, human personality structure and creative personality. Analyzing nonconformism in the personality structure, two aspects can be distinguished. The first one – close to self-control (Kohn, 1969) – is ex-

pressed in the tendency to think, evaluate and act independently on the basis of an autonomous system of values and the readiness to express and defend them (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, 1997). The second aspect of nonconformism is the tendency of "social independence" expressed in terms of whether or not to oppose social pressure and the lack of sensitivity to social norms but without any attitude to overreacting (Hollander, Willis, 1967; Strzałecki, 1989). Another research level of nonconformism is the aspect of creative personality. An attempt of the statistical synthesis and integration of the results of research to date on the most characteristic personality traits of creators has so far ended with an analysis of the relationships between subjective variables and creativity (Feist, 2017) and a theoretical model of the creative personality of Guillaume Fürst and Todd Lubart (2017). Nonconformism can be found in them, which strengthens its position as an important subjective human potential in the creative process.

The result of the work of theoreticians from the trend of interactive psychological models focused on subjective properties necessary to generate creative activity (Karwowski, 2009) is a creative attitude construct. This trend includes Stanisław Popek's (2001) concept, which will be briefly presented in the research part of this article.

Popek (2001) defines the creative attitude as an active attitude towards the world and life, expressed by the need to know and consciously process the existing reality and one's own self. According to Popek (1989, 2001, 2015), the creative and recreative attitude is formed by two spheres: cognitive and personal (Grohman, Szmidt, 2012; Nęcka, Grohman, Słabosz, 2006). This author, assuming the supreme role of personality in activating and realizing the potential possibilities of man, treats nonconformism as the core of the creative personality.

EMPLOYEE INNOVATION AND (NON)CONFORMITY OF POTENTIAL

The concept of innovative behavior includes both creativity, i.e. generating ideas, and innovation understood as the ability to propagate and defend them and implement (Kraśnicka, Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2012). The innovativeness of enterprises can be considered at three levels: organizational, team and individual (Kheng, Mahmood, Beris, 2013). Arguments justifying the need for innovative behavior of employees that affect the assurance of growth and competitiveness of the company are cited by researchers of this issue (Janssen, 2003; Odoardi, Battisteli, Montani, 2010).

Organizational culture classified differently (Cameron, Quinn, 2006), through its specificity affects the behavior, values, attitudes and goals of its employees (Ekval, 1996). Matching employees' personality and organizational culture as well as job specifics (there are various executive and managerial positions in the organization) is part of the psychological contract between them (Kożusznik,

2007). Such matching is very beneficial due to the main goals of the company and the employee himself (Kraśnicka, Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014). The degree of this adjustment affects work efficiency and prevents, among others, motivation problems, very high staff liquidity, deferred costs or burnout (Kraśnicka, Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014; Mockałło, 2012). Employees are more or less innovative among the factors of the organizational climate: diversification of tasks, participation in decisions (including risky ones), decision-making possibilities regarding the way the work is performed, as well as the functioning of the enterprise (the so-called employee participation), autonomy and expectations as to creativity and innovations related to the professional role (Hammond, Neff, Farr, Schwall, Zhao, 2011).

The extensive meta-analysis of 80 studies on predictors of employee innovation (Hammond et al., 2011) shows that these include creative personality and openness to experience. In addition, the characteristics of employees that increase the likelihood of their innovative behavior in the workplace are: high energy, enthusiasm, pursuit of the goal, ability to inspire, commitment, mental resilience and perseverance (Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou, Hartnell, 2012). Responding to the above-mentioned personality predictors, it can be stated that the tendency for innovative behavior of employees triggers and maintains and protects the dimension of conformism–nonconformism from the personality side.

Thus, nonconformism is an energetic motivational resource (Popek, 2001), which initiates, organizes and directs potential human capabilities and (creative) resources to their expression and/or realization. Independence, psychological freedom, originality, one's own system of values and the production and concretization of creative activity in action are the attributes of nonconformism (Popek, 2015). Nonconformism may be accompanied by social costs, many emotions and fears. There is social exposure, the likelihood of failure and ridicule, but also the likelihood of increased social interest and popularity. Dealing with stress, therefore, plays a significant role in the functioning of a (non)conformist.

COPING WITH STRESS

In psychology, stress is defined on three different levels, which implies different explanations and research approaches. Some treat stress as a stimulus – stressor (Elliot, Eisdorfer, 1982). For others, stress is an emotional and physiological reaction of an organism (Mechanic, 1962; Selye, 1976). Still others, see it in terms of relations between external factors and human resources (Beauvale et al. 2006; Hobfoll, 1989; Reykowski, 1966; Strelau, 1996). On the basis of the third trend described above, the Lazarus' Interactive Concept of Stress (1966) and the Cox's Transactional Concept of Stress (1985) have developed. Their authors draw attention to a fact: what matters is not so much the presence of a stress factor but the way an individual perceives it, including how he or she assesses his or her chances

of coping with a difficult situation.

The issue of stress management can be looked at from two different perspectives. According to Haan, when struggling with stress, a man wants to adapt to reality by choosing rational and adaptive forms of behavior in difficult situations (Grzegorzewska, 2006). In turn, in the light of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman's concept, the process of dealing with stress is "the ever-changing cognitive and behavioral efforts of an individual to master certain external and internal requirements judged by a person to be incriminating or exceeding his or her resources" (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984, p. 141). These authors argue that coping has two functions, related to a specific context situation. The first one – instrumental (task-oriented) – is aimed at improving the relationship between a person and the environment. The second concerns the self-regulation of emotions and boils down to lowering the unpleasant tension caused by negative emotional states or increasing agitation, which leads to the mobilization of action. The process of coping with stress occurs over time and reflects the development of the stressful situation. Dealing depends on the primary (meaningfulness of the situation) and secondary assessment, i.e. possible options for dealing with the situation (Heszen-Nejodek, 2000). Coping as a process – described above – is one of the three concepts that are very popular in the literature on stress management.

Another notion is coping in terms of strategy (Carvey, Scheier, Weintraub, 1989), i.e. a specific action and reaction, undertaken or triggered by a human being in a specific stressful situation (Heszen, Sęk, 2007). Attention is drawn here to the context of the stressful situation with which an individual is confronted and the flexibility of coping strategies. There are many categories of hierarchically structured strategies for dealing with stress, including those focused on the problem and emotions (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984). Another systematizing criterion is the commitment to solving the problem (Carver, Connor-Smith, 2010). Engagement strategies include planning or a positive reinterpretation of the stressor, while strategies of giving up engagement include denial, withdrawal or self-blaming (Carver, Scheier, Weintraub, 1989).

The third notion important in the problem of fighting stress is the style of coping with stress, understood as the individual's personal disposition to cope with stressful situations in a specific way. It means applying in various stressful situations the repertoire of coping strategies, characteristics for a given individual (Heszen-Nejodek, 2000). Their aim is to reduce or remove stress. Norman Endler and James Parker (1999) have distinguished three styles of coping with stress – an emotion-oriented, task-oriented and avoidance-oriented style. Zygfryd Juczyński and Nina Ogińska-Bulik (2009) propose three superior styles of coping with stress, namely: problem-focused, seeking support and focusing on emotions and avoidance. Subjective properties, including personal ones, usually constitute stress moderators, influencing the assessment of a stressful situation and

the choice of coping strategy, i.e. they indirectly influence the effectiveness of human actions and the experience of the effects of stressful situations (Ogińska-Bulik, Juczyński, 2008).

At this point it is worth mentioning that Poland belongs to the countries with the highest percentage of stressed employees in Europe (Młokosiewicz, 2018). "In 2018, more than a quarter of Polish employees experienced it every day, with almost a third of employees (32%) believed that the company was not interested in their mental well-being" (ADP Polska, 2018; Młokosiewicz, 2018, p. 28). Stress can destroy the potential of employees at its four levels: intellectual, moral, mental and physical. At the intellectual level, his activity blocks thinking, decision making, problem solving, innovation and promotes errors. At the moral level, it favors the disappearance of the work ethos, aggressive behavior or other unethical actions. At the psychological level, it reduces motivation, neurosis and depression as well as the disappearance of employees' social competences. At the physical level, it causes less resistance to fatigue and less endurance, and promotes accidents (Młokosiewicz, 2018). The fight with stress is primarily associated with the protection of employees' potential and providing them with conditions for development as a valuable key resource of the organization today.

The article attempts to find the answer to the question of how employees with specific personality potential in their individual dimension cope with stress. This is an important question for employees in the context of their mental and physical health, but may also be of interest to the company.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research on conformism–nonconformism measured through the KANH III and styles of coping with stress (measured by CISS) in martial arts practitioners indicates that a higher level of nonconformism was associated with a higher frequency of using a task-focused style and a lower frequency of using an emotion-focused style (Bernacka, Sawicki, Mazurek-Kusiak, Hawlena, 2016). However, the results obtained (Bernacka, 2017), which are a repetition of previous studies, but performed in the population group, indicate that one of the important predictors of conformism is dealing with emotion-oriented stress. In comparative analyses, conformists have higher scores in coping with stress – style focused on emotions and style focused on avoidance. For nonconformists, coping with stress dominates – compared to conformists, it is a task-focused style. Constructive nonconformists and apparent nonconformists do not differ in terms of how to deal with stress (Bernacka, 2017).

To sum up, the research work to date indicates that coping with stress – a task-focused style – is characteristic of nonconformists, while a style focused on emotions and a style focused on avoidance is preferred by conformists. However, it is

interesting to know whether the functioning of (non)conformists, including their specific ways of coping with stress, is reflected in the context of specific professional work. A nonconformist is an individualist and prefers creative work, while a conformist chooses to participate in collective work in order to preventively minimize the need to cope with stressful situations, which he or she assumes to be poorly dealt with (Bernacka, 2005). Working on a tape workstation introduces a sense of predictability, repeatability and a small sense of stress, even though the stress of various origins occurs – as in any work (Litzke, Schuh, 2007; Łosiak, 2008). A nonconformist who has perfect control over emotions and copes with stress needs challenges in order to be able to make full use of his or her own subjective resources or promote them. On the other hand, a conformist chooses to protect the resources he or she possesses or to avoid situations that would require these resources (Bernacka, 2017; Hobfoll, 2006).

Innovative behavior of employees was examined in various sectors of enterprises due to the size and subject of activity (finance, banking, trade) and the respondents were both executive and managerial employees (Wojtczuk-Turek, 2012). However, the personality base of these behaviors, i.e. the personality dimension (non) conformism, was not explored. In this context, it seems interesting to complement the aforementioned studies and explore the area that is the relationship between the dimension of conformism–nonconformism and coping with stress. The issue of coping with employee stress in Poland requires monitoring, while the knowledge of coping with (non)conformist employees needs to be supplemented.

The study was aimed at diagnosing the occurrence of non-conformist personality in employees employed in the executive position, determining the relationship between the dimension of personality and styles of coping with stress, as well as determining whether there are significant differences between conformists and nonconformists in the use of styles and strategies of coping with stress.

On the basis of the above considerations, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1. There is a relationship between the conformism–nonconformism dimension and the styles of coping with stress.

H2. It is likely that there are significant differences in styles and specific strategies of coping with stress between workers nonconformists, conformists and those with an average level of conformism–nonconformism.

METHOD

Participants

The study participants were 100 employee aged 25–48 ($M = 29.80$, $SD = 6.50$) of which 89% were men and 11% were women. The seniority of employees ranged

from 2 years to 20 years. The consent to participate in the research and professional affiliation, i.e. work at the belt-system production, constituted the criterion for the selection of the respondents. The research participants came from the one from large production companies in Lublin. The research was conducted by the author of this paper in November 2019. The respondents received questionnaires anonymously and answered the questions by themselves by marking the answer.

Measures

In order to separate people on the dimension of conformism–nonconformism, the KANH III Questionnaire of Creative Behavior (Bernacka, 2009; Bernacka, Popek, Gierczyk, 2016) was used, which is a modified version of the KANH Questionnaire – based on Popek's creative attitude (1989). KANH III consists of twenty six self-describing items, whose truthfulness in relation to one's own person is assessed by choosing from the letters A–E. The reliability of the tool has been calculated for individual scales: Cronbach's alpha = 0.69 for the conformism–nonconformism, Cronbach's alpha = 0.65 for the algorithmic behavior – heuristic behavior. Absolute stability equals $r = 0.95$. Sten standards are established for people aged 15–60 years, separately for women and men on the conformism–nonconformism and on the Creative Attitude. On the algorithmic behavior – heuristic behavior, they are without division into gender (Bernacka, Popek, Gierczyk, 2016).

The tool used in this paper to measure how people react to stress is the Coping Orientations to Problems Experiences (COPE) by Carver, Scheier and Weintraub in the Polish adaptation of Juszczyński and Ogińska-Bulik (2009). It is based on the Lazarus stress model (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984) and the model of self-regulation of behavior (Scheier, Carver, 1988). It is a self-written tool consisting of 60 statements to which the subject answers by choosing from "I almost never do this" – "I almost always do this". It allows the evaluation of 15 strategies for responding to stressful situations, such as: Active Coping, Planning, Seeking Instrumental Support, Seeking Emotional Support, Avoiding Competitive Action, Turning to Religion, Positive Revaluation and Development, Refraining from Action, Acceptance, Focusing on Emotions and their Discharge, Denial, Distraction, Discontinuing Action, Taking Alcohol or Other Psychoactive Drugs, Sense of Humor. The reliability of the tool was calculated based on Cronbach's alpha for the individual scales and is 0.48–0.94. The stability indexes measured at an interval of six weeks ranged from 0.45 to 0.82.

RESULTS

At the beginning, a percentage statement of employees was made based on the diagnosis of their personality dimension conformism–nonconformism. The

analysis was based on the sten results of the subjects. Chi-square was used. The list of analyses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Residual analysis for C-N dimension

KN level	Number of persons	Percentage	Expected N	Residuals
Conformist	55	55	33.3	21.7
Average	21	21	33.3	-12.3
Nonconformist	24	24	33.3	-9.3

Source: Author's own study.

There are significantly Chi2 (2, $N = 100$) = 21.26; $p < 0.001$, more conformists than would result from a random distribution. In the first step, the normal distribution of results was checked. The results of the Shapiro–Wilk test showed that the distribution of variables is compatible with the normal distribution. In order to check the occurrence of relationships between personality dimension and styles of coping with stress, *r*-Pearson correlation analysis was used. The list of analyses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. R-Pearson correlation coefficient for dimension C-N and styles of coping with stress

Styles of coping with stress	C-N Value r-Pearson	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)
Active coping	0.136	0.179
Seeking support	0.106	0.293
Avoidance behavior	0.160	0.112

Source: Author's own study.

It is worth noting that styles of coping with stress do not show statistically significant correlations with the conformism–nonconformism dimension. The hypothesis was not supported. In order to check if employees with different dimension of conformism–nonconformism requirements differ in styles of coping with stress one-way Anova was used. The list of analyses is presented in Table 3.

The results of statistical analysis indicate that there are no significant differences in the styles of coping with stress in the group of nonconformists, conformists with an average intensity of conformism–nonconformism.

In order to check if employees conformists, nonconformists and average C-N differ in of 15 specific strategies for responding to stressful situations, one-way Anova was used. The list of analyses is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Styles of coping with stress in groups of nonconformists, conformists, average C-N

Styles of coping with stress		Average square	F	*p*
Active coping	Between groups	222.564	2.165	0.120
	Inside groups	102.789		
Seeking support	Between groups	155.379	1.977	0.144
	Inside groups	78.609		
Avoidance behavior	Between groups	305.530	2.448	0.092
	Inside groups	124.783		

Source: Author's own study.

Table 4. Specific strategies of coping with stress in groups of nonconformists, conformists, average C-N

Strategies of coping with stress		Average square	F	*p*
Active Coping	Between groups	0.612	0.202	0.818
	Inside groups	3.033		
Planning	Between groups	5.400	0.963	0.385
	Inside groups	5.605		
Seeking Instrumental Support	Between groups	6.958	0.885	0.416
	Inside groups	7.858		
Seeking Emotional Support	Between groups	19.422	1.658	0.196
	Inside groups	11.710		
Avoiding Competitive Action	Between groups	2.765	0.477	0.622
	Inside groups	5.801		
Turning to Religion	Between groups	26.905	2.017	0.139
	Inside groups	13.340		
Positive Revaluation and Development	Between groups	0.269	0.046	0.955
	Inside groups	5.819		
Refraining from Action	Between groups	4.308	1.051	0.353
	Inside groups	4.097		
Acceptance	Between groups	6.898	0.964	0.385
	Inside groups	7.155		
Focusing on Emotions and their Discharge	Between groups	6.502	1.178	0.312
	Inside groups	5.517		
Denial	Between groups	14.142	2.220	0.114
	Inside groups	6.369		
Distraction	Between groups	7.034	1.286	0.281
	Inside groups	5.471		

Table 4. continued

Discontinuing Action	Between groups	22.748	3.543	0.033*
	Inside groups	6.420		
Taking Alcohol or Other Psychoactive Drugs	Between groups	24.760	2.050	0.134
	Inside groups	12.077		
Sense of Humor	Between groups	2.859	0.237	0.789
	Inside groups	12.052		

Source: Author's own study.

The analysis resulted in a statistically significant effect strategy of Discontinuing Action, $F(2, 99) = 3.54$; $p < 0.05$. Carried out comparisons using the Scheffe test for this strategy (Table 5) revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the conformist and nonconformist groups. This result is significantly lower in conformists than nonconformists.

Table 5. Scheffe test for the Discontinuing Action strategy

Discontinuing Action strategy		Difference of means	*p*
Conformist	Average C-N	-0.641	0.585
	Nonconformist	-1.641*	0.033
Average C-N	Conformist	0.641	0.585
	Nonconformist	-1.000	0.367
Nonconformist	Conformist	1.641*	0.033
	Average C-N	1.000	0.367

* the difference of means is significant at the level of 0.05
Source: Author's own study.

In conclusion, the second hypothesis should be considered as partially confirmed. It is likely that there are not significant differences in styles of coping with stress between workers nonconformists, conformists and those with an average intensity of conformism–nonconformism. Only in using one strategy of coping with stress conformists differ from nonconformists. Conformists less often use the Discontinuing Action strategy.

DISCUSSION

The cognitive goal of this paper has been achieved because some interesting conclusions have been reached coping with stress by (non)conformist employees. According to the theoretical expectations, the largest group of the employees occupying positions in belt-system production are conformists. They are people

characterized by a pragmatic approach to the entrusted tasks and responsibilities. Each of them is a member of a team that implements the guidelines and meets precisely defined expectations, which allows to minimize the chance of coping with possible professional stress alone. Conformists theoretically prefer such work (Bernacka, 2005, 2018), and the results presented in this article empirically confirm it. Referring this result to the research and behavior of innovative employees (Wojtczuk-Turek, 2012) and the psychological contract (Kożusznik, 2007) you can take into account that there are adaptations and personality traits of employees occupying jobs in definite content. The nature of the work is consistent with the specifications of the ranges, where generally it is not expected to behave in the position of executive work which is belt-system production. This result in the hierarchy of the organizational climate where there are different and different expectations for them (Mockałło, 2012; Kraśnicka, Wronka-Pośpiech, 2014; Scott, Bruce, 1994). This may be a sign of a positive work climate on the one hand, but may also be due to the nature of the work performed perceived by the surveyed employees of one production company.

The characteristics of (non)conformists are enriched by the findings of the author's own research concerning their coping with stress. In general, the result no indicates a tendency to use specific styles and strategies for dealing with stress, taking into account the personality variable of conformism–nonconformism. This research has not confirmed the analysis so far of the tendency of nonconformists to prefer a style of coping with stress to a task, and of conformists to avoidance and emotions (Bernacka et al., 2016, 2017, 2018). Task-oriented stress management is the dominant style resulting from the drive of nonconformist emotional and motivational energy, which stimulates, directs and organizes human activity in order to achieve the set goal and cope with the difficulties despite the negative emotions that occur. Nonconformists almost never refrain from acting and do not interrupt it in the face of stress (Bernacka et al., 2016, 2017, 2018).

However, the result of this work indicates that the nonconfomist, especially in situations that are not under his control, gives up efforts to achieve the goal. Nonconformists' application of the Discontinuing Action strategy combined with avoidance and the discrepancy with the presented research results (Bernacka et al., 2016, 2018) may result from the sense of control over the task – greater in the case of an athlete and small in the case of employee occupying positions in belt-system production. An employee with a nonconformist personality may feel the destructive effect of stress when the circumstances of the nature of the task or situation do not allow or inhibit the activation of his activity and a sense of effectiveness in achieving the goal. As a result of a feeling of helplessness, nonconformist will react by ceasing to act.

In light of the above discussion of the results of author's own research, it can be assumed that a nonconformist will proactively deal with situational challenges

in the future (Schwarzer, Taubert, 1999), as his or her personality mechanism directs the cognitive and behavioral system to task-oriented approaches, but in the context of a stimulating and empowering environment in the use of its creative and innovative potential. Otherwise stress can be a factor negatively affecting the employee's potential.

The results of the author's own research can be helpful in a more accurate perception of the specific functioning of (non)conformists in the work environment, but also in other environments: social, school, public. In the cognitive sense, they may be a guideline for determining further directions of research, taking into account a wider list of subject variables, a larger number of respondents, various specificity of the work environment. The obtained knowledge can be used in various projects in the field of work psychology, personality, individual differences or emotions.

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STRESZCZENIE

W artykule omówiono zagadnienie nonkonformizmu jako osobowościowego potencjału pracowników do zachowań innowacyjnych w kontekście radzenia sobie ze stresem. Polska należy do krajów europejskich z najwyższym procentem zestresowanych pracowników. Destrukcyjny stres może zniszczyć potencjał pracowników w miejscu pracy. Głównym celem badawczym było sprawdzenie, czy pracownicy nonkonformistyczni różnią się od konformistycznych pod względem sposobów radzenia sobie ze stresem. Przeanalizowano wyniki 100 pracowników w wieku 25–48 lat. W badaniach zastosowano Kwestionariusz Twórczego Zachowania (KANH III) oraz Wielowymiarowy Inwentarz do Pomiaru Radzenia Sobie ze Stresem (COPE). Wyniki analiz statystycznych pozwalają na sformułowanie wniosku, że w grupie pracowników zatrudnionych przy taśmie produkcyjnej przeważają konformiści. Nie wystąpiły istotne związki między wymiarem konformizm – nonkonformizm a stylami radzenia sobie z stresem ani istotne różnice w stylach i strategiach radzenia sobie ze stresem między pracownikami konformistycznymi i nonkonformistycznymi. Nonkonformiści tylko w jednej strategii radzenia sobie ze stresem różnili się od konformistów, stosowali strategię przerywania działania.

Słowa kluczowe: nonkonformista; konformista; radzenie sobie ze stresem; pracownik