



Travel well, road warriors: Assessing business travelers' stressors



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify stressors related to business traveling. Business travel stress embraces situational, emotional, and physical conditions that restrain personal needs and work expectations. The findings from this study recognize six factors of travel stress: travel arrangements, hotel/airline preferences, travel inconvenience, difficulty maintaining a healthy lifestyle, destination concerns, and work/personal life. This study investigates how personal stress, work stress, and health behavior influence business travelers differently in terms of various travel stressors.

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1. Introduction

Continuous work demand, constant packing, sleeping on planes, and waiting for lost luggage: business travelers are often confronted with challenging conditions on the road, which in turn, increase their stress level. According to the Global Business Travel Association, the definition of a business trip is “travel for a business purpose that includes an overnight stay or where you traveled 50 miles or more” (Global Business Travel Association, 2016). On average, international business travelers are away 12 nights per trip, while domestic business travelers are away four nights per trip (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Frequent business travelers and those who have longer stays at travel destinations often feel traveling is a hassle and less enjoyable than not traveling (Business Travel News, 2011). As such, business travelers' stress and exhaustion may cause a variety of psychological and physical reactions (Burkholder, Joines, Cunningham-Hill, & Xu, 2010; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). Previous research indicated that frequent business travelers reported several red flags regarding their health issues such as sleep deprivation, jet-lag, deep vein thrombosis, frequent alcohol consumption during traveling, high blood pressure, back pain, migraine headache, high risk of cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and feelings of detachment from family or friends (Cohen & Gössling, 2015; Richards & Rundle, 2011). Further, recent terrorist attacks during transit and at destinations raise concerns of security and safety for travelers, which may increase travelers' anxiety and stress level (Naples, 2016). To be sure, travel stress has a tremendous negative impact on business travelers' well-being and mental health, causes

several chronic diseases, and decreases productivity and job satisfaction in the long term (Burkholder et al., 2010).

Few studies in the field of work environment and mobility have proposed possible stressors related to business travel. To that extent, the factors involved in business travelers' stress still lack a conclusive viewpoint. Thus, the purpose of this research note is to identify stressors related to business traveling and how these stressors are related to personal stress, work stress, and their health behavior. Ultimately, this research could spark discussions that address business travelers' health issues and enrich the literature of corporate travel management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Travel-related stress

Past stress-related theories have scrutinized a transactional process between an individual and the environment, and extensively investigated how people handle stress when they confront various demanding situations, challenges, or threatening occurrences (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Lazarus, 1990; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus (1990) stated personal attributes (e.g., values, beliefs, and personality) and environmental factors (e.g., recourses, life events, and constraints) are two major antecedents that elicit a series of appraisal and coping process, as well as generate psychological and physical responses. Thus, stress can be viewed as a post-appraisal state and a subjective reaction that counters stress stimuli (Lazarus, 1990; Miller & McCool, 2003). The theory of stress has been widely used to measure personal perceived stress, work stress, work-family conflict, and vacation stress (Cohen et al., 1983; Jensen, 2014; Westman, 2004; Zehrer & Crotts, 2012). Several studies in the field of leisure and recreation travel have developed a conceptual framework based upon transactional stress

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theory in addition to discussing different leisure activities and situations that may increase travelers' level of stress (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000; Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster, Hammit & Moore, 2006; Zehrer & Crotts, 2012). In a recreational setting, travelers may experience irritating and frustrating situations that cause unpleasant travel experiences and unexpected hassles. For instance, traffic jams, crowds, sickness during the trip, tedious travel arrangements, or unanticipated changes in travel plans, can all potentially increase travelers' emotional and physical challenges and produce stress (Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster et al., 2006). Zehrer and Crotts (2012) developed a vacation stress model and indicated several travel stressors. In their study, they identified pre-trip stressors (seeking information, making travel arrangements, and developing an itinerary), travel stressors (logistics, commuting, weather, health, and safety issues), and destination stressors (experiences and issues occurred at the destination) as three main dimensions of vacation stress.

Similarly to leisure travelers' stress, business travelers may undergo various types of stress during different travel phases: pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip (DeFrank et al., 2000; Ivancevich, Konopaske, & DeFrank, 2003). However, since leisure and business travelers have differing reasons for their travels, they may be confronted with dissimilar travel stressors. In a business travel setting, the stressors associated with the pre-trip phase mainly emphasize travel arrangements, such as planning the trip and delegating work (Carlson Wagonlit Travel, 2012; DeFrank et al., 2000; Ivancevich et al., 2003). When business travelers are on the road, unexpected incidents (e.g., flight delay or cancellation and lost luggage), health concerns, long working hours, and travel logistics become major stressors (Gustafson, 2014; Striker et al., 1999). Moreover, business travelers still retain stress even when they return from the trip; they may have a more demanding workload, deal with paperwork and reports, or resume family responsibilities (DeFrank et al., 2000; Ivancevich et al., 2003; Striker et al., 1999; Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008). In summary, business travel stress embraces situational, emotional, and physical conditions that restrain personal needs and work expectations.

Additionally, travel-related stressors are also associated with individuals' travel frequency and intensity of stressful encounters (Schuster et al., 2006). Compared to leisure travelers, business travelers experience a higher intensity of travel activities, as well as a combination of personal and work stress. However, since traveling is a part of work, business travelers' stress levels may be offset by rationalizing and adjusting their behavior, which leads to business travel normalization (Gustafson, 2014). In short, business travelers may experience different stressful encounters than leisure travelers and know how to develop their own strategies to normalize travel-related stress. This indicates that business travelers may reveal a different facet of handling travel-related stressors. Therefore, although previous studies have addressed leisure travelers' stress, it is necessary to identify various dimensions of business travelers' stressors.

2.2. Business travelers' health condition and behavior

Previous research in the field of occupational health and travel medicine has investigated travelers' health condition, disease risk factors, and travelers' well-being (Burkholder et al., 2010; Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2011; Richards & Rundle, 2011; Rogers & Reilly, 2002; Smith & Leggat, 2010; Striker et al., 1999). Business travelers often undergo both physical and psychological problems due to sleep disruption, a lack of nutritional intake, and illness from climatic changes (Rogers & Reilly, 2002). Additionally, jet lag, diarrhea, weight loss or gain, backaches, and headaches are common physical symptoms that interact with travelers' exhaustion and stress, which deteriorate travelers' wellness (Burkholder et al., 2010). Aside from the physical issues, business travelers also hold job strains and work demands during their trips. Research indicates that intensive work demands are associated with people's poor health behavior such as eating unhealthy food, less

exercise, increased cigarette smoking, and increased alcohol consumption (Ng & Jeffery, 2003; Siegrist & Rödel, 2006). Therefore, business travelers may expose themselves with considerable health risks.

Since business trips often consist of inflexible itineraries and intensive meeting schedules, it is difficult for business travelers to maintain a regular exercise routine, choose a healthy diet, and get enough rest. Business travelers may have different ways that intend to reduce the health risks and retain healthy behavior on the road. For instance, some business travelers have medical examination, take immunizations, or seek medical advice before the trip (Richards & Rundle, 2011; Rogers & Reilly, 2002). Some travelers may try to limit high carbohydrate and sugar intake, take supplements or vitamins, and use gymnasium or spa facilities at the travel destination (Burkholder et al., 2010). As such, pre-trip arrangement, choices of hotel facilities, and activities at the destination could be associated with travelers' health concerns and their health conscientiousness on the road.

3. Methodology

The study employed a self-report questionnaire to obtain business travelers' perspectives of their stress related to business trips, work, and personal perceived stress. In addition, information regarding business travelers' health condition, health behavior, and demographic information was included in the questionnaire. In terms of measurement items, an assessment of Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OBI) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983) were utilized to measure business travelers' work and personal stress. There were 11 measurement items related to travelers' health conditions (HC) during business trips, such as how often the business travelers have experienced insomnia, migraine headaches, diarrhea, and other symptoms during their business trips. Moreover, a total of 7 measurement items was related to business travelers' health behavior (HB), such as "I exercise regularly" and "I limit my food intake such sugar, fat, carbohydrates". These items were adapted from Bruni and Steffen (1997), Burkholder et al. (2010), McIntosh, Swanson, Power, Raeside, and Dempster (1998), and Rogers and Reilly (2002). The mean scores of OBI, PSS, and HB were calculated to evaluate those relationships with participants' travel stress.

Since there were no generalized measures or a consensus of travel stress from previous studies, the current study synthesized 35 measurement items from the literature to assess participants' travel stress. These 35 measurements were characterized into five dimensions: travel arrangements (e.g., transportation reservations), travel incidents (e.g., flight delay or lost baggage), concerns of personal health (e.g., unable to maintain healthy lifestyle), workload (e.g., long working hours at destination), and personal life (unmet familial responsibility). Due to a lack of research that investigates the relationships among business travelers' travel-related stress, work stress, personal stress, and their health behavior, it is critical to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurements in this study. Researchers suggest that an exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) approach, which integrates exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), is the preferable method in an exploratory research with a priori assumption of factor structure because it overcomes the limitations of a two-step approach (EFA followed by CFA, see the discussions in Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009; Marsh, Morin, Parker, & Kaur, 2014; Trépanier, Fernet, Austin, & Ménard, 2015). Thus, the current study applied ESEM in the data analysis to evaluate inter-relationships among the variables. Based upon the transactional theory of stress, travel-related stress served as an endogenous latent variable. Work stress, personal stress, and health behavior served as exogenous and observed variables in this study. The criteria of factor loading is to accept values larger than 0.3 (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2009).

The target population was travelers who have traveled for a business purpose in the past 30 days. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, which is an online participant recruitment platform

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