



# Coping style development: The role of learning goal orientation and metacognitive awareness



Roos Delahajj<sup>a,\*</sup>, Karen van Dam<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Human Behaviour and Organisational Innovations, Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), P.O. Box 23, 3769 DE Soesterberg, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Open University, Valkenburgerweg 177, 6419 AT Heerlen, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 13 July 2015

Received in revised form 23 October 2015

Accepted 7 December 2015

Available online 23 December 2015

### Keywords:

Coping style

Development

Learning goal orientation

Metacognitive awareness

Military

## ABSTRACT

Professionals in high-risk organizations, such as the military, need to develop effective coping styles in order to deal with dangerous and stressful situations. Although most of these organizations already offer programs and interventions aimed at improving employees' coping styles, there is still little research on the predictors of coping style development. This two-wave study examined how goal orientation and metacognitive awareness contribute to coping style development during basic military training. Participants were 235 Dutch military recruits who completed a questionnaire before and after basic training. The results showed that participants with a strong learning goal orientation developed more effective (i.e. more problem-focused coping and less emotion-focused coping) coping styles, and that this effect was mediated by metacognitive awareness. Together, the findings yield theoretical as well as practical implications for organizations that aim to enhance effective coping styles in professionals in high-risk jobs.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Coping style is an important predictor of professionals' ability to deal with difficult and stressful work situations (e.g., Ptacek, Pierce, & Thompson, 2006). Especially in high-risk professions, such as the military and police, professionals should develop coping styles that enable them to deal with threatening and violent situations. Coping style refers to individuals' habitual way of coping (Carver & Scheier, 1994), and derives from the model of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and his colleagues (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that defines coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts people exert to ameliorate the negative consequences of stressful events. Coping style has been shown to affect actual coping behavior in a range of specific situations (Carver & Scheier, 1994; Ptacek et al., 2006). Moreover, research (Ippolito, Adler, Thomas, Brett & Hölzl, 2005; Luria & Torjman, 2009) indicates that effective coping contributes to employee performance and health. Indeed, in the context of the job demands-resources model, several studies have shown coping to be an important buffer between job demands and burn-out (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Especially for high-risk jobs, developing effective coping styles is of utmost importance. Organizations such as the military, police-force and aviation, already train their personnel to cope more effectively

with stressful situations, for example through basic training, socialization programs, and stress management interventions (Boermans, Delahajj, Korteling, & Euwema, 2012). Despite the importance of coping style development for organizational and employee outcomes, research of coping style development in professionals is scarce. Previous studies have either focused on coping style development during childhood and adolescence (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007), or have investigated how a life-changing event, such as contracting a potentially fatal illness, impacts coping style development (Reeves, Merriam, & Courtenay, 1999). Consequently, there is little scientific evidence to substantiate practical interventions in high-risk organizations.

The goal of the present, two-wave study was to address this issue by investigating coping style development during basic military training. More specifically, this study aimed to establish how recruits' cognitive characteristics, i.e. learning goal orientation and meta-cognition, contribute to coping style changes during training. These variables have shown relevance for learning processes in previous research on learning, motivation and self-regulation (Ford, Smith, Weissbein, Gully, & Salas, 1998). As such, this study contributes to insights into coping and coping style development, and the role of person characteristics in learning processes. Moreover, the present study has relevance for high-risk organizations, such as the military, whose employees are highly likely to encounter difficult and stressful work environments, and therefore provide training aimed at developing employees' coping styles. The present study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the processes and outcomes of these trainings.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [roos.delahajj@tno.nl](mailto:roos.delahajj@tno.nl) (R. Delahajj), [karen.vandam@ou.nl](mailto:karen.vandam@ou.nl) (K. van Dam).

### 1.1. Coping style development

Professionals' habitual way of coping (i.e. their coping style) largely affects how they respond to stressful work situations (Delahajj, Van Dam, Gaillard, & Soeters, 2011). Coping style should be distinguished from coping behavior (Carver & Scheier, 1994; Ptacek et al., 2006). Whereas coping behavior refers to individuals' actual strategy in a specific situation, coping style reflects individuals' more stable and consistent application of coping strategies over time and across situations. As such, the development and training of a specific coping style are considered to have long-term consequences (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), coping arises from the individual's appraisal of a demanding situation, and the available resources to meet this situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguish two relevant ways of coping that people use in stressful situations, should be ; or : problem-focused coping, which is aimed at managing the stressor, and emotion-focused coping, which is aimed at managing the emotional distress that results from the stressor. Extant evidence indicates that problem-focused coping can indeed reduce the negative effects of stressful circumstances on health and performance, especially when the situation is controllable (e.g. Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003; Gilbar, Ben-Zur, & Lubin, 2010). The findings for emotional coping are mixed; whereas stressful situations will elicit negative emotions, efforts to deal with these emotions might interfere with constructive coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Emotion-focused coping appears to be more effective when the situation is uncontrollable, and the problem cannot be solved (Semmer, 2003). New insights suggest that it might be important to build a repertoire of coping strategies, and develop flexibility in applying these strategies in response to situational demands (Cheng, 2001). Within the military, however, soldiers are expected to control the situation they encounter, and therefore the focus in basic training is on enhancing a problem-focused coping style (Ippolito, Adler, Thomas, Brett, & Hölzl, 2005).

Research indicates that two factors might affect coping style development, should be : or ; the social environment (also referred to as the socialization of coping), and experiences with stressful situations (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). These factors are important elements of basic military training, where recruits learn the military's values, expected behaviors and social knowledge (Dolan & Ender, 2008), and are trained to cope in a problem-focused way and refrain from using emotion-focused coping strategies that might disengage them from their task. Davis (2006) found that problem-focused coping style increased, and avoidance-oriented coping style decreased during U.S. Army basic combat training.

### 1.2. Learning goal orientation and coping style development

As coping style development can be considered a learning process, it is likely that person characteristics that are associated with learning, such as learning goal orientation and metacognitive awareness (Moneta & Spada, 2009; Theodosiou & Papaioannou, 2006), contribute to the development of an effective coping style. Learning goal orientation refers to individuals' preference to strive for learning goals in achievement situations (Dweck, 1986), and is generally considered a stable person characteristic (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Individuals with a learning goal orientation have the desire to develop themselves by acquiring new skills, master new situations, and improve their competence (VandeWalle, 1997). They actively seek feedback on past performance, and are more likely to perceive adverse performance feedback as a possibility for growth and mastery (VandeWalle, 2003). Moreover, they use metacognitive and self-regulatory learning strategies that enable them to master new tasks (Ford et al., 1998). Research has convincingly shown that learning goal orientation affects learning and performance in different domains, such as education, sports, and organizations (Payne et al., 2007).

Learning goal orientation has also been associated with coping style. People with a strong learning goal orientation tend to use more problem-focused coping and less emotion-focused coping compared to people with a weak learning goal orientation (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2003), for instance when preparing for an exam (Moneta & Spada, 2009). Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, we expected learning goal orientation to contribute to the development of a more effective coping style.

**Hypothesis 1.** Learning goal orientation is positively related to coping style development (i.e., an increase in problem-focused coping style, and a decrease in emotion-focused coping style).

### 1.3. The mediating role of metacognitive awareness

In the past few years, metacognition has been found an important predictor of learning performance. Schraw and Dennisson (1994, p. 460) define metacognition as 'the ability to reflect upon, understand, and control one's learning'. Learners who are metacognitively aware act more strategically and perform better, because they have insight into their own learning strategies and effectiveness, and plan and monitor their learning to improve performance (Schraw & Dennisson, 1994; Theodosiou & Papaioannou, 2006). Metacognition has been related to learning performance in studies focusing on exam preparation (Bartels & Magun-Jackson, 2009), learning a complex decision-making task (Ford et al., 1998), and physical education (Theodosiou & Papaioannou, 2006).

To our knowledge, the concept of metacognitive awareness has not yet been applied in stress and coping research. Still, the importance of individuals' awareness of their stress responses and coping strategies for regulating coping behavior has been acknowledged since the development of cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders (Meichenbaum, 1985). Metacognitive awareness of stress and coping can be defined as a person characteristic which encompasses insight into one's emotional and physiological reactions and coping behaviors during stressful situations, on the one hand, and the conscious regulation of these reactions and behaviors, on the other hand (Delahajj et al., 2011; Schraw & Dennisson, 1994). People who are metacognitively aware are expected to develop a more effective coping style, because they are able and try to learn more about the effectiveness of different coping strategies from their experiences during stressful situations (in training and work).

Previous research has shown that people with a learning goal orientation are more inclined to use cognitive self-regulated learning strategies, such as metacognitive awareness (see Payne et al., 2007; VandeWalle, 2003). Moreover, research in the educational domain (Bartels & Magun-Jackson, 2009; Ford et al., 1998; Theodosiou & Papaioannou, 2006) suggests that metacognitive awareness is likely to mediate the relationship between learning goal orientation and learning outcomes. This mediating role of metacognition might also apply to coping style development in military training. Because recruits with a learning goal orientation will be more focused on learning, they are likely to apply metacognitions in order to better understand and improve their responses and coping in stressful situations; as a consequence, they will more readily adjust their coping style in response to the training and military environment. As this environment emphasizes the importance of problem-focused coping and discourage the use emotion-focused coping (Davis, 2006), it is expected that recruits with a strong learning orientation will use more metacognitive awareness of their stress and coping responses and will develop accordingly. See Fig. 1 for the research model.

**Hypothesis 2.** Metacognitive awareness mediates the relationship between learning goal orientation and coping style development.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889787>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889787>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)