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2011

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#### Recommended Citation

Kuo, B.C.H. (2011). Cultural variations in work stress and coping in an era of globalization. *Camabridge Handbook of Culture, Organizations, & Work*, 418-441.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/psychologypub/36>

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# Cultural variations in work stress and coping in an era of globalization

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Globalization of businesses is a reality that is defining how people from different nations and cultures work together. Over 63,000 multinational and global corporations and 821,000 foreign subsidiaries employ over 90 million people worldwide. The United Nations estimates that about 175 million people live outside the country of their birth. In addition, there has been a great deal of inter-connectedness of work activities in the form of development of 24/7 call centers and outsourcing of various business processes, etc. The expansion of international trade has grown faster than the growth of even the most rapidly growing economies of Asia and South America (i.e., China, Vietnam, India, Brazil, and Argentina). The internet and various forms of computer-mediated communication are redefining the scope of work in multinational and global organizations that function across across disimilar cultures and national borders.

While this increased level of interconnectedness in the global economy has been expanding the global GDP, it has also ushered in a new era of major restructuring of both work and work organizations. This new era has created stressful experiences for workers including increased pressures to perform as well as *how* to perform in order to meet the demands of the global marketplace. Quick *et al.* (2003) noted that new technologies, coupled with rapid expansion of multinational and global organizations, have created highly competitive and stressful environments leading to transformations in managerial roles, working hours, work-life balance, employee attitudes,

organizational commitment, and the psychological contract (Cooper, 1998) and the organization. Many commentators in reflecting on the quality of work life in this new era have observed that such major restructuring of work and the attendant stressful experiences have not been known since the Industrial Revolution (see *Business Week*, August 21–27, 2007). In many ways, this has led to development of smaller organizations competing for their share of market of the global market and fewer workers doing more hours of work in environments where they feel less secure. In terms of pay and related compensation, the real wages and salaries of workers in the US, which is the largest economy in the world, are barely higher than they were in 2000 (Mandel, 2007). While such wage stagnation is not noted in the emergent economies, there are interesting and disturbing reports regarding the increase of work load, office politics, and competition. In a study of Indian call centers, Skeers (2005) reported a high level of exploitation of workers – the employees were under constant stress because of their workload, competitive pressures, and surveillance. When these call center employees were monitored for the number of calls that they received, the average call time and time between calls, they felt that they were being dehumanized. Close circuit cameras and electronic monitors kept track of the time that workers spent at their desk, the time spent for short breaks, and even the time in the bathroom. Such a situation is not necessarily confined to employees in call centers, professionals and managers of many global organizations are spending longer times on their jobs, face chances of occupational obsolescence, and are continuously watching for opportunities in other organizations located not only in their home countries but in other countries as well. These

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank James C. Quick, James R. Van Scotter, James C. Segovis, and Dianna Stone for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

individuals also report a great deal of conflict with the demands of their non-work lives. New centers for research focusing on the antecedents and consequences of work family conflicts have emerged in the US, Spain, Canada, and other countries in the European Union (EU).

Stress is a stimulus or a series of stimuli that originate in the physical, social, or psychological environment requiring the person to respond and/or adapt. Typically, an individual is able to maintain a healthy and balanced state and function normally in response to stressful encounters in daily lives. However, negative effects of stress emerge when the experienced level of stress exceeds the capacity of the individual and his or her personal and social resources to cope with the stress (McGrath, 1976; Beehr and Bhagat, 1985; Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2003). The level of stress experienced by an individual depends on one's cognitive appraisal of the degree of threat to one's physical or psychosocial well-being and one's beliefs about the likelihood of effectively dealing with the negative consequences of environmental threats (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The interaction of the perception of threat and the perception of control determine the actual experience of stress. The most intense experience of stress occurs when one encounters stimuli perceived as a threat to well-being, particularly when one believes the consequences of the threat cannot be counteracted. The presence of threats, along with perceptions of an inability to control or counteract the threats, elicits high levels of stress in the individual which, in turn, are likely to be associated with psychological strain and resulting influences on valued work outcomes (i.e., job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover, etc.).

Work absorbs the energy and attention of a majority of adults in all industrialized societies. Occupational problems often take their toll in terms of decreased life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976), psychological strain (Jex and Beehr, 1991; Kahn and Byosiene, 1992; Bhagat *et al.*, 1994; Beehr, 1995; Sears, Urizar, and Evans, 2000), lowered mastery and self-esteem (Pearlin *et al.* 1981; Bhagat and Allie, 1989), burnout (Maslach, 1998) and physical outcomes such as ulcers, hypertension, and angina (Gaines

and Jermier, 1983; Quick *et al.*, 2003; Macik-Frey, Quick and Nelson, 2007).

Individuals experience stress not only in modern complex and globalized societies, but also in agricultural, pre-industrial and developing societies as well. Hooker (2003) noted that cultural patterns as well as various religions evolve in dissimilar ways in order to deal with different kinds of environmental and ecological stressors around the world. Far from being countries which have a monopoly on the ongoing experience of stressful encounters, the US and other industrialized countries in the G-8 network have enjoyed one of the least stressful environments in the world. The kinds of stressors that Americans and other members of the industrialized world experience tend to differ from those of the developing world (Hooker, 2003). The environment is basically stable and predictable in these national and cultural contexts (Triandis, 1994). In contrast to the stability of the western world with its day-in day-out hassles of daily life (e.g., a traffic jam on the way to work), there are areas of the world where there are frequent power outages, the transportation system is highly unreliable, and medical services are inadequate or even lacking. The food and water supplies may also be inadequate or contaminated, and the economy is often paralyzed by hyperinflation and bouts of massive unemployment. The national government may be in a constant state of crisis, corruption rules the bureaucratic processes, and terrorist acts are rather frequent. Hooker (2003) explained that these experiences are inherently stressful to the members of these countries.

Workers in developing countries may have problems adapting to new stressors or face exploitation. Chadhoury (2004) discussed the Oxfam report, based on the experiences of workers in twelve countries – Bangladesh, Chile, China, Colombia, Honduras, Kenya, Morocco, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Thailand, the UK, and the US – which found that large western retail companies have benefited from the globalization of production in developing countries to the detriment of workers, especially women. For example, in China, there are reports of forced labor, violations of shop floor standards, corporal punishment and physical assaults, violations of the right to work,

and violations of occupational safety and health (Chan, 2001).

As we examine the stress phenomenon in the era of globalization, we believe that research on work stress has to go beyond the issues addressed by Kahn and Byosiere (1992) in the *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. They recommended that organizational stress researchers should focus on the nature of context in which stress responses occur along with the consequences for the individual. The nature of the context we need to consider concerns country and culture-specific variations in work stress, coping and well-being. Compared to the large and systematic body of research that evolved since the classic work of Kahn and his colleagues (Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Kahn, 1973; Kahn, 1981), investigations that incorporate the role of international and cultural variations on work stress and coping have yet to reach a state of maturity. At the time of writing this chapter, it remains unclear how relevant the existing western conceptual frameworks, theories, and findings research are in non-western contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to provide:

1. a historical perspective on international and cultural variations on organizational stress with special attention to the role of coping strategies;
2. a theoretical framework on stress and coping with a cultural perspective;
3. an examination of the role of employee assistance programs (EAPs) and other organizational interventions for managing the deleterious effects of the new kinds of stresses in the era of a global economy; and
4. future research implications.

### **Historical perspective on international and cross-cultural stress research**

Work stress has been an important domain of sustained research over the past four decades. There have been a number of theoretical frameworks concerning the antecedents and consequences of experienced stress (Beehr, 1995). With the exception of the work reviewed in Wong and Wong (2006),

all of the dominant theories have been created by researchers from individualistic nations of the world (see McGrath, 1976; Beehr and Bhagat, 1985; Beehr, 1995; Cooper, 1998; Cooper *et al.*, 2001, Quick and Tetrick, 2003). For example, three prominent models that have driven stress research include: the person-environment fit theory (stress arises from a misfit between the person and environment) (French, Rogers, and Cobb, 1974), Karasek's (1979) demand-control-support model (stress is a response to the demands of work and one's control over those demands), House's (1981) framework of occupational stress (experienced stress reflects the total process including environmental sources of stress, perceptions of stress, and responses to stress). Additional prominent frameworks include Beehr and Bhagat's (1985) uncertainty theory of occupational stress (stress is multiplicative function of perceived uncertainty of obtaining outcomes, perceived importance of these outcomes, and duration of the perceived uncertainties), and Edwards, Caplan, and Van Harrison's (1998) more rigorous approach to person-environment fit theory (French, Rodgers, and Cobb, 1974). While these frameworks have been useful in explaining the phenomenon of organizational stress in the western Europe, the US, and Canada, they do not take into account the role of cultural variations. Research conducted in the US, UK, Germany, Sweden, France, and Australia – i.e., countries with a strong individualistic orientation (with high emphasis on independent self-construal) do not easily generalize to work organizations in countries with a collectivistic orientation (with high interdependent self-construal) despite the fact 80 percent of the world's population live in countries predominated by collective values (Triandis, 1994). Although there is growing recognition that organizational and occupational stresses affect valued work outcomes in developing nations and emergent economies of the world (Bhagat, Steverson, and Segovis 2007a, 2007b, Quick *et al.*, 2003, Macik-Frey, Quick, and Nelson, 2007), there have seldom been any comprehensive attempts to provide a theoretical framework that explicitly considers the role of cultural variations (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). The work of Bhagat, Steverson, and Segovis (2007a, 2007b) incorporating the role of culture in relation

to employee assistance programs is a notable exception to this trend. Until recently, theories of work stress underestimated the importance of groups and cultures which limit the usefulness of the findings.

In a twenty-one nation study of middle managers, the extent of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role (work) overload was related to national scores on power distance (i.e., the extent inequity is accepted), individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity (Peterson *et al.*, 1995). Interestingly, country characteristics were related more to variations in role stresses than to differences in personal and organizational characteristics. Power distance and collectivism were positively related to role overload and negatively related to role ambiguity (Peterson *et al.*, 1995).

Spector *et al.* (2002) collected data on role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload from middle managers in work organizations in twenty-four nations. The cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance were closely related to these role stressors. Also, they found that these three role stressors varied more as a function of national and cultural variations, compared to personal, demographic, and organizational characteristics.

Perrewé *et al.* (2002) examined the relationship among role stressors (i.e., role ambiguity, role conflict), general self-efficacy (GSE), and burnout in nine countries. Findings supported that GSE had a universally negative association with burnout. Furthermore, in eight of the nine countries, self-efficacy mediated the relationships between role ambiguity and role conflict with burnout (Perrewé *et al.*, 2002).

A study by Spector *et al.* (2004) investigated differences in job stressors among working college students and university support personnel from mainland China, Hong Kong, and the US. Significant differences were found for role ambiguity, role conflict, job autonomy, and interpersonal conflict. Role ambiguity was significantly higher for workers in Hong Kong than those in the China and the US. However, role ambiguity was also significantly higher in the US sample than in the mainland Chinese sample. Both Hong Kong and mainland China were significantly higher than

the US for role conflict, but there was no significant difference between the two Asian countries. Mainland China and the US were significantly higher than Hong Kong for perceived job autonomy. Finally, workers in Hong Kong were found to have the highest level of interpersonal conflict while workers in the US had the lowest level.

Narayanan, Menon, and Spector (1999) explored work stress for female clerical workers in India and the US in a qualitative study. Participants were asked to describe a concrete stressful event that occurred at work. The job stressors Indian workers cited most were lack of structure/clarity, lack of reward and recognition, equipment problems and situational constraints, and interpersonal conflict. In contrast, US workers most commonly reported work overload, lack of control/autonomy, and the perception of time/effort wasting.

In the next section, we discuss cultural perspectives on coping with stress. Because culture functions for a society in the same way as memory functions for an individual (Triandis, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2002), each culture provides culture-specific mechanisms (i.e., buffers and filters). These mechanisms evolve over time; typically they are directed towards coping with stress regardless of whether its origin is rooted in the domain of work or non-work. *Coping* refers to the way individuals try to directly or indirectly manage, change or adapt to the experience of stress through cognitive efforts or action oriented strategies.

### **Cultural perspectives on coping with stress**

While coping with stress is a universal experience shared by individuals from all cultures, the mechanism and process through which stressors are appraised and evaluated, and coping responses are selected vary significantly from culture to culture (Chun, Moos, and Cronkite, 2006; Lam and Zane, 2004; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Conceptually, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) posited that: (1) an individual's internalized values, beliefs, and norms are critical in defining his or her appraisal of stresses and delimiting options of coping responses evoked by the person; and (2) the appropriateness of an

individual's coping response is bounded by his or her cultural norms. However, the extant stress and coping research, generated over the last three decades, has received criticism for being overly "acontextual" and lacking realism (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Somerfield and McCrae, 2000). This includes the fact that empirical efforts to articulate the relationship between culture and coping have been very scarce (Dunahoo *et al.*, 1998; Wong, Wong, and Scott, 2006).

### *Western-based, individualistic assumptions of stress-coping in the extant literature*

To address the specific cultural dimensions associated with the stress and coping process, the broad theoretical context and conceptual assumptions of the stress-coping literature, in which culture-based coping research is embedded, needs to be carefully considered first. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) observed that the emphasis on personal control, personal agency, and direct action within major stress and coping theories reflects an individualism (individualistic?) value orientation in the extant literature. Despite the fact that culture is implicated as a pivotal factor in the stress-coping process based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) original person-environment fit paradigm, subsequent empirical works established in this tradition have not investigated cultural factors adequately (Aldwin, 1994; Wester, Kuo, and Vogel, 2006). Hence, the extant stress-coping research and theories have been criticized for being overly western, European American in perspective (Utsey, Adams, and Borden, 2000; Wong, Wong, and Scott, 2006), with a partisan view toward "rugged individualism" (Hobfoll, 1998; Dunahoo *et al.*, 1998), and action-oriented coping (Phillips and Pearson, 1996).

From this popular perspective, coping is typically subcategorized into problem-focused coping (cognitive efforts to redefine the problem and to select among alternative options and actions, etc.); coping versus emotion-focused coping (cognitive efforts to lessen emotional distress); coping (Parker and Endler, 1996; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978), both of which have been said to organize around the "self" and treat "I" as the central point of reference in stress and coping progress (Hobfoll, 1998). For example, Bhagat *et al.* (1994) explored

organizational stress in seven national contexts (US, India, West Germany, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa). They found that: (1) organizational stress was significantly correlated with experienced strain in all seven countries; (2) decision latitude had an independent effect in all of the seven countries studied; (3) problem-focused coping had significant independent effects in five countries; and (4) emotion-focused coping did not have a moderating effect or an independent effect in any of the seven countries (Bhagat *et al.*, 1994). Later work by Bhagat and his colleagues found that South African managers were more likely to use emotion-focused coping to manage stress and that they differed from managers in the US, who were more likely to use a problem-focused coping style, even when controlling for organizational type and technology (Bhagat *et al.*, 2001).

Findings such as the above have led scholars to question the generalizability of this intrapersonal, and agentic view of coping to fully account for the coping repertoires of persons from relational and collective cultures, such as individuals of Asian (Kuo *et al.*, 2006; Phillips and Pearson, 1996) and African backgrounds (Utsey *et al.*, 2000; Utsey, Brown, and Borden, 2004).

However, there has been a limited, but increasing amount of empirical work within the cross-cultural and the multicultural psychological research that have attempted to identify between-group variability in cultural coping preferences, and to link these differences to meaningful cultural variables (Kuo, Roysircar, and Newby-Clark, 2006). Many of these studies are established outside of industrial and organizational psychology, and stem from research contributions made in social, community, health, clinical and counseling psychology. Thus, the focus of this section is twofold: (1) comprehensively to survey empirical studies and systematically present findings that evidence cultural variations in stress and coping; and (2) subsequently to discuss and consider significant cross-cultural, theoretical constructs that underpin divergence in coping across cultures.

### *Cultural differences in coping*

Cultural differences in coping preferences have been explored cross-culturally as a function of nationality.

Typically, this line of research involves comparing samples from diverse countries on the basis of a coping measure. Taking an etic (culturally-universal) assumption, this approach presumes that while cultural divergence in coping may exist, the underlying dimensions constituting coping can be measured in a similar manner across cultures (see Tweed and DeLongis, 2006; Tweed, White, and Lehman, 2004 for more detail discussions). Operating from this vantage point, a number of international studies have identified significant group differences in coping behaviors among samples of different national groups.

In one study involving adolescents from five countries, Oláh (1995) found youth from European countries, including Hungary, Italy, and Sweden, adopted assimilative, operative, confrontative behaviors when facing stressful circumstances. These coping methods characterize attempts, on the part of European youth, to cope by forcing or modifying the stressor to be in line with what one wishes (e.g., assimilative coping). By contrast, Asian youth from India and Yemen reported a greater use of accommodative, emotion-focused coping when faced with stress. Oláh noted that the use of emotion-focused responses reflect Asians' inclination to adjust oneself to stay in line with the demands of the environmental stressors. Similarly, O'Connor and Shimizu (2002) found that Japanese university students in Japan were significantly more likely to use emotion-focused coping, in terms of escape-avoidance and positive reappraisal, than British students in the UK.

When confronted with social issues (e.g., pollution, discrimination, fear of global war, and community violence), Frydenberg *et al.*, (2001) found that adolescents from North Ireland engaged more frequently in non-productive strategies, such as self-blame, tension reduction, and not coping, as well as, socially oriented strategies, such as seeking friends and social support for help more frequently than did adolescents in Colombia and Australia. Colombian adolescents, on the other hand, engaged in problem solving, spiritual support, social action, professional help-seeking, and worrying in response to the stressors more often than did the other two groups.

National differences in coping can also reflect the sociopolitical environment in which an

individual is immersed and the kind of stressors faced. For example, Frydenberg *et al.* (2003) found clear distinction in the coping patterns of war-torn Palestinian youth that differentiated them from adolescents from Australia, Colombia, and Germany. More specifically, Palestinian youth reported to use more of seeking to belong, investing in close friends, ignoring the problem, not coping at all, seeking professional help, social action, social support, solving the problem, spiritual support, and working hard as ways of dealing with their stress. This group was also least likely to engage in physical recreations to help offset their stress. Australian adolescents, on the other hand, reported to cope more often by seeking relaxing diversion and tension reduction, which included physical recreation. In the case of Palestinian youth, it was apparent that the constant ethno-political conflicts experienced by these young people directly limited the kind of coping options available to them.

### *Ethnic differences in coping*

Even within the same national context, ethnic differences in coping are also evident. A number of multicultural studies have investigated coping's relationship to the psychological well-being and help-seeking behaviors of ethnic minorities. In a study examining coping and help-seeking for personal, interpersonal, and academic stressors among African American and Latino American college students, both groups were found to be similar in considering family and religion to be highly important coping resources to them (Chiang, Hunter, and Yeh, 2004). However, on closer inspection, Latino students were significantly more likely to turn to their parents for help than were African students, whereas African American students considered their involvement in religious activities to be more important in coping with stress than did Latino students. This latter finding was explained by the African-centered worldview which places spirituality and religion in high regard. In a study of first-year college students' responses to personal problems and their help-seeking attitude, African Americans reported less likely than Asian Americans and White Americans to engage in wishful thinking as a coping strategy (Sheu and Sedlacek, 2004).

However, Asian Americans reported a greater use of avoidant coping as compared to their White American and African American counterparts. The authors attributed this avoidance tendency to Asian preference for secondary control – a coping strategy that involves accepting rather than changing one's life circumstances.

Some consistent ethnic differences in coping were also identified across studies with samples representing diverse developmental stages. For instance, in a study of adolescents in Australia conducted by Neill and Proeve (2000), Southeast Asian secondary students were found to endorse "reference to others" as a coping resource more so than did their European counterparts. This other-centered coping preference was observed in Wong and Reker's (1985) study of older adults in Canada. When older adults were asked about the ways they respond to stress arising from aging, Chinese older adults reported to access more external help from others (i.e., families, friends, experts and God) and to use more "palliative strategies" (i.e., modifying their reaction towards the stressor) than their Caucasian counterparts. A similar preference was indicated in Yeh and Wang's (2000) study of Asian American college and graduate students. The investigators found that, instead of seeking professional help, Asian participants coped with psychological problems by keeping the issues within the family, seeking help from families, friends, and social groups, and engaging in social and familial activities. Overall, these studies point to common, shared predispositions among Asians for non-directive coping (e.g., avoidance) and collective or relational coping.

Research on similarities as well as differences in coping among ethnic subgroups has also revealed distinctive cultural coping patterns across groups. In a study by Yeh and Inose (2002), Chinese, Korean, and Japanese immigrant youth in the US were interviewed to explore their coping with cultural adjustment difficulties. The results indicated that Korean youth utilized religious coping more than Chinese and Japanese. On the other hand, Japanese youth utilized more social support than did the other two groups. Finally, both Korean and Japanese youth endorsed creative activities as a way of coping more often than did Chinese

youth. In yet another study on Asian Americans, Yeh and Wang (2000) compared the ways in which undergraduate and graduate students in the US of Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Filipino descents coped with mental health problems. Collectively as Asians, the participants generally reported similar coping resources and methods, but the relative importance assigned to the various coping strategies differed significantly across the four groups. Koreans were particularly distinct from the other Asian groups; they relied more heavily on coping through accessing religious sources and they also engaged in more negative coping through substance use.

Cultural variations on stress and the coping process indicate the existence of an intricate relationship between culture and stress responses. The findings in this area call for meaningful conceptualizations and robust interpretations of how and why individuals of dissimilar cultural backgrounds select and employ different coping styles (Lam and Zane, 2004; Kuo *et al.*, 2006). Research suggests the presence of deep-level and ingrained dimensions of cultural variations that selectively predispose individuals towards preferring one style of coping over another. The search for culture-based explanations of stress and coping closely reflects recent developments in cross-cultural psychology research. Smith, Bond and Kagitcibasi (2006), for example, emphasize the need to "unpack culture" by discerning and applying valid cultural constructs (i.e., individualism-collectivism, one's view of the world to include global mindset, associative versus abstractive modes of thinking, etc.) in order to gain better insights. Several recent empirical studies (e.g., Kuo *et al.*, 2006; Tweed, White, and Lehman, 2004; Yeh, Arora, and Wu, 2006) and comprehensive summaries in Wong and Wong (2006) echo the same concerns. It is important for us to ask the question: "What are the cultural dimensions along which individuals and groups vary in their coping strategies and preferences?" To address this issue adequately, we present empirical evidence and interpretation related to the role of coping in situations involving self-construal, acculturation, and collectivism-individualism. Subsequently, we consider their implications for future research on stress and coping in work organizations.

### *Coping and interdependent versus independent self-construal*

Individuals' self definition, in terms of independence and interdependence, has been shown to vary across cultural groups and to influence a person's cognitions, emotions, and motivations (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). The independent selfhood is characterized by qualities of individualism, autonomy, self sufficiency, and self containment, and the reference point is one's internal thoughts, feelings, and actions (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). The interdependent selfhood, on the other hand, is represented by qualities of collectivism, relatedness, and social connection, and the point of reference is others' reactions and responses. Some attempts have been made to extend the theory of self construals to cross-cultural and cultural coping research. The outcomes of these studies appear to support the independent-interdependent self construals as a valuable and promising cultural framework to conceptualize cultural variations in coping (e.g., Cross, 1995; Lam and Zane, 2004).

Earlier work by Cross (1995) found that more independent East Asian students in the US were more likely to cope with direct attempts and plans to deal with their adjustment stress than less independent East Asian students. These direct coping approaches, in turn, helped East Asian students in reducing their perception of stress levels. On the contrast, East Asian students who were more interdependent were found to report more adjustment stress, and their interdependence was not related to the use of direct coping. However, adopting a culture-based measure that distinguished and assessed coping in terms of collective, avoidance, and engagement coping, Kuo and Gingrich (2004) revealed differential relationships between self-construals and the three types of coping in a sample of Asian and Caucasian Canadian undergraduate students. Regardless of ethnicity, more independent students were more likely to adopt engagement coping only (conceptually aligned with the problem-focused coping) for stress that arose from interpersonal conflict. More interdependent students were found to use all three types of coping, including collective and avoidant strategies for the same interpersonal

stress scenario. The study further demonstrated that an interdependent tendency also affects individuals' stress appraisal process. More interdependent participants regarded the interpersonal conflict scenario presented in the study to be more stressful than did less interdependent participants.

Adopting a control-based model of coping, Lam and Zane (2004) tested the mediating effect of self-construals between ethnicity and preference for primary versus secondary control coping strategies among Asian American and White American college students. The result showed that interdependent self-construal partially mediated the ethnic effect on secondary control among Asian Americans. In another words, in responding to scenarios of interpersonal stress Asian Americans appeared to use more secondary control, that involves modifying one's thoughts and feelings to accommodate the external stressor. The authors linked this effect to Asian Americans' cultural values on social dependence and connectedness. By contrast, independent self-construal fully mediated the ethnic effect on primary control among White Americans. That is, White Americans showed a clear preference for primary control, which entails modifying the environment to fit the person's needs. Lam and Zane attributed this finding to western cultural values on autonomy and mastery of the environment.

Similar coping patterns were identified in Tweed, White and Lehmann's (2004) study of Japanese, Asian Canadians and European Canadians. The study utilized a combined etic-emic approach that integrated items from the ways of coping checklist (etic) and a number of Japanese-specific coping items (emic) to assess coping in terms of "externally targeted control" (altering or modifying the environment) versus. "internally targeted control" (modifying oneself to meet the environmental demand). The study hypothesized that each of these controls would correspond to collectivism-oriented individuals (i.e., East Asians) versus individualism-oriented individuals (i.e., European Canadians), respectively. The results supported the predictions that Japanese and other Asian respondents used more internally targeted coping strategies (e.g., accepting responsibilities, waiting things out, using self-control), whereas Euro-Canadians used more

externally targeted coping strategies (e.g., confrontation). The authors contended that changes within oneself as a method of coping is more prevalent among Japanese and Asian Canadians because of interdependent self orientation, and the Buddhist and the Taoist beliefs.

Collectively, these studies extend previous understanding of the effect of self-construals on various aspects of psychological phenomena (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) to include cross-cultural stress and coping experiences. As such, cultural typology of self serves as a meaningful cultural construct in better understanding the process through which stress appraisal and coping strategy selection occur among individuals of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

### *Coping and acculturation*

By definition, acculturation occurs when two autonomous cultures come into first-hand contact with each other and result in changes with either or both of the groups (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936). According to the theory of acculturation, during cultural transition individuals undergo significant changes in language, behaviors, cognitions, personality, identity, attitudes, psychological well-being, and even in their stress and coping experiences (Berry, 1997; Zheng and Berry, 1991). A limited number of studies on cross-cultural adaptation among immigrants have given clues that cultural variability in coping approaches may be a function of acculturation levels.

Mena, Padilla, and Maldonado' (1987) study of coping mechanisms among four generation groups of immigrant college students in the US showed that the participants' generation status had an effect on the use of coping strategies and the experiences of acculturative stress. For instance, the late immigrant group reported a greater use of active coping methods than individuals from early immigrant and later-generation backgrounds. The second- and third-generation respondents, on the other hand, relied more on social networks as a coping mechanism than the first- and the mixed-generation group. It was assumed that second- and third- generation immigrants, being more acculturated in the US, were afforded with more interpersonal resources

and social networks as their sources of coping. In a Canadian study of cultural adjustment among individuals of varying immigration statuses, Zheng and Berry (1991) found that Chinese sojourners, being the most recent and the least acculturated newcomers to Canada, reported more areas of stresses and problems (e.g., homesickness, loneliness, etc.) than Chinese Canadian students, and European Canadian students. The same group also tended to use more positive coping (e.g., more tension reduction and information-seeking), and less passive coping (e.g., wishful thinking and self-blame) than European Canadian students.

Inferring from these findings, it appears that coping patterns can vary along the dimension of one's acculturation level. In view of these findings, Kuo, Roysircar, and Newby-Clark (2006) postulated that the relationship between generational/immigrant status and preferred coping approaches might actually be mediated by degrees of acculturation. To verify this relationship, three cohorts of Chinese adolescents in Canada, including Chinese Canadians, late-entry Chinese immigrants, and Chinese sojourners, were assessed and compared based on measures of culture-based coping and acculturation (Kuo *et al.*, 2006). Consistent with the authors' predictions, there were significant group differences in acculturation and coping patterns across the three cohort groups. In particular, Chinese adolescents in the less acculturated cohorts (e.g., Chinese sojourners) preferred more collective coping and avoidance coping methods in managing their acculturative stresses than those belonged to more acculturated cohorts (e.g., Chinese Canadians). The authors suggested that less acculturated immigrant adolescents might also adhere more strongly to traditional Asian values of collectivism and interpersonal harmony. As such, collective and avoidance (e.g., not rocking the boat) coping behaviors were favored by these adolescents.

These preliminary findings suggest that acculturation might be a critical factor in discerning cultural variations in coping, particularly among ethnic minorities and immigrants. Nonetheless, the conclusion on the interaction between acculturation and coping is quite tentative. It awaits further substantiation by additional conceptual development and empirical investigation.

### *Coping and individualism versus collectivism*

One's tendency to construe one's 'self' either in the independent or interdependent mode is essentially shaped by the predominance of individualism vs. collectivism in one's culture (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001). As we have seen earlier, western, individualistic values and assumptions have guided research in this area for a long time. Recently, however, the cultural variation of collectivism has been receiving increased research attention focused on the intricate interplay between culture and coping strategies in a number of Asian samples (see Kuo *et al.*, 2006; Yeh and Wang, 2000, Wong and Wong, 2006). Research involving African and African American samples are also on the rise (Utsey, Adams, and Borden, 2000; Utsey, Brown and Borden, 2004). These studies are concerned with articulating the role of 'collective coping' in these predominantly collectivistic samples.

The importance of coping by relying on relational and collectivistic values has been found in a study involving Chinese working parents in Hong Kong (Shek and Cheung, 1990). The results supported a clear distinction between two types of coping among the Hong Kong Chinese: "reliance on the self" versus "seeking help from others." Soliciting assistance from others (i.e., one's spouse, friends, parents, in-laws, relatives, supervisors, professionals, and even fortune-tellers) reflect different facets of coping. In a similar vein, later research on various subgroups of Asians lend further credence for the thesis that Asians have strong preferences for an ingroup-based coping style (Neill and Proeve, 2000; Yeh *et al.*, 2001). Termed as 'collective coping' (Kuo *et al.*, 2006; Yeh and Wang, 2002), it highlights that collectivists tend to cope by engaging others who are strongly connected in their social network.

Such emphasis on collective-coping has also been observed in Africo-centric frameworks. For example, Utsey and his associates found that community-based as well as spiritually-oriented approaches in dealing with stress are more frequently used by individuals of African descent (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000; Utsey, Brown, and Bolden, 2004). It is known that Africo-centric

worldview places a strong emphasis on spirituality, affect sensitivity, expressive communication, and harmony with nature and temporal rhythms, and time as a social phenomenon. In addition, interpersonal orientation, multifaceted perception, and the tendency towards optimistic versus pessimistic orientations are also emphasized (Belgrave *et al.*, 1997).

In a related vein, Utsey, Adams, and Bolden (2000) identified four types of coping behaviors (that are essentially culture-specific or emic in character) in people of African descent. These coping behaviors were carefully derived from data collected by using a culturally sensitive scale, called the Africultural coping systems inventory (ACSI). The first factor, termed *cognitive/emotional debriefing* style, represents adaptive reactions to environmental stressors by *detaching* oneself from the stressors and focusing on the positive aspects of the situation or event. The authors asserted that this type of coping has probably evolved out of centuries of racial oppression. The second coping style, termed the *spiritual-centered* factor, represents strategies being utilized to maintain an individual's sense of harmony with the universe. The third coping style, the *collective* factor, entails efforts to seek resolution and comfort through the social support of members of one's own in-group and others in the community. The fourth coping style, the *ritual-centered* factor, highlights the importance of engaging in spiritual rituals (e.g., lighting candles or burning incense) that are rooted in African societies. A later study involving the ACSI further supported the existence of these four coping styles for African Americans (Utsey, Brown, and Borden, 2004). These studies were conducted without an individualistic bias and it clearly informs us that in-group norms and other collectivistic values, spiritual rituals and practices are of profound significance in these cultural groups.

Kuo *et al.*'s (2006) study probed into the structure of coping among Asian samples by utilizing the cross-cultural coping scale (CCCS). The study found that collective coping, which is rooted in "ingroup" focused strategies, interpersonal and social resources located in one's immediate collective, is quite different from the problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies that have

guided research since the work of Lazarus and his associates in the early 1980s. Validated across three samples of Asians and Caucasians in the US and Canada, the CCCS supported the importance of collective coping along with avoidance and engagement modes of coping. It was also found that collective coping was preferred more by participants who were high in interdependent mode of self-construal, who were lower in acculturation level in the host country, and who engaged in more conservative religious beliefs and practices.

Yeh and her colleagues have also constructed a collectivism-based model of coping (Yeh *et al.*, 2006). Corresponding to the model is the collectivistic coping scale (the CCS) – a scale that was designed to capture the collective aspects of stress and coping among American ethnic minorities (Yeh *et al.*, 2003). The scale was tested across six studies with diverse samples. The result of factor analysis of the CCS supported a seven-factor model of collectivistic coping which consists of: family support, respect for authority figures, intra-cultural coping, relational universality, forbearance, social activity, and fatalism. The scale was shown to be correlated with measures of collectivism, social support, collective self-esteem, and fusion with others.

Zhang and Long (2006) has examined collective coping within the context of work-related stress among overseas Chinese professionals in Canada. The authors developed and tested an occupational collective coping scale (i.e., the collective coping scale). The authors defined collective coping as coping activities that “function to orient attention to relationship with in-group members and maintenance of interpersonal relationships” (Zhang and Long, 2006, p. 571). More specifically, collective coping encompasses seeking support from one’s in-group, conforming to one’s in-group norm, and using group action to cope. Across three studies on the development of the scale, the factor results pointed to three coping factors: collective, engagement, and disengagement coping. Incidentally, these coping factors were conceptually closely to those identified by Kuo *et al.* (2006) pertaining to non-work related stressors. Zhang and Long further revealed that those participants who identified strongly with Chinese traditional values and beliefs preferred collective coping.

The centrality of collectivism in the coping process among culturally diverse individuals finds additional support from a study focusing on the differential effects of personal, collective, and social identity on coping with mental health problems among native Japanese (Yeh *et al.*, 2001). The authors defined the collective identity as the aspect of the self that is prescribed by the importance of family, ethnic group, community, religion, and language. The salience of collectivistic values was highlighted by Japanese students’ preference for coping with the assistance from their friendship networks, and families and siblings, as opposed to mental health services providers. Moreover, collective identity was found to be a significant positive predictor in determining Japanese students’ tendency to assess help from family as their ways of coping.

Additionally, collective coping was also found to play a critical role in facing serious trauma, grief, and loss among Asian Americans. In a rare qualitative study, Yeh, Inman, Kim, and Okubo (2006) interviewed eleven Asian Americans who had lost family members to the World Trade Center terrorist attack on September 11th 2001. Based on open-ended, structured interviews, the study showed that the coping strategies adopted by these Asian participants in dealing with their tragedies were overrepresented by collective strategies. In fact, six of the eight key coping mechanisms reported by the participants mapped onto the characteristic of collective coping in terms of familial coping, intra-cultural coping, relational universality, forbearance, fatalism, and indigenous healing. The above studies together highlight the significance of collectivism as reflected in the stress and coping process among Asians.

Following on from the broad cultural perspectives on coping with stress described above, a specific conceptual model to guide future research in this area is presented in the next section. This model is adapted from earlier conceptualizations advanced in Bhagat, Steverson, and Segovis (2007a, 2007b).

### **Cross-cultural variations of the stress process: a conceptual model**

Figure 15.1 demonstrates that both work (i.e., organizational) and non-work (i.e., personal

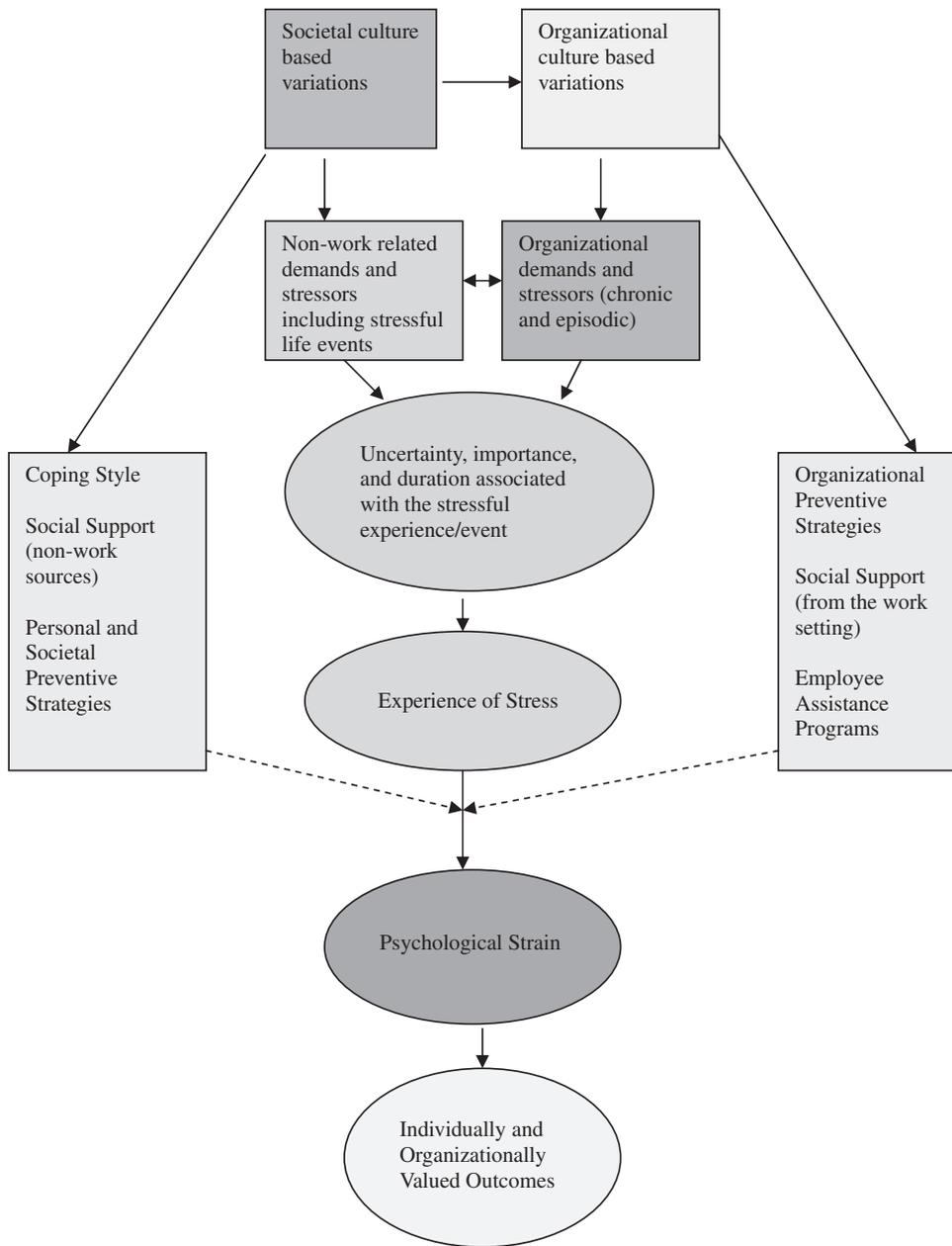


Figure 15.1. A conceptual model of cross-cultural and cross-national variations of the stress and coping process

life related) demands and stressors lead to the possibility of experiencing decision-making or problem-solving situations characterized by different degrees of uncertainties, importance, and duration (Beehr, 1998, 1995, Beehr and Bhagat, 1985). Stress is conceptualized as a multiplicative function of uncertainty, importance, and duration (i.e.,  $S = U_c \times I \times D$ ). This multiplicative function suggests that an individual experiences stress in a situation where: (a) he or she has an important set of outcomes to obtain; (b) there are considerable uncertainties associated with obtaining these valued outcomes; and (c) the length of time associated with resolving the uncertainties (if they can be resolved) is significantly longer than he or she might have the capacity to cope with. Cultural differences come into play in the perception of each of these three components. In cultures that are high in uncertainty avoidance (e.g., Greece, Japan, etc.) individuals are likely to have little propensity to tolerate the situations and hence experience stress. In a similar vein, the importance of the outcomes varies according to whether the culture is relationship-based versus rule-based (Hooker, 2003). Individuals from relationship-based cultures are likely to experience considerable stress when important (not necessarily tangible) interpersonal outcomes (i.e., recognition from supervisor and peers, positive social relationships) that they value are uncertain. On the other hand, individuals in rule-based cultures are likely to be more concerned with calculative exchanges involving tangible outcomes (i.e., pay, promotional opportunities, health related benefits, etc.) and are likely to experience stress when these outcomes are uncertain.

Societal culture-based variations which influence these three components of stress (Beehr and Bhagat, 1985) include individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 1991), short versus long term orientation (Hofstede, 2001) and other variations such as those found in the World Values Survey, Triandis (1994, 1995, 1998, 2002), Trompenaars (1993), Bond (1996) and Chinese Culture Connection (1987). Organizational culture based variations such as process versus results orientation, employee versus job orientation, parochial versus professional orientation, loose

versus tight control (Hofstede, 2001, Hofstede *et al.*, 1990), fragmented versus integrative dimensions (Martin, 1993), etc. influence the kinds of demands (chronic versus episodic) that impinge on the individual. Figure 15.1 also shows that societal culture affects the kind of stressors and stressful encounters that might emerge in the lives of individuals. Not only that, societal culture also influences the nature of organizational values that become salient. Demands from the domains of work and non-work lead to the experience of stress to the extent they are uncertain, important, and of long duration. Examples of demands from the work domain involve working long hours without adequate breaks, dealing with an abrasive supervisor, conflict with co-workers, and inadequate resources such as equipment and supplies needed to perform the job. Examples of non-work related demands are death of or divorce from one's spouse, ongoing conflicts with spouse and children, financial difficulties, geographical relocation, and health issues (see Bhagat *et al.*, 1985 for an empirical study on the significance of total life stress for organizationally valued outcomes).

The response to the experience of stress may be either adaptational or dysfunctional for the individual. The experience of psychological strain is a dysfunctional response that adversely affects the individual in terms of decreased job satisfaction and life satisfaction, increased incidence of depression, alcoholism, suicidal tendencies, and other negative affective outcomes. Organizationally valued outcomes that are affected by the ongoing experience of strain are decreased job performance and satisfaction, lowered morale and commitment to the organization, higher absenteeism and turnover, etc. The model also shows that social support from both work and non-work sources, coping style, availability of employee assistance programs as well personal, organizational, and societal strategies for stress prevention moderate the relationship between the experience of stress and psychological strain (see figure 15.1).

The role of social support is crucial. Individuals experiencing higher levels of social support, whether from supervisors, co-workers or family, experience lower levels of psychological strain including decreased incidences of burnout (Maslach, 1976; Dignam, Barrera, and West, 1986; Leiter, 1990).

Furthermore, effective individual coping skills as well as the availability of well-designed employee assistance programs are helpful in managing the stress (Bhagat, Steverson, and Segovis, 2007a, 2007b). We have discussed the role of coping in ameliorating the effects of stress on psychological strain in an earlier section. It is sufficient to note that cultural variations play a stronger role in determining the type of coping strategy many instinctively prefer as a result of socialization in a given national or cultural context. Next, we discuss the role of employee assistance and other organization-based intervention strategies designed to lower the effects of stressful experiences on psychological strain and individually and organizationally valued outcomes.

### **Role of EAPs and other organizational interventions**

Workplace stress is a global concern. Understanding how culture and nationality may affect employee stress and coping is important for a global society. Interventions to prevent and cope with the effects of stress need to be sensitive to cultural differences. What works with one ethnic group or in one country might not work in another.

Work stress interventions consist of three categories based on western research, and different approaches may be needed in different countries (Liu and Cong, 2005). First, primary intervention requires intervention at the level of stressors (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2003). Efforts to reduce the stressors themselves necessitate understanding context-specific work stressors. Work redesign efforts such as job enrichment (adding tasks or responsibility or authority) and job rotation have the potential to reduce stress but need to take into account the individual's needs, values, and abilities.

Secondary interventions such as stress management training (i.e., relaxation exercises, biofeedback) help employees cope with stressors (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2003). However, some specific techniques might be effective in one type of culture (i.e. individualistic) but not in others (i.e., collectivistic). For example, Liu and Cong (2005)

discussed that assertiveness training to learn to speak up to management might be effective in the low power distance US, while not effective in a high power distance country such as India, where assertiveness with managers might be viewed as inappropriate and as a challenge to managerial authority that would eventually result in increased stress.

Tertiary interventions involve treatment for individuals who are experiencing physical and psychological disorders (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2003). Medical treatment of physical disorders and psychotherapy are examples of tertiary intervention. Medical treatment involves activities such as employee examinations, disability reviews, and urgent medical care. Most organizations are not well equipped to provide extensive or long term care related to stress and must rely on outside health care referrals. Psychotherapy involves activities such as insight-oriented psychotherapy and supportive counseling. In particular, psychotherapy requires competence on the part of the therapist to successfully work with people of different cultural backgrounds (Kuo, and Gingrich, 2004; Kuo *et al.*, 2006). In this context, it should be mentioned that psychotherapy as a technique is not necessarily universally accepted. In fact, there are stigmas associated with the use of psychotherapy and other person-directed techniques in East and South Asian cultures (Chiu and Hong, 2006) as well as in other cultures.

Many western companies offer limited counseling at the workplace or outside referrals through employee assistance programs (EAPs). Managers or the employee themselves can refer or be referred to the EAP. The primary goal of the EAP is to maintain or restore the health and productivity of valuable employees. EAPs are primarily rooted and evolve out of the cultural context of western and vertical individualistic societies (Bhagat *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b). Although they do exist in one form or another in other parts of the world (non-western and collectivistic societies), the state of globalization in the locale, economic realities, and societal and organizational culture-based variations strongly affect their evolution, maintenance, and effectiveness. There are also cultural variations in the propensity to seek mental health related counseling

**Table 15.1 An organizational culture-based matrix of the prevalence of styles of coping, social support mechanisms, and differential emphasis of EAPs**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rule Based</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Relation-ship Based</b></p>	<p><b>Cell 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate emphasis on social support, emotion-focused and problem-focused coping</li> <li>• EAPs are likely to be not as prevalent</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cell 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong emphasis on problem-focused coping</li> <li>• Less emphasis on emotion-focused coping, social support</li> <li>• EAPs are likely to be most prevalent and well organized</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Cell 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong emphasis on social support especially from one's co-workers and ingroup</li> <li>• Strong emphasis on emotion-focused as opposed to problem-focused coping</li> <li>• Virtually no EAPs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cell 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate emphasis on social support from one's work group</li> <li>• Moderate emphasis on emotion-focused and problem-focused coping</li> <li>• EAPs are likely to be infrequent except in organizations in rapidly globalizing regions</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Employee Oriented</b> ←</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↔</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ <b>Job Oriented</b></p>	

(Kuo *et al.*, 2006) and to use EAPs (Bhagat *et al.*, 2007b). In table 15.1 we provide an organizational culture-based matrix of the prevalence of the styles of coping, social support mechanisms, and differential emphases of employee assistance programs based on the work of Bhagat *et al.*, (2007a).

As table 15.1 shows, cell 1 consists of work organizations that are largely employee oriented and also concerned with maintaining harmonious

relationships in the workplace. Such organizations are found in rural areas of countries that are largely untouched by globalization. Small family owned organizations in horizontal or vertical collectivistic cultures (such as rural China, India, Brazil, Mexico, most rural parts of Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, as well as the Israeli kibbutz) are likely to exhibit the tendencies of strong social support and strong

emotion-focused as opposed to problem-focused coping. In Mexico, for example, work relationships, like other relationships in the non-work context, are strongly guided by the cultural tradition of *simpatía* (Diaz-Guerrero, 1967; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, and Betancourt, 1984; Triandis, 1994). People value relationships and seek ways to maintain high degrees of social harmony in work as well as in their personal life. A strong concern for others in the immediate network is also characteristic of many East Asian cultures (Bond, 1996). EAPs are virtually unknown in these work cultures. Workplaces which are characterized by the cultural prototype as depicted in cell 2 are likely to moderately emphasize social support mechanisms, culture-specific (i.e., emic) coping strategies. EAPs in these contexts are likely to be somewhat uncommon. However, work organizations in urban sectors of the emergent economies and rapidly globalizing countries (e.g., South Korea, China, Taiwan, and India) are likely to exhibit these tendencies. Workplaces in cell 3 are found in highly industrialized and information intensive societies like those in the G-8 countries perhaps with the exception of Japan (which is the second largest economy but is highly collectivistic in orientation). The US, Australia, Canada, and a large part of western Europe have organizations whose cultural prototype fit this pattern (i.e. strongly job oriented and rule-based). There are both explicit and subtle messages in the work context that one must deal with stressful situations by adopting a problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping is to be avoided at all costs, especially in the workplace. Sanchez-Burks (2002, 2004) suggests that organizations located in countries such as the US will have a strong preference for putting aside affective and relational concerns away from work. EAPs are likely to be highly institutionalized and often available on a regular basis in this work context. Our research reveals that even in the collectivistic context of Japan (which is one of the G-8 countries) heavy emphasis placed on job and role orientation is also fostering the need for institutionalized EAPs in recent times. When Japan embarked on the path of rapid industrialization and reconstruction after World War II, workplaces at that time did not have

any organized and institutionalized EAPs to assist employees in times of distress. Social support was the primary method of coping with stress in this highly collectivistic East Asian country. Workplaces in cell 4 are job oriented and relationship-based. In these workplaces, there is likely to be a moderate emphasis on social support from one's ingroup as well as a moderate emphasis on problem-focused and emotion-focused styles of coping. There is likely to be an emphasis on the principle of *gunaxi*, that is a sense of interconnectedness with and caring for one's ingroup members (Leung and White, 2004; Hooker, 2003, p. 183). EAPs are likely to be infrequent except in rapidly globalizing regions. Examples of organizations in cell 4 are likely to be found in South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and globalized urban regions of China (i.e., Shanghai, Canton, Beijing, etc.) and India (i.e., Bangalore, Bombay, Chennai, etc.).

### Implications for future research

Although embedded in the research traditions of Europe and North America, the seminal coping model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) has remained uncontested for more than four decades (Wong, Wong and Scott, 2006). The limited scope of western research models necessitate that future researchers utilize multicultural perspectives for the benefit of science and practice. Learning how people in dissimilar cultures experience and cope with stress can enhance our understanding and provide guidance for workplace interventions.

Although some studies have employed measures of coping, most have not dealt with the effectiveness of coping strategies in reducing stress. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found little effectiveness of coping strategies aimed at reducing stress at work although they were effective in reducing stress in interpersonal relationships – in other words, mechanisms for dealing with stress that are idiosyncratically appropriate in one context may be relatively ineffective in another. We identify the following issues that need to be adequately addressed in future theory development and research concerning the role of cultural variations in work stress and coping.

### Issue 1

A theory like transactional theory of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and his associates in the 1960s and then tested in numerous settings in the 1980s and 1990s (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus, 2000; Lazarus, 2003) eschews the notion that the nature of work stresses is not identical across different situations and/or different cultural contexts, nor do such stresses impact individuals with uniform effects. The transactional theory of stress clearly emphasizes the notion that the etiology of work stress as well as strategies directed for coping with work stress must be viewed within a longitudinal and process-oriented perspective. That is, neither the individual nor the work organization, nor the culture in which the work organization is embedded, is solely responsible for the transaction between stress and coping response. To place the emphasis of stress and coping squarely on the individual or on the context (organizational or societal culture-based) alone, fails to adequately account for the intricacies of human stress and cognition in the workplace. The conceptual model presented in this chapter is advanced to focus on the longitudinal process of work stress and coping. To appreciate the process fully, one must examine the unfolding bi-directional transaction interactions between the experienced stress from the environmentally imposed conditions and the individual's response within his or her societal and/or work culture. Such coping can be personal in etiology, i.e., problem-focused coping and other action-oriented strategies that one can creatively and sometimes not so creatively engage in. Also, cultural contexts may provide appropriate social support related mechanisms in the form of informational, affective, structural and instrumental supports. Future research should be directed towards understanding the complex processes that underlie the role of cultural variation in stress and coping.

### Issue 2

Researchers should also focus on developing research instruments that consider the temporal nature and importance of stress. Stress can be acute

or chronic, a one-time event, episodic, or an ongoing phenomenon. Current research instruments do not articulate this temporal differentiation. It is important to capture day-in and day-out stress experiences (e.g., daily hassles) as well as acute stress experiences (e.g., downsizing of company or job loss). Also, the importance of the stressor may vary among individuals and among individuals in different work organizations. Future research instruments should be designed to capture the degree of importance of the stress phenomenon.

### Issue 3

Another area for researchers to focus on is the subjectivity inherent in research instruments. Self-report measures are heavily utilized (e.g., Spector *et al.*, 2002; Bhagat *et al.*, 1994; Bhagat *et al.*, forthcoming) and will continue to be an important method for collecting information on stressful experiences, coping strategies, as well as perceptions of culture specific values inherent in the work and organizational contexts. However, it should be noted that while self-report based data collection generally yields psychometrically valid and reliable data in western contexts, such methods are not valid in countries and cultures where individuals have tendencies toward responding with *acquiescence bias*, i.e., tendency to respond to questionnaire items either passively or by using one end of the attitudinal stem. Arab cultures in the Middle East are particularly known for this bias (Triandis, 1994; Van de Vijver and Leung, 1997) and while item response theories can be employed to correct for some of psychometric errors that creep in, the fact is that we need to move towards more unobtrusive, objective, archival, and creative methods for collecting stress and coping related information from individuals of dissimilar cultures. More emphasis needs to be placed on ethnographic and qualitative modes of data collection in cultures where such methods are likely to yield better insights into the the experience of stress and coping.

### Issue 4

Research in this area should also be concerned with the key themes that lie at the intersection of

theoretical concerns dealing with: (1) technological advances in the work place; (2) virtual work across nations and borders; (3) ageing of the work force in many but not all countries; and (4) the advancement of globalization. Macik-Frey, Quick, and Nelson (2007) discussed the significance of these issues in their review of research on occupational health and psychology. They made important observations which are applicable in improving theoretical rigor and methodological robustness in the area of cultural variations of work stress and coping. Technological advances in the workplace result in improved individual and group productivity, higher levels of organizational effectiveness and better economic growth rates for nations. However, rapid technological changes result in unexpected and potentially problematic outcomes that make it difficult to discern the exact etiology of the stressful experiences of the employees and also the nature of interventions that need to be adopted to adequately address the distressing outcomes of the experiences. The impact of a virtual world where rapid advances in computer-mediated technologies eliminate space and time boundaries and challenge individuals continuously to monitor the pace of their work to keep up with the demands of clients located in different parts of the world both western and non-western. The issues are multi-faceted. Not only are individuals affected but also their spouses and immediate family members might be confronted with stressful health-related problems not previously seen by work stress researchers. Research centers, such as the one dealing with work-family issues located in IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain, are beginning to provide useful insights but the search for knowledge that can be helpful for understanding the basic issues as well as for managing adverse outcomes continues to be outpaced by newer problems rapidly emerging in this era of virtual world and rapidly globalizing economies. The aging of the population in the US, as well as in much of the world, challenges work organizations today and in the future. Not only are people living longer, but they are living healthier lives with the expectation that the average age of workers will continue to increase as older workers strive to remain actively engaged. However, there is some evidence

(Spiezia, 2002) that older workers are exiting the workforce earlier either by choice or force and that this is not always in their best interest economically. There are financial implications for organizations and nations in countries where the percentage of older workers is increasing rapidly. These implications exacerbate stressful thoughts on the part of older workers in pre-retirement years. Important insights need to be gained in this area. While significant in-roads have been made in Scandinavian countries and in the US (research largely sponsored by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health), there is little knowledge in this area from rapidly developing BRIC economies and other emergent economic zones where there is an uneven growth of older workers employed in different sectors of these economies. We urge future researchers to pay attention to this important area of research and generate comparative bodies of research and findings so that better interventions can be designed for individuals and their families in dissimilar cultures.

Along with the ageing issue, the increasing globalization of the workplace has obvious implications for health and well-being of the workers. Macik-Frey, Quick, and Nelson (2007) note that this is not simply a US issue and that globalization of occupational health and stress related issues is a major initiative of the World Health Organization started in 2000. The issue of national and cultural differences in the perception of physical and mental health, distress, and impact of work-related stressors on a growing percentage of working women and children demand urgent attention. Work-specific locus of control, which is generally higher in western countries and relates positively with physical well-being in the workplace, is found to be uncorrelated with physical well-being in a majority of the twenty-four cultures studied by Spector *et al.* (2002). Additional research of this kind, linking personality and specific individual-difference variables with cultural variations in the prediction of emotional and physical well-being, will be useful as globalization expands.

Since the review of occupational stress literature in Quick *et al.* (2003), Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991), Danna and Griffin (1999) and Quick and Tetrick (2003), we have seen a modest increase

of research concerning the role of national and cultural differences in work stress and coping. We have argued in this chapter that such research has a unique role to play in examining the interaction of cultures, organizations, and work which is the primary focus of this handbook. Research in this area is not going to be for the faint-hearted because of complications involving theory and measurement, as we have discussed. However, it is our sincere hope that when research is conducted in the context of a robust theoretical framework as presented herein, important findings will emerge and the journey of a thousand miles will begin successfully with a few successful but bold steps.

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