



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**The Relationship of Problem-based Coping and Emotion-Based Coping on  
Employees' Work-Life Balance of Public Sector in Kuching**

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67480

Bachelor of Science with Honours  
(Human Resource Development)

2021

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF PROBLEM-BASED COPING AND  
EMOTION-BASED COPING ON EMPLOYEES' WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF  
PUBLIC SECTOR IN KUCHING**

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This project is submitted  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Bachelor of Science with Honours  
(Human Resource Development)

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK  
(2021)

The Project entitled ‘The Relationship of Problem-Based Coping and Emotion-Based Coping on Employees’ Work-Life Balance of Public Sector in Kuching’ was prepared by *Peter Anak Salan* and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development)

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Date:

25 August 2021

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to praise and thank to God, The Almighty, who has granted countless blessing, knowledge, and opportunity that give to me to accomplish my Final Year Project 2020/2021.

Nevertheless, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Surena Sabil with her assistance and dedicated involvement throughout the process to ensure this Final Year Project has been accomplished. Also, I want to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Victoria Jonathan and Madam Farida Binti Abdul Halim @ Alil, Coordinator of Final Year Project, who has patiently guided us throughout this semester in completing this final year project especially during this pandemic Covid-19.

After that, I would like to extend my gratitude to all lecturers of Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development (FCSHD), who have taught me with the knowledge where I can utilize in this project.

Huge appreciation to my closest friends, Mayrion Egit anak Moris @ Michael and Doris Ng Sin Er, for providing moral supports, attention, and listening to my rants throughout the completion of this project.

Most importantly, I am eternally grateful to my family, especially my parents, Salan Anak Sam and Bangi Anak Tila, who taught me discipline, manners, respects, and so much more that has helped me to succeed in life.

Last but not least, I placed on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all, who directly and indirectly, have lent their hand on this venture.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine the relationship of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping on employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching. The theory that used in this study is role theory. The research used survey methodology which involved the utilization of questionnaire and were distributed to 80 respondents who work in public sector which located in Kuching, Sarawak. The relationship between problem-based coping and emotion-based coping was analyzed using Pearson's Correlation analysis. The results revealed that there is significant relationship between problem-based coping and emotion-based coping on employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching. Hence, from this study, organization plays important role especially the managers and Human Resource practitioners to give awareness to the employees and the employees need to choose the most effective coping strategies to balance their work and life. In order to gain future insight regarding the area of this study, the future researcher can use other coping strategies as independent variables.

*Keywords:* problem-based coping, emotion-based coping, work-life balance, role theory

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Chapter 1 will explain a research regarding problem-based coping and emotion-based coping strategy on employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching. This research includes approaches and practices. In this chapter, a few aspects are discussed which it will cover on background of study, statement of problem, research objectives, research hypotheses, conceptual framework, significance of study, definition of terms and limitation of study. Last but not least, Chapter 1 will end up with the summary for this chapter. This chapter is important because it described the scope of the study and provide brief explanation about problem-based coping and emotion-based coping impact on the employees' work-life balance in public sector. In addition, this also stated the purpose and goals of the study.

### **1.1 Background of Study**

For this research, it is to study the relationship of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping on employees' work-life balance of public sector in Kuching. According to Guest (2002), work-life is concerned for an individual who are interested in the quality of working life in the efforts to enhance better quality of life. As mentioned by Kalliath and Brough (2008) stated work-life balance as an individual's satisfaction with the work role and life role, involving time balance, involvement balance as well as satisfaction balance (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). The individual who can manage and perform both work role and life role tend to have better quality of life. However, work-life balance has become major issue when the demand of work greater than family-related or personal interest. The incompatible between work domain and life domain seems

to put the individual under pressure that results to work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict can be viewed as a condition in which one role drains the resources such as time and energy that people need to fully participate in multiple roles. As studied by Adam et al. (1996), the rising of work-family conflict leads to low satisfaction, low commitment and increase job burnout. The job stressors emerged which leads to emotion exhaustion and demotivated them to accomplish the task. As stated by Beutell and Wittig-Berman (2008), stress management or coping strategies become investable as an individual's approaches to manage and cope the role pressures from their work and family demands. Therefore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested problem-based coping and emotion-based coping to deal stressful situation in the effort to reduce stress. The individual who able to utilize coping strategies effectively will facilitate them to seek good mental health that involved physically and emotionally in achieving better quality of life.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

As stated by Broers (2005), it is difficult to balance individual's career with family-related and personal interest which likely to affect their satisfaction towards both domains. This means that the juggling of workplace stress will lead to job stressors and give impact with their daily pressure in term of family, community and themselves. When the work life and family life are incompatible, the individual failed to perform one role effectively and this will lead them in stressful situation. According to Hardie, et al. (2005), the individual who lacks with coping resources or uses ineffective strategies to cope with stress, they tend to have high stress level. However, having said that, not much studies or focus has been made towards addressing the effective coping strategies such as problem-based coping and emotion-based coping towards employee' work-life balance.

Nowadays employees have to struggle when they carry many responsibilities such as work life, taking care of the children and elderly parents, housework, and these put them under pressure on which decision they need to deal with and prioritize. In this study, there is need to have further

exploration regarding the individual's coping strategies to facilitate them to have high satisfaction in life. Hence, effective coping strategies enhance the quality of an individual's life as work-family enrichment is achieved. Previous studies from Brough, Timms et al. (2014) described that a person who has work-life balance tend to have good satisfaction which is associated with good mental health and physical well-being.

The study also needs to have further research on how problem-based coping and emotion-based coping as these coping strategies affect employees' work-life balance. It is harder to achieve work-life balance nowadays due to the high demands which interfere work and family related.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

1. To investigate the relationship of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping on employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objective**

1. To assess the relationship between problem-based coping and employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching.
2. To establish the relationship between emotion-based coping and employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching.

### **1.4 Research Hypotheses/ Research Questions**

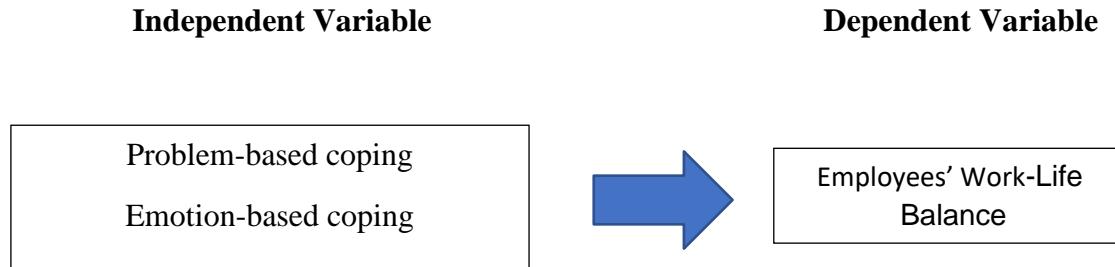
There are two (2) research hypotheses in this study which are:

**Ha1:** There is a significance relationship between problem-based coping and employees' work-life balance of public sector in Kuching.

**Ha2:** There is a significance relationship between emotion-based coping and employees' work-life balance of public sector in Kuching.

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Direct Effect Conceptual Model



The Figure 1 shows the direct effect conceptual model between independent variable and dependent variable. Direct effect model defined as a direct relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. In this study, the independent variables refer to problem-based coping and emotion-based coping whereas the dependent variable refers to employees' work-life balance.

## 1.6 Significance of Study

This study primarily focused on the relationship between problem-based coping and emotion-based coping and the employees' work-life balance in public sector. The findings of this research will redound to the benefits of employees, in which problem-based coping and emotion-based coping act as effective approaches to enhance work-life balance today. For the researcher, the study will give a guidance and overview for them to explore and do more research to uncover

critical areas regarding the problem-based coping and emotion-based coping. Also, this study will help Human Resource (HR) practitioners to understand the importance of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping that should be implement among employees especially when they are dealing with stressful situation.

Nevertheless, Human Resource Development (HRD) play a vital role to facilitate the employees in public sector to achieve work-life balance. This study may encourage the changes in policy and practice within organization that help the employees to perform work domain and family domain. Therefore, the individual will have better idea to utilize these coping strategies in dealing with the interference in their work role and family role.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **1.7.1 Problem-based coping**

**Conceptual definition:** Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined as behavioural coping which concentrates on defining the problems, planning, generating alternatives in terms of their costs and benefits, selecting the alternative and acting.

**Operational definition:** Problem-based coping refers to cognitive behavioural which seeking and taking direct action in challenging situation. Problem-based strategy includes all the active efforts to manage stressful situations and altered a troubled person-environment relationship to modify or eliminate the sources of stress via individual behaviour.

### **1.7.2 Emotion-based coping**

**Conceptual definition:** According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined emotion-based coping as a cognitive process which consists of thinking and emotion expression that aim to be tolerate the

stressful situation. Emotion-based coping involves cognitive behavioural efforts to reduce or manage emotional distress but not focusing directly to the problem-solving.

**Operational definition:** Emotion-based coping refers to an individual's stress management strategy in which they focus on regulating negative emotional reactions to a stressor. It also refers to the tendency of an individual to manage personal's emotional reactions to reduce stress.

### **1.7.3Work-life balance**

**Conceptual definition:** According to Lewis and Beuregard (2018), work-life balance defined as the individual experienced or aspiration, with particular focused on time-squeezed white-collar workers; used as an adjective to describe workplace policies or practices or public policies that purport to enhance individual's experiences.

**Operational definition:** The work-life balance refers to the extent of which an individual is equally engaged in and satisfied with their work role and family role as well as personal interest.

## **1.8 Limitation of Study**

There have several limitations during conducting the research. One of the limitations is the research is conduct among the employees in public sector only and do not include the private sector. The result does not reflect to the overall population of employed individual in Malaysia. Next, the independent variables that have chosen are not considerable sufficient to represent all the coping strategies on employees' work-life balance in public sector. The results of this study show that there may be several coping strategies can influence the employees' work-life balance as it depends on how the individual tends to cope the particular situation.

In term of cost, an alternative way was done where Google Form was created instead of printing out the questionnaires and distributing them manually and literally. However, the Google Form is

distributed online via Whatsapp and this is time consuming since the link is shared from one employee to another employee. Apart from that, the result of this study may not really accurate where the respondent might be influenced by some factors such as willingness and honesty to answer the questions. Last but not least, they might face difficulty to understand the questions that have been asked. These situations could affect the ability to collect a reliable data that represents the employed individual in Malaysia.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed about the introduction of this study to provide understanding of the problem statement and objective of study. The important element for problem statement is by analyzing and prioritizing to ensure there are concrete evidence or fact to support the problem statement within literature, empirical studies and practical aspects that happened in society or event. The research objective also be directed to make the forecasting and description are achieved. The significance of the study is to measure the finding of problem-based coping and emotion-based coping on employees' work-life balance in public sector in Kuching are nearly accepted and can be referred to. Also, it is significance study for HR practitioners can apply for future improvement. The next chapter is related to literature review.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Literature Review**

This chapter discussed the knowledge that is related to the concepts of theory that have been used in this study and from previous study. This section is covered on the focus of study, discussion from empirical, theoretical and practical as well as the overall summary for this chapter. The literature review is important as it provides useful information that help to develop understanding and insight for this study.

#### **2.1 Focus of Study**

This study is focusing on the relationship between problem-based coping and emotion-based coping and employees' work-life balance in public sector of Kuching. The study is conducted to examine whether the relationship between these two variables are strong or weak. The study also provides more understanding and insight about the practices of work-life balance among employed individual in public sector in Kuching. This will help them to have better quality of life and able to facilitate them to perform multiple roles in their life.

#### **2.2 Empirical Discussion**

Work-life balance is very crucial as an individual need to balance their work and other related in life to have good performance at workplace. According to Greenhaus (2002), work-life balance is defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. When the work demands are incompatible with family related or personal interest, it will

lead to work-family conflict. Sarafino (2012) emphasized that stress arises when the individual perceived discrepancy between the physical or psychological demands of a situation and the resources of their biological, psychological and social systems. However, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested problem-based coping and emotion-based coping which are the efforts to solve personal and interpersonal problems in order to reduce stress. To make it clearly, Thoits (1986) described that activities are directly related to the goal of solving existing problems by any of them changing or removing circumstances that are perceived to be threatening.

Previous research has revealed that people use problem-based coping to identify situations as variables (Lazarus, 1991; Folkman et al., 1986; Aldwin & Lazarus, 1981; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). As for emotion-based coping, Thoits (1986) stated that it is related to the regulation of unwanted negative emotional stress through actions or thoughts.

In the past empirical study by Drnovsek, Ortqvist and Wincent (2010), they investigated the relationship of coping strategies that have been used by entrepreneurs with a set of antecedents influencing the selection of their coping strategies. This research was involved 469 respondents from two European countries and the results were found that there has positive relationship regarding problem-based coping and entrepreneurs' personal well-being which are ( $p<.001$ ). There was no significant relationship between emotion-based coping and entrepreneurs' personal well-being which was ( $p>.05$ ). It concluded that problem-based coping has strong relationship to personal well-being. In term of human resource perspectives, utilizing different coping strategies able to help an individual to control their emotion in order to analyze the stress and attempt to solve the problem. It linked with higher job satisfaction and directly affect the work-life balance as they experience personal accomplishment when the stress was coped successfully. As the empirical study by Lina, Jose, Gloria and Martin (2006), they described that problem-based coping increase job satisfaction.

Another research studied by Rahnama et al. (2017), they investigated the relationship between anxiety and coping strategies in family caregivers of patients with trauma. The research was conducted on 127 family caregivers of patients with trauma and the results found that there is no significant relationship between anxiety and emotion coping which was ( $p>0.05$ ) whereas the inverse relationship between problem-based coping with ( $p<0.05$ ). This showed seventy-seven point one tenth percent (77.1%) family caregivers in this study applied emotion-based coping strategy to cope their situation which exposed to stress and mental exhaustion. In a meta-analysis that carried by Penley, Tomaka and Weibe (2002), they stated that emotion-based strategies more effective than using problem-based strategies in term of health outcomes.

Herman-Stahl et. al. (1995) suggested thinking positively will help an individual to manage their stressful circumstances with mentally optimistic manner. This means that the tendency of particular individual in utilizing emotion-based coping to deal with unwanted or painful emotional that cannot be altered or changed at the moment.

### **2.3 Theoretical Discussion**

Theoretical is used to see the phenomenon that proposed a way of thinking about potentially related event. There is one (1) theory approach that sed in this study which is role theory. Role theory refers to a set of behavior that have socially agreed-upon function and accepted manner or expectation in society. This theory is associated with work-life balance where an individual is compatible to perform their roles in work domain and family domain. As eloquently stated by Greenhaus et al. (2003), the individual will achieve better quality of life when they are balanced between work role and life role in term of time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance.

As studied by Marks and Macdermid (1996), they found a balanced individual tends to experience less overload and reduced work-family conflict when they are fully engaged in both roles. However, the role conflict arises when the work domain interferes with life domain. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) analyzed that work-family conflict emerged when the demand of work and family are incompatible as the participation in another role is difficult. Ghorpade et al, (2011) indicated that role conflict and role ambiguity act as stressors which believed to increase burnout.

The individual with effective stress management tends to have better quality of life. They utilize problem-based coping to deal with the cause of their problem and eliminating the source of the stress. Meanwhile, the person with emotion-based coping tend to manage their emotion by minimizing or reducing the stressors. They gather information about what they need to do and seek initiative to change the reality of troubled person-environment relationship. Shimazu and Schaufeli (2007) suggested that high problem-based coping and high distraction may lead to job stress. Problem-based coping involved recognizing when they try to make change that will directly impact the element of the problem. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), problem-based coping is the effort to alleviate stressful circumstances whereas emotion-based coping is the effort to regulate the emotional consequences or potentially stressful event.

## **2.4 Practical Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) assumed that the responsibilities and role demand between work and family-related are mutually incompatible and this associated with work-family conflict. In the other hand, Grzywacz and Powell (2006) assumed that the participation in multiple roles provide individuals with greater number of opportunities and resources which can be utilized in promoting better functioning across roles. According Rantanen et al. (2011), they emphasized work-family enrichment to be a proximal correlate of successful work-family coping.

This means that the individuals who can deal with role conflicts and overload between work and family responsibilities are linked with effective coping strategies. Rotondo and Kincaid (2008) mentioned that social support from family members, friends and organizations more or less help them to manage an potential role conflict.

According to Zheng et al. (2015), a research regarding coping strategies on employee affective and organizational provision of work-life balance programs on employee affective well-being. They found that the individuals with positive attitudes and life coping strategies were more capable of achieving well-being which direct better quality of life. Another research from Mathur and Swami (2015) proposed that coping strategies are depending on individual experiences in dealing with multiples roles and work pressure to maintain work-life balance.

When the role conflict exists, the coping strategies which dominated by problem-based coping and emotion-based coping become inevitable as the employees need to perform multiple roles at the same time. Beutell and Wittig-Berman (2008) mentioned that such coping abilities can be described as the approach for an individual to manage stressful situations effectively. Furthermore, the imbalance levels of demands and resource availability which put them under pressure, they will perceive to manage with reactive coping behaviors after appraisal of the situations in their way to reduce or remove stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has an explanation on the review of the literature related to the research. The purpose of literature is to provide a structural analysis and the general ideas of published writings from past scholars that are relevant to the research topic. In this chapter, it discussed the literature review for this study which are focus on study, empirical discussion, theoretical discussion as well

as practical discussion. Hence, in the part of the empirical discussion, it discussed some past research that associated with problem-based coping and emotion-based coping and work-life balance to ensure the important points are highlighted. In the theoretical discussion, one theory has been used and it correlated to this study which are role theory, in which work and family domains incompatible in some respect. Last but not least, practical discussion has been made to strengthen the understanding regarding the research. The critical issues that discussed from past research are used to generate information and idea to provide latest development in this study. The methodology for this research is presented in the following chapter.