

COPING WITH DEMANDING SITUATIONS IN MANAGERIAL WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF MANAGERS

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Abstract: Effectively resolving demanding situations in managerial work and the residues of these processes can significantly impact the quality of a manager's life, both mentally and physically. The goal of research project is to focus attention on identifying and specifying selected personality traits of managers that are related to coping with demanding situations. The results confirmed the expected correlations between the ways of behaving in demanding managerial work situations and the features of interpersonal behavior of managers. The acquired knowledge also reveals risk factors that can significantly reduce the level of a manager's work and are thus an important aspect of decision-making not only in the process of selecting people for managerial positions, but also in the education and training of managers.

Keywords: Coping, Demanding situations, Managerial work, Personality traits.

1 Introduction

Managers perceive challenging situations in varying ways – some view them as problematic, crisis-ridden, or conflict-ridden, while others see them as opportunities to demonstrate skills and advance their careers (Frankovský, Ištvaníková, Štefko, 2009). Understanding the demands of managerial work requires considering both situational characteristics and personal traits. The strategies chosen to address these situations can lead to different outcomes, influencing either self-reinforcing or self-threatening behavior (Fedáková, 2002).

Demanding situations in managerial roles encompass not only major life events or organizational changes but also routine challenges encountered on a daily basis, such as interpersonal conflicts or decision-making dilemmas (Lajčín, 2023). The interpretation of these situations varies based on situational and personality factors. While some managers may view tasks like employee layoffs or strategic decisions as routine and manageable, others may perceive them as highly stressful and burdensome. Similarly, individuals may perceive the same situation differently, with some seeing it as a threat and others as an opportunity for growth or as routine work. Managers regularly confront challenging scenarios, irrespective of their personal assessment of the difficulty level. Addressing these situations often requires a full mobilization of their efforts, sometimes leading to varying degrees of success or occasional failure. Successfully navigating these challenges and their aftermath can significantly impact a manager's well-being and the effectiveness of their organizational leadership. Ultimately, it influences not only the manager's own performance but also the overall success of the organization, thereby impacting its stakeholders. The pursuit of effective strategies for managing demanding situations in managerial roles necessitates an interdisciplinary approach (Vávrová, 2004; Hrbáčková, 2010; Čuka, 1997).

Developing fundamental research inquiries regarding managing challenging situations in managerial roles entails focusing on and expanding upon established research frameworks for coping with such challenges (Frankovský, 2003). These inquiries explore three primary research avenues (Frankovský & Ištvaníková, 2008):

1. Identification, characterization, and classification of situations perceived by managers as problematic, demanding, conflict-ridden, complex, stressful, or

unpleasant. This line of inquiry typically involves delineating key dimensions of these situations, which serve as the basis for proposing specific empirical taxonomies and classifications.

2. Analysis of managerial behavior in addressing and managing these situations. Research in this area often aims to create a comprehensive classification of managerial responses to challenging situations using inductive taxonomies.
3. Examination of the relationships between managerial coping strategies and the dispositional characteristics of managers or the situational contexts in which specific problems arise. This aspect of research usually focuses on the personal traits of managers and the organizational conditions that influence their coping mechanisms.

The management domain is a common setting where facing challenging situations is prevalent. The interest in investigating how managers navigate these challenges stems from the desire to elucidate broader factors, as outlined by Výrost et al. (1995):

- Understanding individuals' life plans, personal perspectives, and career development.
- Gathering insights into the motivational and emotional aspects of an individual's personality.
- Characterizing various methods and approaches to problem-solving and coping.

In terms of practically applying the knowledge gained regarding coping with demanding situations in managerial work, Lajčín and Frankovský (2011) suggest specific applications in managerial practice that relate to the broader factors influencing interest in this issue, including:

- Selecting individuals for managerial roles where they will inevitably face challenging situations.
- Training managers in these roles to effectively handle challenging situations in organizational management (Pitt & Sims, 1998).
- Developing protocols for addressing these situations within the organization and providing training at different management levels.

The investigation of correlations between personality traits as inherent characteristics that predict behavior across various situations and coping mechanisms is a standard and, some might argue, traditional area of research in coping studies. In this realm, Judge, Thoresen, and Pucik (1999) scrutinized seven personality traits. Callan and Dickson (1993) focused on analyzing the connections between locus of control and coping strategies amid challenging circumstances. Hu and Cheng (2010) delved into coping with challenging situations within the context of burnout syndrome. Förster and Ducheck (2017) propose that specific personality traits are positively linked to resilience. They discovered a significant positive correlation between concerns and certain dimensions of their resilience construct.

Wei and Taormina (2014) highlight a favorable association between the personality trait of responsibility and resilience in both workplace and career settings. They contend that responsible individuals tend to be more industrious and systematic, rendering them better prepared to tackle challenges. Additionally, they assert that future orientation, openness to new experiences, and emotional stability are positively correlated with resilience in workplace and career contexts. Several researchers conceptualize resilience as a skill that can be cultivated and emerges from experiencing positive emotions in the workplace (Hartmann et al., 2019).

Sommer, Howell, and Hadley (2016) discovered that positive emotions bolstered employee resilience, whereas negative emotions diminished it during an organizational crisis.

Managers regularly encounter challenging situations, necessitating them to muster all their resources to address them, with varying degrees of success. Failures in managing these situations also occur. Understanding the complexity and stress associated with demanding situations requires considering situational management conditions, assessing managerial competencies, and evaluating the manager's personality traits.

From a practical standpoint of handling demanding situations, we can link the application of acquired knowledge with these research directions:

- During the assessment of managerial competencies and the selection of individuals for managerial roles, where they inevitably confront demanding situations (Frankovský, Lajčín, & Vargová, 2013).
- In preparing managers for effectively managing demanding situations within the organization (Pitt & Sims, 1998), fostering their activity and performance (Lajčín, Hrmó, & Krištofiaková, 2014).
- While developing protocols for resolving these situations within the organization and providing training at different management levels, such as through coaching (Birknerová, Frankovský, & Lajčín, 2014).

Within the work environment, the managerial position emerges as a pivotal factor. The efficiency of managers intertwines significantly with the advancement of the entire system, encompassing an array from individuals, through organizational dynamics, to the overall expansion of the company. These managers serve as purveyors of strategic foresight, thereby fostering the evolution and advancement of the entire organizational framework. Consequently, the selection process for managerial roles stands out as a paramount endeavor within any organization. This process necessitates precise and intricate procedures geared towards prognosticating successful managerial performance.

The findings presented regarding the management of challenging circumstances, particularly within managerial contexts (Lajčín, Frankovský, & Štefko, 2012; Lajčín, 2017; Lajčín, & Frankovský, 2017), underscore the sustained attention directed towards this domain. This emphasis aligns with the depth of knowledge amassed within this field. Our research endeavors have been centered on addressing inquiries pertaining to coping mechanisms in managerial settings, including the identification, detection, and anticipation of managers' behaviors in such scenarios. This aligns with the primary research trajectory focused on empirical classification and taxonomy of coping strategies in demanding situations.

The objective of the research project is to spotlight the identification and delineation of specific personality traits among managers that correlate with their ability to manage demanding situations. The research project, as outlined by Lajčín and Frankovský (2017), is centered on elucidating the interrelationships among various antecedents and outcomes, particularly focusing on the analysis of personality traits, social intelligence, and coping mechanisms utilized by managers in challenging scenarios. Through their work, the authors have not only enhanced the efficiency of managerial practices but also deepened our comprehension of the managerial role. This encompasses both the essential prerequisites for effective managerial performance and the obstacles that managers must navigate.

We designated the original questionnaire developed by the authors as WBMW – Ways of Behaving in Managerial Work (Lajčín, Frankovský, & Štefko, 2012). This Slovak questionnaire was crafted and validated with the specific aim of identifying coping mechanisms in demanding managerial situations. The final version of the questionnaire enables the assessment of individual preferences for coping strategies across various challenging scenarios encountered by managers. Its development entailed a qualitative analysis of detailed accounts of demanding situations experienced by managers in their professional roles.

The questionnaire was meticulously designed to gauge preferences for coping strategies applicable in real-world managerial contexts. Constructed on the foundation of the principle of transsituational stability in personality assessment methodologies, as articulated by Výrost (1998), this approach involves presenting respondents with specific managerial challenges and prompting them to evaluate the efficacy of various coping strategies using interval-based rating scales.

The development of the WBMW methodology (Lajčín, Frankovský, & Štefko, 2012) draws on the insights gained by authors Frankovský and Baumgartner (1997) during the creation process of a revised edition of the BSDS(r) Questionnaire: Behavioral Strategies in Demanding Situations. Additionally, it was influenced by the experiences of authors Frankovský, Ištvaníková, & Štefko (2009) with the BSDWS Questionnaire: Behavioral Strategies in Demanding Work Situations and the analysis outcomes of the BSBM methodology: Behavioral Strategies in Business Management (Lajčín, & Frankovský, 2011).

2 Materials and Methods

The WBMW questionnaire, validated through research (Lajčín, Frankovský, & Štefko, 2012), facilitates the recognition of coping mechanisms in managerial settings amid challenging circumstances. It encompasses descriptions of nine prototypical demanding situations representing diverse scenarios encountered in managerial roles. Each situation presents several potential behavioral responses. For instance, consider the scenario: "You discover that false, negative information about you is circulating within the company. What actions would you take?" Following the situation's description, various coping strategies are outlined:

Forms of behavior	strongly agree	agree	neither	disagree	strongly disagree
a) Without any hesitation, I discuss it with my co-workers.	1	2	3	4	5
b) I highlight that such behavior is unethical.	1	2	3	4	5
c) I think about how to solve this situation.	1	2	3	4	5
d) I ask for an advice on how to proceed.	1	2	3	4	5
e) I get angry.	1	2	3	4	5
f) Such a situation is an unpleasant experience for me.	1	2	3	4	5

Respondents are tasked with evaluating their potential responses to each alternative provided on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – neither, 4 – disagree, 5 – strongly disagree).

The questionnaire facilitates the identification of five factors describing managers' coping tendencies in business management situations:

Emotional Coping Factor: Pertains to the emotional response evoked by the situation, independent of its context.

Cognitive Coping Factor I: Focuses on cognitive processes such as information seeking and problem analysis within the social context.

Cognitive Coping Factor II: Centers on cognitive processes like information gathering and analysis concerning general managerial challenges.

Behavioral Coping Factor I: Relates to immediate behavioral responses in addressing common managerial challenges.

Behavioral Coping Factor II: Concerns immediate behavioral responses in handling situations with significant social implications.

The identified factors account for 43 % of the variance, which is deemed acceptable. Therefore, there was no need to specify additional factors to increase this percentage. The factors extracted could be clearly delineated in terms of their content. This is supported by the satisfactory Cronbach's alpha values (Emotional factor = 0.92, Cognitive factor = 0.79; Cognitive factor II = 0.82; Behavioral factor I = 0.67; Behavioral factor II = 0.64), indicating the reliability of the items within each factor. The content validity of the WBMW methodology was assessed in comparison to a standard coping questionnaire.

The IAS Questionnaire, designed by Wiggins (1991), was utilized to identify the personality traits of managers. This questionnaire, developed based on insights from the Interpersonal Check List (ICL) by Leary (1957), arranges eight crucial interpersonal behavior characteristics into an "interpersonal circumplex." These characteristics, depicted in a counterclockwise circle and represented by four bipolar dimensions, are defined by Wiggins (1979) as follows:

- Ambitious, dominant – Lazy, submissive
- Arrogant, calculating – Unassuming, ingenuous
- Cold, quarrelsome – Warm, agreeable
- Aloof, introverted – Gregarious, extraverted

In this research, a condensed version of this methodology, comprising a list of 24 adjectives where each dimension is described by three pairs of bipolar adjectives, was employed. Respondents assessed each interpersonal behavior trait on an 8-point scale, ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 8 (very accurate). Below is an example of eight adjectives from the IAS methodology along with the corresponding answer key:

Manipulative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Calculating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Arrogant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Introverted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Submissive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Able to understand others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Joyful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

1 – very inaccurate, 8 – very accurate

The study drew upon the findings of a research survey encompassing 179 participants, comprising 86 male and 93 female managers occupying positions in top management (11 respondents), middle management (60 respondents), and line management (108 respondents). Regarding their professional domains, the sample encompassed 27 managers from production, 85 from services, 33 from trade, and 34 from the education sector. These managers possessed technical (92 respondents), natural science (15 respondents), or social science (72 respondents) backgrounds. Among the participants, 49 were single, 107 were married, 19 were divorced, and 4 were widowed. The average age of the managers was 38.5 years, with a standard deviation of 8.39 years, ranging from 21 to 66 years. On average, they had accumulated 14.6 years of professional experience (standard deviation of 8.350) and had served in managerial roles for approximately 7.8 years (standard deviation of 7.432). This dataset underscores the diversity of managerial experience levels within the sample, ranging from novices to individuals with extensive experience, spanning up to 38 years.

3 Results

A comparison between the outcomes derived from our questionnaire and Amirkhan's (1990) Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI) methodology revealed several intriguing insights that substantiate the distinctiveness of each factor within our methodology. Upon scrutinizing the preference for individual behavioral strategies, we observed the highest degree of

preference in evaluating the Behavioral factor of coping I, juxtaposed with the lowest degree of preference in appraising the Cognitive factor of coping I. Statistical scrutiny of the results, employing the non-parametric Friedman test for dependent choices, confirmed statistically significant disparities in the preferences for individual coping strategies (Table 1). Evaluation of the extracted coping factors placed the Cognitive factor of coping II and Behavioral factor of coping I within the agreement section of the utilized scale. The Emotional factor of coping and Behavioral factor of coping II garnered rather neutral assessments, while the Cognitive factor of coping I was assessed within the disagreeing segment of the scale.

Tab. 1: Assessment of individual extracted coping factors

	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Emotional factor	3.17	137.887	.000
Cognitive factor I	4.13		
Cognitive factor II	2.52		
Behavioral factor I	2.19		
Behavioral factor II	3.03		

The structured five-factor model delineating various ways of coping with demanding situations, alongside its foundational validation metrics, substantiate the significance of the devised multidimensional approach for delineating coping mechanisms in managerial contexts. Moreover, we regard the outlined analytical outcomes and discoveries as pivotal for refining the taxonomic understanding of coping strategies within managerial domains.

The findings corroborated the anticipated correlations between behavioral responses in challenging managerial scenarios and the interpersonal behavioral attributes of managers, as illustrated in Table 2.

The coping mechanism characterized by emotional reactions exhibited correlations with certain personality traits—namely, aloof, introverted, lazy, and submissive. This suggests a higher inclination towards this coping style among managers with introverted, lazy, and submissive tendencies. Conversely, the coping strategy categorized as cognitive I (involving thinking and seeking further information about situations with a significant social context) demonstrated a negative correlation with personality traits such as arrogant, calculating, cold, and quarrelsome. This implies that managers exhibiting these traits are less likely to prefer this coping approach in situations with significant social implications.

Furthermore, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the assessment of coping behavior specified as behavior II (involving immediate behavioral reactions in addressing situations with significant social implications) and certain personality traits of managers—specifically, ambitious, dominant, gregarious, and extraverted. Conversely, a negative correlation was identified between this coping factor and personality attributes such as aloof, introverted, lazy, and submissive. This suggests that the coping strategy in situations with significant social implications is favored by ambitious, dominant, gregarious, and extraverted managers, while it is less favored by introverted, lazy, and submissive managers.

Tab. 2: Correlations between the ways of behaving in demanding managerial work situations and the features of interpersonal behavior of managers

	PA	BC	DE	FG	HI	JK	LM	NO
Emotional factor	-,116	-,152	-,118	,157*	,209**	,103	,128	,091
Cognitive factor I	-,013	-,173*	-,209**	-,018	,091	,083	,118	,017
Cognitive factor II	,011	,073	-,033	-,040	,002	,004	,079	-,028
Behavioral factor I	-,062	-,102	-,057	-,107	,063	,025	,002	-,016
Behavioral factor II	,173*	-,112	-,087	-,185*	-,203**	,092	,107	,213**

Key: PA – ambitious, dominant, BC – arrogant, calculating, DE – cold, quarrelsome, FG – aloof, introverted, HI – lazy, submissive, JK – unassuming, ingenuous, LM – warm, agreeable, NO – gregarious, extraverted.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The exploration of interpersonal behavior traits provides valuable insights into how individuals navigate demanding situations, particularly in managerial roles. Using the IAS Interpersonal Adjective Scales questionnaire (Wiggins, 1991), we assessed these traits, revealing correlations between active, positive approaches to managing challenges and various attributes of social intelligence and interpersonal behavior.

Managers who exhibit higher levels of empathy tend to prefer actively managing difficult situations. Empathetic individuals often demonstrate traits such as self-assurance, intelligence, warmth, and introversion. Conversely, managers characterized by manipulation tendencies are more likely to opt for active resolution strategies, particularly if they exhibit cold and arrogant behavior.

Furthermore, managers adept at acquiring and leveraging social information, possessing strong social competency and awareness, tend to exhibit traits such as self-confidence, warmth, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Notably, the personality trait of agreeableness is positively associated solely with social awareness.

These findings underscore a preference for extroverted and emotionally stable individuals in managerial positions, highlighting the importance of social intelligence and interpersonal behavior in effectively managing demanding situations.

The effectiveness of managerial work is influenced by various factors, including education, experience, and the personal qualities of managers, which serve as important predictors of success in managerial roles. Our analyses of the connections between managers' personality traits and their coping strategies in demanding situations confirm the expected correlations between specific features of interpersonal behavior and coping mechanisms.

Managers who are introverted, insecure, or submissive tend to exhibit a stronger inclination towards emotional reactions when dealing with challenging situations, reflecting sentiments such as discomfort or unpleasantness. Conversely, self-assured, dominant, sociable, and extraverted managers show a reduced preference for emotional coping strategies, opting instead for direct and immediate solutions to challenges. Notably, these correlations were particularly prominent in situations with a significant social context, aligning with the focus of the IAS

methodology used to assess interpersonal behavior traits, which inherently carry social implications.

The solution directly pertains to predicting managers' behavior in challenging situations, thereby influencing the methodological approach for identifying coping strategies within management contexts, considering managerial competencies and personality traits. The suitability of the chosen approach corresponds to the nature of the problem managers face in managing demanding situations. This aspect was evident in the research project, where both approaches were effectively utilized. While the mentioned methodologies possess dispositional traits, the WBMW methodology developed by the authors exhibits a situational nature. The research outcomes validated the efficacy of employing both types of methodologies. The COPE methodology, coupled with CSI, represents a balanced approach amalgamating both situational and dispositional perspectives.

4 Discussion

Managerial work is directly related to solving demanding situations. The way managers deal with these situations affects their lives, the lives of their co-workers. At the same time, the effectiveness of coping with demanding situations has an impact on the operation and efficiency of the entire organization that these managers manage. As part of the research projects implemented by us (Frankovský, Lajčín, & Birknerová, 2011; Frankovský, Lajčín, & Sláviková, 2012; Lajčín, Sláviková, Frankovský, & Birknerová, 2014; Lajčín, 2017 and others), we have therefore focused our attention on solving questions related to specifying contexts between selected personality traits of managers, managerial competencies and ways of coping with demanding situations in managerial work.

Several methodologies were used in research projects to solve the problem of links between the selected attributes of social intelligence and assessment of ways of coping with demanding situations in managerial work. Assessment of ways of coping with demanding situations in managerial work was determined by the original WBMW questionnaire (Lajčín, Frankovský, Štefko, 2012) and the COPE questionnaire (Carver, 1997). The personality traits of the managers were assessed by IAS Interpersonal Adjective Scales questionnaire (Wiggins, 1991).

Baumgartner and Frankovský (2000) presented similar results in the analysis of connections between traits of interpersonal behavior and strategies for managing demanding situations, primarily from the point of view of immediate solution of the situation, based on research of the general population. The presented findings testify not only to the meaningfulness of investigating the issue of coping with demanding situations in the context of managerial work, but also point to the possibility of predicting the behavior of managers in these situations based on the use of the developed questionnaire WBMW - Ways of behavior in managerial work. The aforementioned knowledge also reveals risk factors that can significantly reduce the level of a manager's work and are thus an important aspect of decision-making not only in the process of selecting people for managerial positions, but also in the education and training of managers, e.g. also for coping with demanding situations in their work.

5 Conclusion

Managers who exhibit a preference for coping strategies outlined in the original WBMW questionnaire tend to be socially active, communicative, adventurous, and receptive to novelty, embracing unknown challenges with curiosity. They demonstrate broad interests, inventiveness, creativity, and originality. Interpersonally, they project kindness, friendliness, trustworthiness, forgiveness, helpfulness, and sincerity. Managers characterized by self-assurance, extraversion, openness, warmth, and astuteness are inclined towards proactive problem-solving in demanding situations. Conversely, a propensity to avoid solutions is more evident in managers who are insecure, arrogant, and aloof. These findings have

implications for managerial practice, particularly in discussions concerning the predictability of managerial behavior based on stable dispositional traits—traits that influence behavior irrespective of specific circumstances—or situational factors that shape managerial responses (Terry, 1994; Carver et al., 1989; Parkes, 1986; Holahan & Moos, 1987; Frankovský & Lajčín, 2012; Frankovský, Birknerová, & Lajčín, 2014).

Addressing the challenge of predicting managerial behavior is intricately linked to managerial effectiveness. Predictors encompass a diverse array of characteristics, indicators, and criteria, ranging from managerial competencies and work experience to personality traits. As previously mentioned, the second aspect of this inquiry involves examining the correlations between coping strategies in stressful situations and the dispositional traits of managers, as well as situational factors.

The outcomes of the conducted research have significantly advanced this domain of knowledge, particularly in terms of delineating the structural components of managing demanding situations by managers. These findings hold relevance not only in the realm of management theory but also within the discourse on managerial competencies. They contribute to the expansion of knowledge in management theory, particularly concerning the interplay between a manager's personality and their ability to manage demanding situations. The personality of the manager stands out as a pivotal factor from various perspectives on management issues. As highlighted by Frankovský, Kentoš, Lajčín, and Sláviková (2011), it is imperative to continually consider the level of generality of established conclusions regarding coping strategies, the situational context of these strategies, and the individual context of coping.

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