Review

TQM, role stressors and counterproductive behaviour: A proposed framework on strain reduction

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Previous studies reveal that Total Quality Management (TQM) practices reduce the perception of role stressors among employees. Some questions nevertheless remain to be answered. This paper attempts to fill these gaps by developing a conceptual model that extends previous work done on the 'TQM - role stressor' relationship. The conceptual model in this paper therefore incorporates two additional, yet important stress-related variables, namely 'strain' which are the actual manifestations of stress, and 'withdrawal behaviors' which are the coping strategies employees engage in when exposed to role stressors. This paper contributes to TQM literature by highlighting the following important areas: Firstly, although past literature indicates that TQM practices reduce role stressors, this paper proposes that TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors and individuals may still need to engage in coping strategies to further safeguard their wellbeing. Secondly, this paper challenges the traditional notion that all components of counterproductive behaviors (CWB) are harmful for the organization. In a stressful environment, withdrawal behaviours, a type of CWB, is proposed to be a coping strategy done out of necessity to reduce strain, rather than to solely harm the organization. The proposed model serves important managerial implications because withdrawal behaviors, traditionally perceived to warrant disciplinary action, should be viewed in a different light.

Key words: Total quality management, role stressors, strain, counterproductive behaviour, coping.

INTRODUCTION

Total quality management (TQM) is a management philosophy that spans the entire organization with the aim of providing products and services with a level of quality that satisfies customers (Talha, 2004; The W. Edward Deming Institute, 2010). TQM is a stellar management philosophy that has been proven time and again to improve organizational performance, competitiveness and efficiency (Escrig-Tena, 2004; Kuruppuarachchi and Perera, 2010; Wruck and Jensen, 1994; Zhang, 2000). Besides organizational level performance TQM has also been accredited at the individual level, whereby TQM was found to reduce the perception of *role stressors* among individual employees (Teh et al., 2009a, b). It is important

to note that role stressors are merely the stimuli that trigger stress, and not the actual outcome of stress (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Onyemah, 2008). Strain on the other hand, is the outcome of stress. Strain is commonplace in the working environment, and occurs when individuals are exposed to role stressors over a long period of time (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). Strain is identified in individuals via the manifestation of the following symptoms: physical symptoms (such as tension headaches), psychological symptoms (such as anxiety, depression, frustration) and behavioural symptoms (such as absenteeism, turnover) (Jex and Beehr, 1991; Kahill, 1988). Nevertheless, according to Skinner et al. (2003), not all employees experience strain, as some may engage in defensive coping mechanisms to reduce the effects of strain.

Within TQM literature, the following gaps are observed:

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firstly, no studies have attempted to investigate beyond the 'TQM - role stressor' relationship by incorporating the 'strain' component (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Teh et al., 2009a, b; Victor et al., 2000). Previous studies have only examined the direct relationship between TQM practices and the stimuli of stress (such as role stressors), but not the impact of these stimuli (for example, role stressors) on actual stress outcomes (for example, strain). With reference to the study by Teh et al. (2009a, b), although we know that TQM practices reduce role stressors, it is not specified whether the reduction of role stressors also cause a significant reduction in strain.

There also appears to be a lack of TQM literature on the type of coping mechanisms that employees rely on to reduce role stressors. When exposed to stressors, not all employees break under pressure as some may engage in coping strategies to reduce the effect of these stressors (Skinner et al., 2003). It is a b to assume that coping mechanisms are not necessary just because TQM practices reduce role stressors. With reference to the study by Teh et al. (2009a, b), TQM practices only account for between 19 to 25% of the variation in role stressors, with the remaining variation being unaccounted for. This means that although TQM practices reduce role stressors, TQM *does not completely* eliminate the existence of role stressors. This argument is supported within TQM literature itself, as studies have revealed that role stressors remain to be part-and-parcel of TQM firms, and are continually present even within the best TQM firms (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Victor et al., 2000). Therefore, because TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors, some employees may be forced to rely on coping strategies to *further reduce* the '*residual*' amount of these role stressors. Within literature, these behaviors (for example, behaviors that reduce the residual amount of role stressors) may be *instinctual*, as individuals *automatically* protect themselves from threats if the environment (such as the TQM firm) *fails to completely eliminate it* (Gross, 1998; Scapini, 2001; Skinner et al., 2003). Furthermore, within neuroscience literature, these behaviors may even occur at the *subconscious* level, as part of an individual's *subconscious* drive to defend against threats (Lawrence and Nohria, 2002; LeDoux, 2000; Winkielman and Berridge, 2004). To recapitulate, there is a lack of literature on the type of coping strategies used to reduce role stressors within a TQM environment.

Pertaining to the third gap and stemming from the second, within TQM literature and management literature in general, counterproductive behaviours (CWB) are behaviours traditionally perceived to be *harmful* to the organization (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Thus employees caught engaging in CWB are normally handed disciplinary action. However, in a recent study by Krischer

et al. (2010), 'withdrawal' behaviours, a type of CWB, were revealed to be an important 'coping mechanism' that employees relied on to significantly reduce strain. Interestingly, the study revealed that employees who engaged in 'withdrawal' behaviours (for example, taking longer breaks than allowed, arriving late and leaving early) do it out of *necessity* to reduce strain, rather than to deliberately harm the organization. Thus the third research gap emerges because the majority of TQM literature only paints CWB in a negative light, but does not consider the possible *advantages* and *necessity* of CWB in a TQM environment. To recapitulate, no prior studies within TQM literature have attempted to examine the moderating effects of CWB on the 'role stressor - strain' framework.

To fill these gaps, this paper will attempt to design a conceptual model that *extends* prior work done on the 'TQM - role stressor' relationship by Teh et al. (2009a, b) by proposing a 'TQM - role stressor - strain' framework. In addition to that, withdrawal behaviours (the coping mechanism) will be incorporated as a moderating variable in our model. As a summary, our final model will propose that both TQM practices and CWB *co-exist* together in a single framework to explain how strain levels are reduced.

This paper contributes to TQM literature in three ways. Firstly, our model *extends* previous work done on the 'TQM - role stressor' framework by adding in a 'strain' component (thus focusing on the actual outcome of stress, and not just the stimuli of stress). Secondly, this paper suggests that TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors, and therefore some employees may need to rely on coping mechanisms to reduce the *residual* amount of these role stressors. Thirdly, our model challenges the traditional notion that all components of CWB are detrimental for TQM firms. Our model proposes that employees engage in withdrawal out of necessity to reduce strain, rather than to harm the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TQM practices

TQM encompasses the wide range of management activities that span the entire organization to provide products and services with a level of quality that satisfies customers (Talha, 2004; The W. Edward Deming Institute, 2010). Generally, firms that embrace the TQM philosophy have been found to improve overall organizational performance, competitiveness and efficiency (Escrig-Tena, 2004; Kuruppuarachchi and Perera, 2010; Williams et al., 2004; Wruck and Jensen, 1994; Zhang, 2000).

According to Jha and Kumar (2010), three prestigious quality awards namely the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), the European Quality Award (EFQM) and the Deming prize serve as common frameworks for TQM implementation within organizations. Benchmarking against these awards have proven time and again to be effective, as well as practical in achieving quality excellence (Calvo-Mora, Leal and Rolda´n, 2005; Saizarbitoria, 2006; Wong et al., 2010). Organizations conferred these awards are usually role models in their industries, and personify the TQM quintessence of quality. Pertaining to the MBNQA, across literature many authors have advocated conceptualizing the TQM component using the six dimensions in the MBNQA framework (for example, leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, human resource focus, process management, and information analysis) (Ooi, 2009; Teh et al., 2009a, b; Dean and Bowen, 1994; Samson and Terziovski, 1999; Wong et al., 2010). Conceptualizing the TQM construct using the MBNQA is commendable, because the MBNQA is very *versatile* as it has been applied across a wide variety of sectors including manufacturing, service industries, non-profit organizations, education, healthcare, and small-medium businesses (American Society for Quality, 2010). Furthermore, according to Ooi (2009), these six dimensions have been widely acknowledged as part-and-parcel of TQM practice by both academicians and practitioners alike. Additionally, the MBNQA framework has also received international recognition, with its six dimensions widely adopted across different countries (Jha and Kumar, 2010). As a result, our model will conceptualize the TQM construct using the six dimensions outlined in the MBNQA framework, namely leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, human resource focus, process management, and information analysis.

Role stressors

First and foremost, it is important to highlight the distinction between the term *stressor* and *stress*. Stressors (for example, role stressors) are the *stimuli* that trigger stress, and are not the actual *outcome* of stress (strain) (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Onyemah, 2008). Generally, the long-term exposure to role stressors causes strain. Stressors are commonplace in the working environment, and role stressors are no exception (Beehr and Newman, 1973; Krischer et al., 2010). Derived from role theory, 'role stressors' are the stimuli that cause stress, due to the roles an individual holds within the organization. According to Rizzo et al. (1970), role stressors encapsulate two smaller dimensions, namely role conflict and role ambiguity. The first dimension*, role conflict*, occurs

when employees face contradictory role expectations when on the job. Role conflict is defined as *"the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures, such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other"* (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict is commonplace in the working environment because employees are required to constantly juggle *conflicting demands* across the different roles they hold. Pertaining to the second dimension of role stressors, *role ambiguity* occurs when an individual lacks clarity as to what behaviours are expected at work (Rizzo et al*.,* 1970). Role ambiguity causes a lot of psychological discomfort and stress because individuals who are unduly troubled about how to proceed with a critical task experience frustration.

Conceptualizing role stressors using these two dimensions has been a common practice within literature (Mulki et al., 2008; Onyemah, 2008; Rangarajan et al., 2005; Rizzo et al., 1970; Weeks and Fournier, 2010). Although factorially independent, in certain studies, these two dimensions were sometimes *combined* into a single unidimensional measure for simplicity purposes (Bowling and Eschleman, 2010). As a result, and for the purpose of model simplicity, role conflict and role ambiguity will also be combined into a single unidimensional measure to represent our role stressor construct.

Strain

Strain is usually detected in individuals via the manifesttation of the following symptoms: 'physical symptoms' (such as tension headaches), 'psychological symptoms' (such as frustration, depression, anxiety) and 'behavioural symptoms' (such as absenteeism, turnover) (Jex and Beehr, 1991). Strain is the first indicator of burnout, and if not properly monitored, leads to full burnout (Hunsaker, 1986). If strain continues over the long-term, the following worst case scenarios will occur: *Physical* worse case scenarios (such as chronic insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, poor appetite and chest pains) *interpersonal* worse case scenarios (such as antisocial behaviour and poor working relations) and *behavioural* worse case scenarios (such as turnover, absenteeism, decreased performance, excessive smoking, binge drinking and even drug abuse) (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007; Kahill, 1988; LePine, 2005; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994; Schaubroeck et al., 1989; Wallace et al., 2009; Wright and Cropanzano, 1998).

From a practical perspective, strain also takes a heavy toll on a firm's financial resources, as the annual costs associated with long-term strain has doubled in merely a decade from $ 150 to 300 billion in 2007 (Cynkar, 2007; Wright and Smye, 1996). Due to the various detrimental
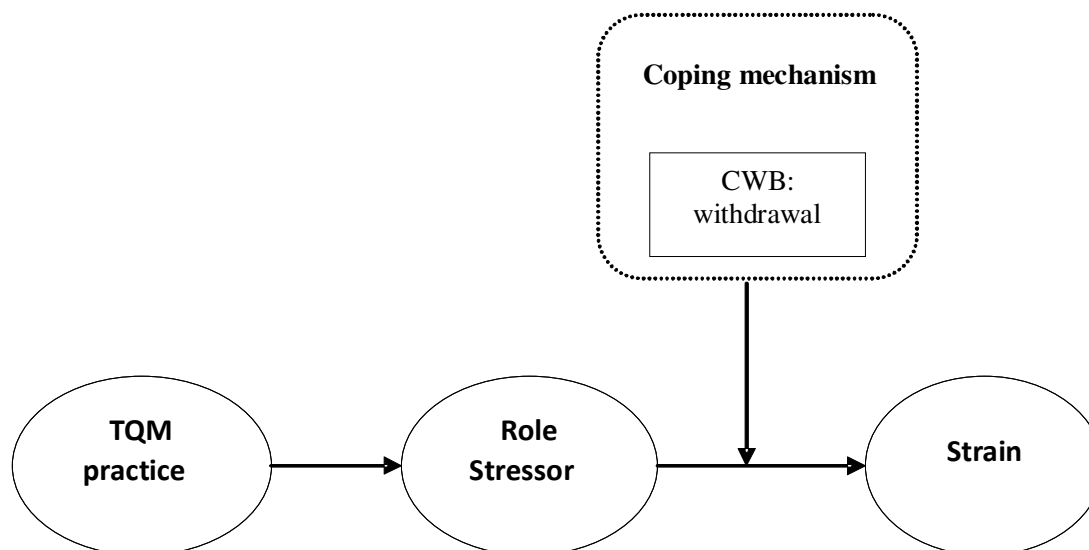
Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

outcomes commonly associated with strain, it is therefore important to identify the processes and mechanisms whereby strain operates, which will thus be the focus of this paper.

Counterproductive behaviours

Traditionally, CWB has been perceived to be behaviours that *harm* the organization or its members (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Spector et al. (2006) outlines a typology of five of these behaviours namely: *abusing others*, *sabotage, theft*, *production deviance* and *withdrawal*. In the past, CWB has been viewed as detrimental as it is claimed to cost organizations billions (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). Because CWB has been perceived to be detrimental, employees caught engaging in CWB are normally dispensed strict disciplinary action. Furthermore, throughout the ages, researchers and practitioners alike have either attempted to control or reduce the occurrence of CWB within the organization (Spector et al., 2006).

THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS DEVELOPMENT

With literature laying the foundation for our framework, Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between our constructs. Firstly, TQM practices are proposed to reduce role stressors. This reduction in role stressors are subsequently proposed to reduce strain. However, because TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence

of stressors, a *residual* amount of role stressors still exist within the organization. As a means to cope, some employees may *instinctively* engage in coping strategies (for example, withdrawal behaviors) to *further weaken* the stressor-strain relationship. As a result, employees that cope, for example, in withdrawal experience, *lower* levels of strain, compared to their counterparts who do not engage in withdrawal at all.

Propositions between TQM practices and role stressors

In a pioneer study by Teh et al. (2009a, b), an interesting relationship was established between TQM practices and role conflict. The authors found that in general, TQM when conceptualized using the MBNQA, was revealed to significantly reduce employees' perception of role conflict. In these two studies, TQM practices accounted for between 19 to 25% of the variation in role conflict.

Previous authors' findings are widely supported across management literature. Within literature, each of the six TQM dimensions was closely associated with the reduction of role stressors. Leaders providing proper guidance and direction were found to be an important factor in reducing role conflict among employees (House and Rizzo, 1972; Lee, 2000; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Subsequently, leaders that displayed supportive leadership styles also reduced the level of role stressors among employees (Babin and Boles, 1996; Michaels et al., 1987; Teas, 1983). Pertaining to the TQM dimension of 'process management' (for example, formalization, rules and procedures), process management was found to reduce

role stressors because formalization helps clarify role perceptions (Morris et al., 1979; Rizzo, 1970). Formalization involves the proper documentation of rules and procedures and this is helpful in guiding action and clearing uncertainties (Zhang et al., 2000). Additionally, organizations that coordinate activities through rules and procedures reduce role conflict and role ambiguity because required behaviours are specifically outlined (House and Rizzo, 1972; Rizzo et al., 1970). 'Information analysis' refers to the quality and timeliness of information within the organization. Quality and timely information facilitates better decision making (Lin and Brian, 1996; Loke et al., 2010) and this subsequently reduces role ambiguity at work. According to Gunasekaran et al. (1994), the presence of reliable and timely information is important because it reduces the probability of role conflict between two or more departments. In a recent study by Tan et al. (2010), a higher emphasis on quality was also found to increase *knowledge sharing* behaviours among individuals, and in certain cases among the members of the supply chain itself (Loke et al., 2010).

This increase in knowledge sharing behaviours is postulated to reduce role ambiguity because information flows smoothly within the organization and its supply chain. Furthermore, Chong et al. (2010) sheds light on the possibility that TQM firms are also more likely to adopt new technologies to ensure the smooth flow of information within the supply chain. Next, 'strategic planning' refers to the process of translating goals into action plans that permeate every layer of the organization (such as strategic, tactical and functional layers). TQM firms that implement strategic planning thus improve goal convergence between these three layers (Ketokivi and Castaner, 2004) and this reduces role conflict and role ambiguity. 'Customer-oriented' firms are generally more in-tuned to their customer's needs (Gatewood and Riordan, 1997) and therefore groom employees to reflect more customer-oriented behaviours. Because customer-oriented firms train employees to be better equipped to serve customers, this reduces the level of role ambiguity faced by employees when serving these customers (Singh, 1993). According to Parkington and Schneider (1979), customer-oriented firms are also more closely associated with lower levels of role stressors among its employees. Pertaining to the 'human resource focus' dimension of TQM, although found in certain studies to have a positive relationship with role conflict, nevertheless, it is still a valid predictor of role stressors when incorporated into the TQM model as a whole (Teh et al., 2009a, b). As literature generally advocates that TQM practices reduce role stressors, we therefore propose that:

P_1: TQM practices have a negative relationship with role stressors.

Propositions between role stressors and strain

In general, role stressors increase strain, as role stressors are categorized as a type of hindrance-based stressor (Gilboa et al., 2008). Pertaining to our first dimension, 'role conflict' increases 'strain' and the positive relationship between these two constructs have been widely supported across literature. It is important to note that within stress literature, another synonym for strain is also 'emotional exhaustion' (Lee and Ashforth, 1996). Across literature, higher levels of role conflict have been found to be associated with higher levels of strain (Brewer and Clippard, 2002; Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Singh et al., 1994; Ngo et al., 2005; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994; Lee and Ashforth, 1996), anxiety and tension (Jackson and Schuler, 1985: Schaubroeck, et al., 1989), distress (Floyd and Lane, 2000) and frustration (Keenan and Newton, 1984). In certain cases, role conflict was also found to be the strongest predictor of strain compared to the other stressors (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). The rationale for the positive relationship between role conflict and strain is explained by the fact that when conflicting role demands arise (such as when employees faces conflicting pressures from each role), the continuous exposure to this form of stressor takes a heavy toll on the employees' psychological wellbeing (such as higher strain levels).

The positive relationship between 'role ambiguity' and strain has also been widely supported across literature. Higher levels of role ambiguity have been associated with higher levels of strain (Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Maslach and Leiter, 2008; Ngo et al., 2005; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994), anxiety and tension (Jackson and Schuler, 1985; Keenan and Newton, 1984; Schaubroeck et al., 1989), higher stress levels (Wallace et al., 2009) and even burnout (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). Schaubroeck et al. (1989) explains the rationale for this phenomenon by stating that the long-term exposure to role ambiguity increases strain because individuals who are unduly troubled about how to proceed with a critical task experience frustration. This frustration eventually builds up and results in tension, and if left unchecked would eventually lead to strain.

As findings across literature strongly support the positive relationship between role stressors and strain, the *converse* would also be true, whereby lower levels of role stressors would also be associated with lower levels of strain. Thus we posit that:

P_2: Role stressors have a positive relationship with strain. Therefore, *lower* levels of role stressors are associated

with *lower* levels of strain.

Propositions on the moderating effect of counterproductive behaviour

It is a *fallacy* to assume that coping mechanisms are not necessary just because TQM practices reduce role stressors. With reference to the study by Teh et al. (2009a, b), TQM practices only account for between 19 to 25% of the variation in role stressors, with the remaining variation being unaccounted for. This means that although TQM practices reduce role stressors, TQM *does not completely* eliminate the existence of role stressors. This argument is supported within TQM literature itself, as studies have revealed that role stressors remain to be part-and-parcel of TQM firms, and are continually present even within the best TQM firms (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Victor et al., 2000). Therefore, because TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors, some employees may instinctively engage in coping strategies to *further reduce* the 'residual' amount of these role stressors. Within stress literature, these behaviors (e.g. behaviors that reduce the residual amount of role stressors) may be *instinctual*, as individuals *automatically* protect themselves from threats if the environment (e.g. the TQM firm) *fails to completely eliminate it* (Gross, 1998; Scapini, 2001; Skinner et al., 2003). Furthermore, within neuroscience literature, these behaviors may even occur at the *subconscious* level, as part of an individual's *subconscious* drive to defend against threats (Lawrence and Nohria, 2002; LeDoux, 2000; Winkielman and Berridge, 2004).

Coping behaviours are described by Folkman et al. (1986) as behaviours that aim to conserve emotional, cognitive and physical resources by either eliminating the stressor (that is, the stimuli) or reducing the negative emotional outcome (for example, the strain). Two types of coping behaviours are highlighted within stress literature, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Skinner et al., 2003). *'Problem-focused coping'* occurs when employees directly target the source of the problem (that is, tries to eliminate the stressor). Employees select this type of coping strategy when the 'stressor' is perceived to be within their control. *'Emotion-focused coping'* on the other hand occurs when employees try to reduce the negative emotions (that is, reduce the strain) that arises during the stressful event. Employees select this type of coping strategy when the 'stressor' is perceived to be beyond their control (uncontrollable). With reference to our study, Wallace et al. (2009) classifies role stressors as an 'uncontrollable' type of stressor. As a result, because employees in TQM firms perceive role stressors to be uncontrollable they will therefore engage in 'emotion-focused coping' rather than problem-focused coping. Hypothetically, if 'emotion-focused coping' really does occur, then a significant reduction in 'strain' levels would be an indication of successful versus unsuccessful coping among TQM employees.

This brings us to the next important section of our paper, counterproductive work behaviours. CWB has been traditionally perceived to be behaviours that are *harmful* to the organization, and therefore perceived to warrant strict disciplinary action (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Spector et al. (2006) outlines a typology of five of these behaviours namely: *abusing others*, *sabotage*, *theft*, *production deviance* and *withdrawal*. However, a recent and groundbreaking study conducted by Krischer et al. (2010) revealed that there is more to CWB than meets the eye. With relevance to our study, the authors discovered that *'withdrawal'* (for example, taking longer breaks than allowed, arriving late, leaving early) actually improved productivity because these behaviours significantly reduced the amount of strain felt by employees when exposed to stressors. 'Withdrawal' was discovered to be a type of *'emotion-focused coping'* strategy used during stressful situations. Employees that engaged in withdrawal behaviours were found to do it out of *necessity* to reduce strain, rather than to harm the organization. Technically speaking, withdrawal was found to moderate the stressors-strain relationship, whereby engaging in withdrawal behaviours reduced the long-term strain felt by these employees.

The rationale for this phenomenon is strongly supported within stress literature. Within stress literature, withdrawal allows employees to temporarily replenish emotional resources by taking time out from the stressful environment. For example, leaving work early or taking longer breaks enables employees to temporarily escape a situation that induces negative emotions. These findings reflect similarities with a study by Westman and Etzion (2001) whereby blue-collar employees that spend time away from the workplace had significantly lower levels of strain. Furthermore, while spending time away, negative feelings induced by the stressors dissipate, and *"emotional homeostasis is restored"* (Krischer et al., 2010). This defensive coping mechanism is described as the process of 'emotional regulation' by Gross (1998), whereby the author states that individuals may deliberately avoid situations to safeguard themselves from unwanted emotions. In a meta-analysis conducted by Darr and Johns (2008), deliberate absence from stressors was found to reduce strain, and the various psychological and physical illnesses along with it. Being temporarily away from work gives employees the opportunity to temporarily escape stressors, and this protects them from long-term strain (Etzion et al., 1998). Additionally, Fritz and Sonnen

tag (2005) highlight the benefits of temporary withdrawal during the weekends, as it allows employees to go through an important rejuvenation process that replenish emotional resources that were previously depleted.

To recapitulate, because TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors, some employees may *instinctively* engage in coping strategies (such as withdrawal) to further reduce the residual amount of these role stressors. This is done so as to weaken the stressor-strain relationship within the model. Thus, building our model on previous empirical findings, we propose that:

P₃: CWB (for example, withdrawal) moderates the relationship between role stressors and strain.

This is such that the positive relationship between role stressors and strain becomes *weaker* when withdrawal behaviours increase.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATION

Our conceptual model contributes to TQM literature in three ways. Firstly, our model *extends* previous work done on the 'TQM-role stressor' relationship by adding in a 'strain' component (thus focusing on the actual *outcome* of stress, and not just the *stimuli* of stress as done in previous studies). Secondly, our model suggests that TQM practices *do not completely eliminate* the existence of role stressors (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Victor et al., 2000) and therefore, some employees may instinctively rely on coping strategies to *further reduce* the 'residual' amount of these role stressors. Such behaviors are *instinctual* in nature, because individuals *automatically* protect themselves from threats that the environment (the TQM firm) fails to completely eliminate (Gross, 1998; Scapini, 2001; Skinner et al., 2003). Thirdly, our model challenges the traditional notion that all components of CWB are detrimental for TQM firms. Although withdrawal has been traditionally perceived to be harmful for organizations, our model proposes that employees engage in withdrawal out of *necessity* to reduce strain, rather than to solely harm the organization (Krischer et al., 2010).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

The proposed model serves important managerial implications because withdrawal behaviors, traditionally perceived to warrant disciplinary action, should instead be viewed in a different light. Withdrawal may be done out of necessity rather than to deliberately harm the

organization. This is especially true for jobs highly susceptible to stressors. Two important managerial implications stem from the model. Firstly, it is important to create awareness among managers and supervisors when dispensing disciplinary action on subordinates found to have engaged in withdrawal (for example, taking longer breaks, leaving early and coming late). Disciplinary action should be exercised with discernment, by taking into consideration the previous track record of these subordinate and to gauge the intensity of role stressors the employee is exposed to on a daily basis.

The next managerial implication pertains more to employees that *resist* the urge to withdraw due to various commendable reasons (such as high level of personal accountability, highly responsible individuals). It is recommended that these employees be given adequate opportunities to withdraw, albeit different ways. Although annual leave may be viewed as a good means for these employees to recover and rejuvenate, in reality, despite the accumulation of annual leaves, certain category of employees (especially those that hold relatively important positions in the hierarchy or hold critical roles that no one else can substitute) may find it hard to exercise their liberty to withdraw. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations provide sufficient opportunities for these employees to do so. This can be done via pre-allocated vacation slots for these employees, or via training their second-in-command to competently handle their post while the former is away rejuvenating.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, our model proposes that TQM practices and CWB *co-exist* together in a single framework to explain how strain levels are reduced. Our conceptual model contributes to TQM literature in three ways: Firstly, our model *extends* previous work done on the 'TQM-role stressor' relationship by adding in a 'strain' component (thus focusing on the actual outcome of stress, and not just the stimuli of stress). Secondly, our model suggests that TQM practices do not completely eliminate the existence of role stressors, and therefore some employees may instinctively rely on coping mechanisms to reduce the *residual* amount of these role stressors. Thirdly, our model challenges the traditional notion that all components of CWB are detrimental for TQM firms. Although withdrawal has been traditionally perceived to be harmful for organizations, our model proposes that employees engage in withdrawal out of necessity to reduce strain, rather than to deliberately harm the organization (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Victor et al., 2000). The proposed model serves important managerial implications because withdrawal behaviors, traditionally perceived to warrant disciplinary action, should be viewed

in a different light.

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