



PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES OF STRESS RESILIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

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Abstract. *The professional activity of higher education leaders is characterised by high responsibility, intensive information flow, time pressure, organisational changes, interpersonal interaction and the need to make decisions under uncertain conditions. This paper analyses the psychological resources of stress resilience in higher education leaders, with particular attention to cognitive flexibility, cognitive complexity, emotional stability, reflection, constructive coping strategies and the meaningful interpretation of professional information.*

Keywords: *higher education; leadership; stress resilience; psychological resources; cognitive flexibility; cognitive complexity; psychosemantics; coping strategies; emotional regulation; professional stress.*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary higher education is developing in an environment of continuous organisational, technological and social change. Higher education leaders are responsible not only for administrative processes but also for coordinating academic staff, organising educational and research activities, managing interpersonal relations and ensuring the strategic development of their institutions. Consequently, their professional activities involve a combination of intellectual, emotional, communicative and organisational demands.

Selye (1976) conceptualised stress as a general adaptive response of the organism to demands placed upon it, noting that a moderate level of psychological tension may mobilise personal resources and facilitate goal-directed activity. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed a transactional perspective in which cognitive appraisal occupies a central position: stress emerges through the interaction between environmental demands and the individual's evaluation of available resources for managing those demands. This perspective is particularly relevant to higher education leadership because leaders

continuously interpret organisational events, assess potential consequences and select strategies for responding to complex situations.

MAIN PART

A leader's ability to analyse a difficult situation, identify its essential elements, generate alternative interpretations and reconsider an initial judgement may substantially influence the intensity of the stress response. Cognitive complexity is particularly important in this context: a cognitively complex individual is able to perceive a situation through multiple dimensions rather than reducing it to a single explanation (Hobfoll, 1989). Jabbor (2020), analysing cognitive methods in psychological research, emphasises the importance of cognitive processes and individual cognitive characteristics in understanding personality functioning. Cognitive constructs determine how individuals perceive themselves, other people and events, while differences in cognitive complexity influence the ways in which information is organised and interpreted.

The objective characteristics of a professional event do not completely determine its psychological meaning. Individuals construct subjective meanings through which they interpret situations, other people and their own experiences. Jabbor (2019), examining psychosemantic analysis of texts as an approach to psychological research, emphasises the role of semantic structures in studying psychological phenomena. Applied to leadership stress, this perspective suggests that the psychological impact of information depends not only on what is communicated but also on the meaning attributed to it by the leader. An organisational difficulty may be interpreted as a threat to professional authority, as evidence of personal failure, or alternatively as a temporary management problem requiring a specific solution.

Coping represents cognitive and behavioural efforts directed toward managing internal and external demands that are perceived as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping is particularly relevant when the leader has the possibility of changing the situation. The Job Demands–Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a useful framework: job demands increase strain, while resources – including social support, delegation, psychological trust within the academic team and professional autonomy – buffer the impact of those demands. Karasek (1979) similarly

emphasises the interaction between demands and decision latitude as a predictor of occupational strain.

CONCLUSION

Stress resilience in higher education leadership is a multidimensional psychological phenomenon that develops through the interaction of cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social resources. The intensity of professional stress is determined not only by external demands but also by how leaders perceive, interpret and evaluate those demands. Cognitive complexity and cognitive flexibility provide leaders with the ability to analyse stressful situations from different perspectives, generate alternative explanations and revise ineffective strategies.

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