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Coping Intelligence™: Integrated Approach to Coping with Life Difficulties

Existing studies on coping with stress and life difficulties are very contradictory. Traditional approaches, while identifying cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of coping, often confuse the modality of the strategy with its functionality and outcome. This conceptual drawback presents quite a few challenges to the study of efficient and inefficient strategies. Perception of the incongruence between modalities (cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) of a particular strategy and its functionality or organizational efforts (efficient vs. inefficient) hinders the development of an integrated methodology for a generalized coping process and the design of an adequate assessment instrument. The absence of general principles for classification of efficient and inefficient coping poses methodological as well as practical difficulties in their diagnostics and differentiation, thereby causing additional obstacles in the systematic study of this important phenomenon. The newly developed concept named Coping Intelligence™ suggests the use of cross-cutting parameters to facilitate the unified classification of inefficient (also known as defensive) and efficient coping strategies.

Coping Intelligence™: multidimensional model for measuring efficient and inefficient strategies for managing everyday life difficulties

Multidimensional Coping Intelligence™ Model (Libin, 2003a) strives to overcome limitations in studying coping by suggesting one basic and three auxiliary cross-cutting parameters for the unified classification of efficient and inefficient strategies. Coping Intelligence™ is defined by the quality, functionality, repertoire, and efficiency of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies of varying orientation and intensity. Taking into account the new findings on generalized properties of human intelligence described by Gardner (1999), the proposed model categorizes efficient and inefficient strategies primarily based not on their modality, but on their functionality or the organization of coping efforts applied toward the resolution which includes achievement of meaningful result and its evaluation by person as efficient or inefficient. According to the Multidimensional Coping Intelligence Model each strategy is characterized by:

- The primary cross-cutting parameter: organization of the efforts applied toward the resolution (efficient or inefficient);
- The secondary cross-cutting parameter: modality of manifestation of the efforts (emotional, cognitive or behavioral);
- The tertiary cross-cutting parameter: primary orientation of the efforts that can be directed toward self, others or subject (self-, socially- or subject-oriented);
- The fortiori cross-cutting parameter: intensity of the efforts (active or passive).

Thus, the organization of the efforts (a primary cross-cutting parameter) defines a coping activity as efficient or inefficient, whereas the modality characterizes any given efficient or inefficient strategy as emotional, cognitive or behavioral. In addition, each emotional, cognitive or behavioral strategy can be evaluated as self-, others- or subject-oriented depending on the direction of provided efforts. Accounting the intensity of provided efforts any given efficient or inefficient strategy of each modality and orientation can be evaluated as active or passive. Hereby, a strategy is defined as a vector of emotional, cognitive, or behavioral efforts of varying intensity resulting either in an effective or ineffective outcome for dealing with life difficulties. Efficient coping strategies focus on the resolution of the difficult situation. Accordingly, inefficient coping, also known as defensive strategies, diverge from the resolution of life difficulties (See Figure 1). During the experimental phase of the Coping Intelligence™ project a new assessment tool,
named Coping Intelligence Questionnaire (CIQ), was development and tested. According to the proposed model there are 36 basic strategies: 18 efficient and 18 inefficient that describe a variety of individual behaviors in difficult situations. Four consequential steps were performed in CIQ™ design including (1) literature analysis and the development of a pool of items, (2) studying content validity of the new measure through the expert review panel, (3) exploring psychometric properties of the CIQ via Cronbach alphas, (4) and validation of the proposed measure via the analysis of individual differences in efficient and inefficient coping strategies with relation to age, gender, temperament, and subjective evaluation of meaningful life outcomes. The data were collected as part of a larger cross-cultural study on coping with life difficulties currently being conducted in the U.S.A., Russia, and Ukraine.

Figure 1
CJQ™ measures cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to a difficult situation viewed as a meta-concept of complicated events that trigger coping efforts. CJQ™ is a self-report instrument consisting of 72 items combined into 3 efficient and 3 inefficient indexes differentiated by the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral modality of coping responses. The instruction asks a participant to indicate whether he or she employs a particular strategy while facing life difficulties, using a 5-point Likert-type scale of frequency with «1=never» and «5=always». Outcome variables included six CIQ basic scales, two general indexes for efficient and inefficient strategies. All indexes and scales are calculated as a mean of appropriate strategies. Results of the factor analysis verified a basic two-factor structure of coping intelligence with alternative solutions for efficient and inefficient strategies characterized via three basic modalities.

Results of the experimental study showed that changes in coping, related to age dynamics, suggest that individual efficient coping repertoire arises initially as a result of the development of
emotional and cognitive mental processes. Our findings also confirmed that not only emotional, but also cognitive and behavioral inefficient strategies are associated with low life satisfaction. The general conclusion is that a low Coping Intelligence, defined as a predominance in individual repertoire of ineffective strategies, was correlated with high scores on subjective dissatisfaction with personal achievements and relationships with others. On the contrary, a high Coping Intelligence, defined as a predominance in individual repertoire of efficient strategies, was linked to socio-behavioral plasticity and subjective satisfaction with both personal achievements and social aspects of life.

**Methodological and practical foundations of Coping Intelligence: Creating a science of human strength**

Coping Intelligence™ concept has broader impacts for our understanding of the mediating role of problem solving skills in promoting competence in dealing with difficulties of life. «Creating a science of human strength» is a promising mission of psychology that focuses on «systematically building competence, not on correcting weakness» (Seligman, 2000). This direction of research is based on a healthy, positive model of human behavior. The basic principles of positive psychology correspond strongly to the guidelines of differential psychology, whose primary goal is to explore the uniqueness of human individuality (Libin, A., 2008). The concept of human competence is an ideal starting point for studying the complexity of human individuality as well as investigating the fundamental issues such as quality of life, satisfaction with life self and others. The newly proposed model of Coping Intelligence™ may serve as useful feedback while assessing changes in individual coping repertoire during therapy and consulting, rehabilitation and medical recovery, for it measures flexible individual strategies that can be modified as a result of life experiences or educational training.

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