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PERSONALIZED TERRITORIES ARE APPARENT COPING AGENT FOR STRESS AMONG CORPORATE EMPLOYEES: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF CORPORATE WORKSTATIONS WITH REGIONAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to demonstrate that the personalized territories, spatial configuration and design attributes of workstations has the potential to qualify as coping agent for stress among the corporate employees. Furthermore, to establish that coping for stress is a function of personal spaces, spatial configuration and design attributes of the work station. In pursuit of this, the selected concepts of defense mechanism for coping stress identified are: Denial, projection, repression, undoing investigated through observation and collected response from the employees through a set of structured questionnaire in selected workstations of corporate in and around Tiruchirappalli district. The research questions examined here are: 1) Among the employees, does the personalized work station and spatial configuration facilitate the stress coping trait – denial, 2) Among the employees, does the intact personal space and territory without infringement facilitate t increased level of the stress coping trait- projection 3) Among the employees, does the personalized setting, markings and levels of natural light and ventilation facilitate exhibit more of the stress coping trait - Repression 4) Among the employees, does the clarity on space and personal claim of the territory influence increased level of the stress coping trait – Undoing . Data collected with questionnaires completed by 233 respondents from selected corporate settings in Tiruchirappalli district were analyzed and the results indicate that the personalized territories with spatial markings and physical attributes of workstations design influence stress coping mechanisms and qualify as a coping agent for stress among corporate employees in their work environment besides the other uncontrolled variables. Thereby, proving the Research hypothesis that coping of stress is a function of personalized territory, spatial markings, and design attributes of work station.

KEYWORDS

Personalized territory, stress, coping agent, Denial, Projection, Repression, Undoing, workstation, corporate environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Physical space is the basic unit through which we experience our daily life. Perhaps, by means of built environment we derive it, develop it, utilize it, and affiliate it. Nevertheless, Built environment encompasses all buildings, spaces and products that are created, or modified by people in the form of 'Shelter' – a prime need of human. The purpose of built environment is to protect its inhabitants against unwelcome outside forces and offers them a congenial internal environment. On the other hand, it tries to create an exterior, physically adopted to its functions and visually impressive. Further, it provides a congenial surrounding with physical setting attributes that provokes appropriate behavior in the social environment. However, every built environment attempts to create an order which is socially identifiable and interactive with the members at large so as to get the endorsement of the society that transact with the setting.

In order to perform the activity in line with the socio-cultural norms of their community, People adapt, transform or change their environment in which they live. However, the physical setting forms the building which is an assemblage of many sets of physical features, characteristics and attributes. Physical environments often serve as repositories of individual experiences and social relationships and are therefore, more than a cause of behavior and more than a behavior mechanism. (Irwin Altman, 1993) The fact that buildings are defined by many sets of physical setting attributes and the relationship between themselves has made the process of investigating Human behavior within this context as rich, complex and undeniable in bringing out several theories and models. (Robert Gifford, 2000) Theories could lead to conceptualize a framework for better understanding of the impact of the physical setting attributes in creating privacy, affiliation or accessibility to the spaces. In general territorial behavior at large and in particular the personalized territorial behavior of the occupants themselves. In this circumstances it gives us hope to recollect the statement made by - Winston Churchill: "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us."

Though, the designers and planners have long been concerned about the effect of the built environment on human behavior. In the beginning of nineteenth century, there was a massive thrust on the effect of the primary and secondary territory (Irwin Altman, 1975), personal spaces (Robert Sommer, 1969) and its spatial configuration on the privacy, stress and well-being of the community by the physical planning of the neighborhood and started searching for factors that could reduce stress and coping for stress not only among the residents of the neighborhood, but also in other secondary environments like the work environments too, which is considered as a significant point of departure in investigating and identifying coping agents for human stress.

1.1 CONNECTION BETWEEN PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN WELL BEING

The connection between human wellbeing and the physical environment is a multi-disciplinary field that includes contribution from social and behavioral sciences of psychology, sociology, geography, and anthropology as well as from the design disciplines of Architecture, landscape architecture, interior design, and urban and regional planning. Recently it has included contributions from neuroscience research (Ziesel, 2006) and public health (Frumkin, 2003; Northridge&Sclar, 2003).

There are studies that consider person and physical environment as separate entities and emphasize the ways in which the physical environment influences wellbeing of the occupants. Some researchers, on the other hand, start from an assumption of person- environment as unity and propose interlocking and ongoing process of coexistence between people and physical environments.

The studies on territoriality, personal spaces conducted by (Irwin Altman, 1975, Edney, J.J, 1974, Sommer, 1969) have contributed to the development of types of personal spaces and effect of those on the well-being of the occupants. Perhaps, the studies focus on the stress management of the occupants in the primary territories (home), secondary territories like work space, and work stations as well.

There were length of studies and volume of research done in this area. Currently, the planners and designers along with sociologist and environmental psychologist put in their efforts to bring out the desirable outcomes in a personalized setting where there is a scope for reducing the stress by means of coping strategies within the settings. In particular the design of the work station, and personalized attributes are examined on how to nurture coping for stress in a spontaneous way among the employees and maintain the stress levels within the manageable condition.

1.2 DEFINITION AND DISTINCTIONS

The context: Context is any information that can be used to characterize the situation of an entity. An entity is a person, place, or object that is considered relevant to the interaction between a user and a function, including the user and function themselves. In This study, the entity is the corporate employees and the elements are the personalized workstation in selected corporate sectors of a particular city.

Brown (Brown 1996b) defined context to be the elements of the user's environment. They include the following facet of the environment:

- **Collective environment:** available spatial order, physical settings of permanent feature variable, semi-permanent feature and ambience to carry out the function in the physical space.

In this study the collective environment refers to the spatial configuration, physical area of the workstation where the task of employee is performed.

- **Social environment:** location, collection of nearby people, and social situation social, emotional or informational state. Here, the social environment refers to the other employees in nearby work stations and people who are involved in the working ambience.

- **Physical environment:** Work station- corporate working environment: Objective measures of the physical space, and qualities of the personalized space, lighting and noise level. Here, it refers to the actual space available for the activity, the levels of natural lighting, ventilation and the physical comfort in the work stations.

- **Stress:** Defined as any event in which environmental or internal demands tax the adaptive resources of an individual.

- **Coping for stress:** our efforts to master the demands of stress are referred to as coping. It includes thoughts, feelings, and actions that constitute these efforts

- **Defense mechanisms:** the psychological aspect of managing stress can be viewed in two different ways. Some theorists consider coping ability to be a stable personality or trait. Furthermore, it is considered as an acquired defense style. Defense mechanisms are unconscious, automatic responses that enable us to minimize perceived threats or keep them out of our awareness

- The term work stations are Physical space designated for human activity in a formal setting of order ranging in scale from personal office to large-scale corporate working environment.

- **Personalized territory** refers to the spatial configuration of the work stations in which a pattern of behavior and attitudes held by the individual is manifested , Furthermore, markings to indicate one's territorial intention and express one's identity through articulation of the physical attributes in the occupied setting wherein they perform their task on a daily basis.

- **Physical attributes** refers to the basic features of the built setting for a space including forms, proportion, area, openness, enclosure, levels of spaces, articulation of the spatial order, texture, scale, safety, protection, materials used to decorate and create identity to the space. Moreover the finish of the setting.

Ego Psychology, which emerged in 1930's (Goldstein, 1995), shifted to a more balanced perspective on the influences of cognition and emotion in social functioning. As an adaptation of psychoanalytic theory, it signaled a reaction against Freud's heavy emphasis on drives and highlighted the ego's role in promoting healthy social functioning.

- **Ego psychology** represents an effort to build a holistic psychology of normal development

2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The following objectives are formulated for this study:

- To find out the relationship between the physical settings and the coping for stress among corporate employees.
- To identify the spatial factors and design attributes that is responsible for influencing mechanisms for coping stress among corporate employees in the workstation.
- To demonstrate empirically the level of influencing potential for the identified defense mechanism in promoting coping for stress among corporate employees in the workstation.
- To prove that the personalized spatial configuration of the workstation, and markings in the territory has significant contribution in influencing selected defense mechanisms on coping for stress in work stations.
- To empirically prove that the mechanism on coping for stress among corporate employee is a function of personal spaces, spatial configuration and design attributes of the work station.
- The prime motive of this research is to investigate the influence of the personalized territorial spatial configuration and the design attributes of the corporate work stations in influencing increased level of adopting coping mechanisms for stress among corporate employees in the workstations. Thereby proving the proposition that coping for stress among employees is a function of the personalized spatial configuration and the design attributes of the workstation. In particular, this study explores the selected mechanisms for coping stress in the work station of their work environment in a day to day manner and how does that physical setting in context i.e. personalized spatial configuration (form and shape of the work station) and design attributes including the furniture layout of the workstation could be supportive in adopting mechanisms for coping stress in the work environment.

The various studies related to coping stress among the employees has been approached from many directions, but the correlation between personalized territory, Spatial configuration , design attributes of the workstation at corporate environment in Indian context has not been investigated systematically. Moreover, the potential for further scope of the research on increased adoption of coping mechanisms for stress is found to be high because the issues related to the personalized territorial space and Physical setting feature variables were not dealt with many situations. It is found that the previous studies related to coping stress pertaining to built environment has not been documented by applying specific theoretical concepts towards the study. Hence, this study has been carried out to deal with the defense mechanisms for coping work environment, through selected concepts identified by Goldstein (1995) are stated as below:

Denial : **Negating an important aspect of reality that one may actually perceive.**

Projection : **Attributing unacceptable thoughts and feelings to others.**

Repression : **Keeping unwanted thoughts and feelings entirely out of awareness.**

Undoing : **Nullifying an undesired impulse with an act of reparation.**

The above selected key concepts were empirically investigated whether it could be the Defensive factors in coping for stress among the corporate employee with special reference to software dealings corporate office settings in Tiruchirappalli district in Tamilnadu. Since this is applied for the selected office settings of a district of Tamilnadu, the findings and the results are more specific in nature and the same theory can be applied to other work environmental setting also to get the significant results with appropriate research design.

2.1 PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE CORPORATE WORK STATION AND THEIR DESCRIPTION

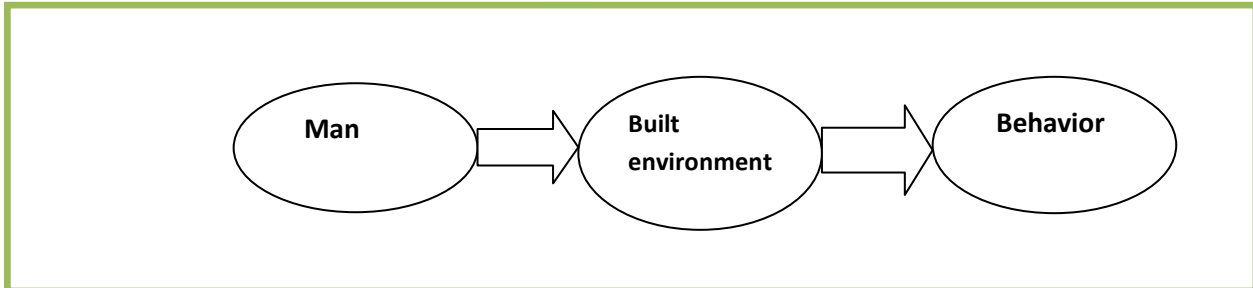
Since this study investigates whether the personalized spatial configuration of the workstation and its physical attributes can promote defense mechanisms for coping stress of the employees, it is expected to describe the details of workstation. To substantiate, the workstations selected is in the form of rectangular or square that is constructed with contemporary materials like aluminum sections, brick, steel ,cement with false ceilings and roof supported by RCC beams and columns. The interior is furnished with steel aluminum and wooden furniture which offers space for sitting, writing, group forming, and facilitates official work as well. The previous studies related to this domain evidently proves that the study related to find the influence of personalized spatial configuration and design attributes of the work stations in promoting defense mechanisms for coping stress is exceptionally rare and not much explored. Point to ponder here is that this research focuses on the impact of personalized territory, spatial configuration and physical attributes of the work station of specified corporate work settings to specific defense mechanisms for coping stress of selected employees at the corporate setting at the executive level in Human resource wing in the office. In order to demonstrate that mechanisms for coping stress is a function of the personalized spatial configuration and design attributes of the workstation, the selected concepts for understanding Defense mechanisms for coping stress identified by Goldstein (1995): Denial, Projection, repression,

undoing were investigated through observation and collected response from the corporate employees for a set of structured questionnaire in selected corporate office environments in and around Tiruchirappalli district.

3. REVIEW OF PAST STUDIES

The literature in this area is at an early stage of development, although it is growing rapidly. Results of this research to date, which has been largely cross-sectional, provide a growing body of evidence that shows an association between the built environment and coping for stress at different levels. Lau, Eley, & Steveson, (2006) Psychological coping in two ways, that is coping seen as a trait and as a state that changes over time depending on the context. The role of physical setting in the support (or nonsupport) of coping for stress has been known in the literature for some time, for example in a seminal study (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994) demonstrated that there is concrete relationship between the environment and psychological stress management.

FIG: 1- SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR (Irwin Altman 1967)



In addition to acting as a communicating medium, spatial layout or an architectural arrangement can also signal the appropriate social roles and responsibilities, for example, jury members seated at the head of a rectangular table assume leadership roles and participate more than members seated on the sides (Strodtbeck and Hook 1961). Proximity of work spaces has been linked to the occurrence and frequency of both formal communication (Conrath 1973), and informal, face-to-face communication (Homans 1954; Conrath 1973). By creating greater visual accessibility, open types of workspaces facilitate communication (Lorenzen and Jaeger 1968). Experiments in human learning behavior are valuable in that they can provide a greater understanding. All that happens in the world of human beings will definitely happen in a spatial setting and the design of the setting has a deep and assisting influence on stress among the people in that setting.

The spatial configuration, articulation and physical setting attributes within the contemporary settings manifests moods, communicates messages and remains relevant on the following aspects:

In pursuit of this investigation, our literature study clearly shows that there is a substantiated gap in this area of research involving the personalized spatial configuration and physical setting attribute for assessing the level of adopting the mechanisms for coping for stress among the corporate employee in the work environment. In light of this, the study is carried out by applying the factors identified by Goldstein (1995). In that four concepts were selected to study the research question. Therefore, this study has formulated hypothesis based on the four concepts and as an outcome the following hypothesis were formulated and examined.

4. STUDY HYPOTHESIS: DENIAL, PROJECTION, REPRESSION, UNDOING

H1: The defensive behavior –Projection is positively associated with personalized, intact workstation of the corporate employee.

H2: The defensive behavior –Denial is positively associated with his work station territory without infringement within their work environment.

H3: The defensive behavior –Repression is positively associated with personal markings and legibility on spatial articulation and ease of perceiving the circulation space and arrangement of workstation.

H4: The defensive behavior –Undoing is positively associated with adequate levels of natural lighting and ventilation in his work station within their work environment.

To prove the equation $CS = f * n \{ PT + SCoN + Mark \}$

Where CS = Coping for stress

F = Function of

N = no. of Factors

PT = Personalized territory

SCoN = Spatial Configuration

Mark = Personalized markings of the setting

4.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the above objectives the research methodology consists of the following stages:

1) Naturalistic observation in order to capture the work culture of the corporate environment in the daily routine of the employee in workstation

2) Data collection by self-report method by administering questionnaires on Defense mechanisms for coping the stress.

3) Selected concepts for understanding Defense mechanisms for coping stress identified by Goldstein (1995): Denial, Projection, Repression, Undoing were investigated through observation and made up into 4 parcels by collecting response from the employees pertaining to the workstations.

4) Analyze the data to test the research hypotheses.

4.2 METHOD OF STUDY

4.3 SAMPLE: A random sample (F.G.Kaiser, 2000) of 267 were observed, interviewed and examined by self-report method for the study. Of the 267 questionnaires that were set out 242 were returned giving a return rate of 90%. Some questionnaire contained considerable missing data and were excluded. Thus 233 subjects who provided complete data were considered for the study. Among them 137 are Male and 96 were Female employees with a mean age 37 years. The sample was 100% professionals with Engineering & technology degree working for the corporate ranging from 5 years to 10 years of work experience from four software offices in and around Trichy district. The names and identity of the corporate offices surveyed for the study and the pictures of their environment are not disclosed here as requested by the corresponding corporate offices.

4.4 PROCEDURE: Before handing out the questionnaire to the subjects they received a short description about the objective of the study. In certain cases subjects were helped to clarify some of the items of the questionnaire the respondents required about 10 minutes to complete.

4.5 INSTRUMENT: First, item pools of 30 questions (F.G.Kaiser, 2000) were created. Most of this was based on the Goldstein (1995) key concepts and Gifford & Gallagher (1985) social interaction aspect of the physical environment. Roger Barker's spatial physical setting and its affordances in promoting desirable behavior with mechanisms for coping stress like Denial, Projection, Repression, and Undoing. Ten items were eliminated as it does not fit into the above construct. Finally a set of 20 questions were construed for the survey.

The second step involved asking 8 subjects (four males, four females; age ranging from 19 to 22 years) to read and answer the questionnaire by speaking aloud while answering. When the subjects stopped or hesitated in answering, the experimenter inquired why, and later changed the wording of some items.

Thereafter, statements are framed in a yes or no pattern questions and their response is recorded. Under the components 1) Does the personalized space and intact work station facilitate the Defensive behavior denial in order to cope with the stress among the employees in the work environment 2) Does the intact personal space and territory without infringement in the work station facilitate the Defensive behavior Projection in order to cope with the stress among the employees in the work environment. 3) Does the levels of natural lighting and ventilation in the work station facilitate the Defensive behavior Repression in order to cope with the stress among the employees in the work environment 4) Does the personalized markings and Legibility on spatial articulation and ease of perceiving the circulation space and activity space facilitate the Defensive behavior Undoing in order to cope with the stress among the employees in the work environment.

5. ANALYZING DATA

The set of 20 questions are rated in a bipolar scale with the scores of ‘No’= 0 and “yes’= 1. Therefore a maximum total range of score will be 20 which recorded for all the components put together as mentioned earlier. Thus the score of 20 shows a strong influence for coping stress. Here, for the purpose of studying the role and influence of the Factors in a distinctive way the Factors are segregated into 4 parcels and Each parcel share a score of 5 points and obtaining full 5 points in the respective parcel shows significant influence and reveal definite influence of the factors towards promoting mechanisms for coping stress among corporate employees. A score of 3 discloses the moderate influence of the factors towards promoting mechanisms for coping stress among employees. And less than 2 shows lower influence of the factors towards promoting mechanisms for coping stress among employees. And a score of 0 reveals that the factors are highly insignificant to influence mechanisms for coping stress among employees.

The statements on the personalized space and territory and its influence on coping for stress are framed and administered for the questionnaire survey. Details of the questionnaire format for this study. Is provided in appendix-A.

TABLE 1

Range of scores		Mechanisms of coping for stress				sample
		Repression	Projection	Denial	Undoing	
20-15	Strong	73%	57%	58%	71%	233
14-10	Moderate	19%	25%	23%	18%	233
09-05	Weak	5%	10%	11%	6%	233
04-0	Insignificant	3%	8%	8%	5%	233
Physical setting for investigation		Work station and design attributes				

6. INTERPRETING RESULTS

Range of Scores;

20-15	-	Strong in influencing coping for stress
14-10	-	Moderate in influencing coping for stress
9 - 4	-	Low in influencing coping for stress
3 - 0	-	Insignificant in coping for stress

The empirical results are tabulated as below:

Table- 1: provides the Tabulated results for each Factor that influence mechanisms for coping for stress stated in the research hypothesis:

7. RESULT

The study results clearly indicate in an empirically that Hypothesis H3 is strongly supported for Repression mechanisms on coping for stress clearly indicates that personalized markings and legibility of the space has significant contribution and connection towards coping for stress. Furthermore, it suggests that Hypothesis H4 Denial is equally supported by this study and has greater importance in coping for stress.

H1 and H2 have moderate significance with Projection and Denial as coping for stress among the employees.

Thus the study equation is proved as $CS = f * n \{PT+ SCoN+Mark\}$

8. FINDINGS

The results of this study strongly and evidently support the two researches. Hypothesis made for the investigation. Further with 73% of the sample involved in coping for stress with personalized markings and territory in the work stations and 71% of the sample involved in increased coping for stress to the conducive sensory stimulations like adequate natural lighting and ventilation in the work station suggest that there is a definite causal connection between the personalized built environment and the coping for stress among the corporate employees. Thus personalized spatial configuration and physical attributes of the work station design proves to be the driver in promoting increased coping for stress among the Corporate employees in this context.

9. CONCLUSION

Although this study is done in a corporate settings context, the results indicate that the Built environment can facilitate or constrain mechanisms coping for stress. Likewise, the built environment can be structured in ways that provide employees more or fewer opportunities and choices to make their work environment as stress reliever. The characteristics of the built environment that facilitate or constrain coping for stress may differ depending on the overall intention of the activity. for example: ready access to outdoor environment – Circulatory spaces, fellow mates and in our daily routine which in turn improves levels of coping strategies among the employees depending upon the scale of the built environment.

Built environments that facilitate more social wellbeing and better quality of life could be articulated to provoke desirable emotions. The author believes that research on the relationship between built environment and coping for stress is at a pivotal stage. These types of investigations are highly adaptive in nature and paves way to carry out similar studies in other context depending on the type of stress coping mechanisms and the built setting. The number of investigators and studies are growing rapidly: Nowadays, interdisciplinary approaches are being encouraged; and technologies such as the global positioning system and geographic information systems, and closed circuit television, system are now available to provide and link more objective and detailed measures of both built environment and Mechanisms for stress management in different context too.

This empirical evidence designates built environment as a tangible causal agent in promoting mechanisms for coping stress.

10. FUTURE DIRECTION OF RESEARCH

This research reveals that the importance of coping mechanisms for stress among the employees warrant a strong and continuing research effort to further understand the relationship between the built environment and stress, if the field is to move forward, however different kinds of collaboration and research are needed. More interdisciplinary approach to research would help bring together the needed expertise of the public behavior, social psychologist, urban planners, architects, Interior designers among others, the research found that the interdisciplinary character of its own membership shall greatly facilitate its understanding of the issues. However, longitudinal studies should be carried out in order to measure full range of Mechanisms for coping stress at different context like, semi-urban, urban and cosmopolitan. Likewise rapid-response capability to evaluate natural experiments. Intensification and expansion of national databases are essential if important causal connections are to be researched. Built environment and its settings are the major catalyst in creating social well-being at all walks of our life.

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APPENDIX**APPENDIX –A: QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT (SAMPLE QUESTION FOR THE PARCEL – REPRESSION)****REPRESSION: KEEPING UNWANTED THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ENTIRELY OUT OF AWARENESS**

- 1) Do you think that the personalized markings in the work station help you to keep away the unwanted thoughts that cause stress?
Yes/No
- 2) Is your work station furniture with societal arrangement an important factor in keeping away the undesirable feelings that cause stress among employees?
Yes/No
- 3) Does the personalized physical attributes of your furniture in the workstation facilitates you repression in the work environment.
Yes/No
- 4) Is the legibility of the spatial configuration of your work station makes most of the employees to adopt mechanisms to cope for stress?
Yes/No
- 5) Did you feel that your work station personalized by you and the design attributes and spatial quality has become a significant component in coping stress?
Yes/No

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