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Emotional Processes and Performance

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This study investigates the interplay between stress perception and its intensity concerning performance in a professional setting. Contrary to our initial hypothesis of an interaction between stress perception and intensity, our results reveal that individuals perceiving stress as a challenge exhibit higher performance levels, while those viewing stress as a threat experience significantly lower performance, irrespective of stress intensity. This underscores the importance of how individuals interpret stress in the workplace. Our findings have crucial implications for management, employees, and human resources, suggesting that fostering a positive perception of stress as a challenge could enhance overall performance.

Drawing on Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model, stress is viewed as a dynamic relationship between individuals and environmental demands. Stress emerges from the subjective appraisal of events rather than the events themselves. This study distinguishes between threat and challenge appraisals, positing that threat perceptions decrease performance, while challenge perceptions enhance it. Additionally, Hanin's stress intensity theory suggests an optimal performance zone unique to each individual.

Eighty-five participants (62 men, 25 women) completed a questionnaire assessing stress perception, intensity, and professional performance. Stress perception was manipulated using the Appraisal of Life Events Scale, measuring threat, challenge, and loss. Intensity was assessed with a single item. Professional performance was measured using the Attainment of Sport Achievement Goals Scale. Contrary to expectations, there was no interaction between stress perception and intensity. Threat perception correlated with decreased performance, while challenge perception correlated with increased performance. No significant effects were observed for loss perception. Satisfaction with performance did not align with increased performance levels.

Our hypothesis of an interaction effect was not supported, highlighting the impact of stress perception on performance. Positive stress appraisal correlated with enhanced performance, aligning with Lazarus and Folkman's appraisal approach. However, high-performance levels did not necessarily translate into satisfaction, potentially influenced by self-critical tendencies associated with positive perfectionism. Limitations include subjective performance measurement and reliance on self-reporting, suggesting the need for future research combining subjective and physiological measures. This study emphasizes the influence of stress perception on workplace performance, urging managers to consider employees' interpretations of situations. Fostering a challenge perception and providing clear goals may enhance performance and well-being, acknowledging the unique responses of individuals to stress.

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