

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Examining Occupational Stress, Sources of Stress and Stress Management Strategies through the Eyes of Management Consultants: A Multiple Correspondence Analysis for Latent Constructs

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## Abstract

To date, little research has yet focused in broad assessment for management consultancy professionals. This investigation aims to analyse management consultants' self-perceptions of occupational stress (SPoOS), sources of stress (SoS) and stress management strategies (SMS) and to find latent constructs that can work as major determinants in consultants' conceptualization of SPoOS, SoS and SMS. Measures were completed, including demographics and interviews. Complete data were available for 39 management consultants, 53.8% male and aged between 23 and 56 years ( $M = 38.0$ ;  $SD = 9.2$ ). The data were subjected to content analysis. Representation of the associations and latent constructs were analysed by a multiple correspondence analysis. Results indicated that 'intellectual disturber' (31.4%) was the most referred SPoOS, 'high workload' (15.1%) was identified as the most prevalent perceived SoS and 'coaching' (19.0%) was the most mentioned SMS. No significant differences between the two gender groups were found regarding the three total scores. SPoOS was explained by a two-factor model: 'organization-oriented' and 'person-oriented'. A three-dimension model formed by 'job concerns', 'organizational constraints' and 'career expectations' was indicated as a best-fit solution for SoS, and SMS was best explained in a three-dimension model by 'group dynamics strategies', 'organizational culture strategies' and 'individual support strategies'. This research makes a unique contribution for a better understanding of what defines SPoOS, SoS and SMS for management consultants. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## Keywords

stress management strategies; occupational stress; sources of stress; multiple correspondence analysis; management consultants

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## Introduction

The experience of stress and its behavioural and psycho-physiological correlates mediates, in part, the effects of many different types of work demands on health (e.g. Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Jacobs, Tytherleigh, Webb, & Cooper, 2007; Rodell & Judge, 2009; Scheck, Kinicki, & Davy, 1997).

There is a growing consensus on the definition of stress as a negative psychological state with cognitive and emotional components and on its effects on the health of both individual employees and their organizations (Addae & Wang, 2006; Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Cox, Griffiths, & Rial-González, 2000; Drach-Zahavy & Freund, 2007;

Hsieh, 2004; Jacobs et al., 2007; Kivimäki, Elovainio, Vahtera, Virtanen, & Stansfeld, 2003; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Rodell & Judge, 2009).

The experience of stress is likely to occur, and well-being is likely to be affected, when there is a lack of fit in either or both respects (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Cox, 1990; Cox & Ferguson, 1991). Part of the stress process corresponds to (1) the relationships between the objective work environment and the employee's perceptions of work; (2) between those perceptions and the experience of stress and (3) between that experience and changes in behaviour and physiological functions and in health (Cox et al., 2000).

Furthermore, there is a growing consensus developing around the psychological approach to the contemporary definition of stress, characterized in terms of the dynamic interaction between the individual and the work environment. This might suggest an increasing coherence in current thinking within occupational health and safety (Bonde, 2008; Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Cox et al., 2000; Jacobs et al., 2007; Siegrist, 1996).

Siegrist (1990) argues that the experience of chronic stress at work results from two sources of effort: an *extrinsic* source, the demands of the job, and an *intrinsic* source, the motivation of the individual worker in a demanding situation. Sources of stress (SoS) in work can be situations that are experienced as stressful when they are perceived as involving important work demands, which are not well matched to the knowledge and skills of workers or their needs (Addae & Wang, 2006; Cox et al., 2000).

Levi (1994) grouped the various psychosocial SoS in work that can be derived from quantitative overload, qualitative underload, lack of control over work and lack of social support. Each aspect of such work situations represents a hazard for stress, namely aspects of work design, organization, management of work and social and environmental contexts (Addae & Wang, 2006; Benyamini, 2009; Cox & Griffiths, 1995; Drach-Zahavy & Freund, 2007; Hsieh, 2004; Rodell & Judge, 2009; Vagg, Spielberg, & Wasala, 2002). There is some preliminary evidence that even changes that may be thought to enhance the work environment can produce the opposite effect (Cox et al., 2000; Ito & Brotheridge, 2009; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). In fact, non-standard types of employment are used more frequently to guarantee organizational flexibility and short reaction times to external changes (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson, & Lundberg, 2011). Moreover, technological and socio-economic changes in recent years have affected workplaces considerably and encompass a wide range of new patterns of work organization (e.g. teleworking, communication technology, downsizing, outsourcing, subcontracting and globalization), with the associated change in employment patterns, demands for workers' flexibility both in terms of number, time, function or skills, and an increasing proportion of the population working in the service sector, self-regulated work and teamwork (Addae & Wang, 2006; Allvin et al., 2011; Cox et al., 2000; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).

An increasing body of literature suggests that stress management can be classified in terms of its strategies and that a distinction can be made between strategies that concern the organization (organizational stress management) and those that concern the individual (personal stress management) (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Ben-Zur, 2009; González-Morales, Peiró, Rodríguez, & Greenglass, 2006; Ivancevich, Matteson, Freedman, & Phillips, 1990; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Kets de Vries, 2004; Quick, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1992; Villanueva & Djurkovic, 2009).

Furthermore, three common types of intervention are found in the literature on stress management: *primary* that corresponds to some form of organizational or work development (e.g. work design and ergonomics) (Cicero & Pierro, 2007; González-Morales et al., 2006; Jones et al., 1988; Lapierre & Allen, 2006), *secondary* that emphasizes worker training either in the form of health promotion or psychological skills (e.g. coaching) (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Giuseffi et al., 2011; Kets De Vries, 2004; Lindquist & Cooper, 1999; Villanueva & Djurkovic, 2009) and *tertiary* that corresponds to employee assistance (e.g. counselling) (e.g. Cooper & Cartwright, 1997; Dollard & Winefield, 1996; Kompier, Geurts, Grundeman, Vink, & Smulders, 1998). The available data suggest that interventions, especially at the organizational level (e.g. Dollard & Winefield, 1996; Kompier et al., 1998), are beneficial to both individual and organizational health and should be further investigated and evaluated.

Most literature reviews have identified the need for further research to translate this information into a form that can be used in the auditing of workplaces (Cox et al., 2000). In addition, the enhancement of stress management strategies (SMS) and its relevance to improve health in the workplace can become a significant means for health care interventions.

In its most general use, consultation describes any taken action with a system of which the consultant is not a part (e.g. an evaluation, a study). Its goal or end product is some degree of change (e.g. structural, policy) (Biech, 2007; Block, 2011; European Federation of Management Consultancies Associations, 2010; Tordoir, 1995).

Furthermore, consulting services must include elements of advice and judgement, the expertise of the firm's consultants (Alvesson, 1995, 2002; Kurpius & Fuqua, 1993; Starbuck, 1992). The process of consulting can vary according to industry (e.g. banking, utilities) and type of consulting (e.g. technology, business). In 2009, 10,285 professionals were working as management consultants in Portugal, mainly in multinational firms (European Federation of Management Consultancies Associations, 2010).

Early definitions presented the consultant as a one-on-one content expert (Kurpius & Fuqua, 1993). A management consultant professional is a specialized expert who helps private and public organizations to analyse and redefine their strategies, to improve the efficiency of their business operations and to optimize their technical and human resources. Consultants are in position of having some influence over a group, and individual or an organization but have no direct power to make changes or implement programmes. Moreover, these professionals develop technical and interpersonal skills and can work internally (i.e. within an organization) or externally (i.e. employed by an external organization) (Biech, 2007; Block, 2011; Tordoir, 1995).

In detail, a consultant's primary objective is to achieve organizational results through the application of specific expertise, which may not imply transferring knowledge or a skillset to their client. The primary focus of a management consultant is organizational development in terms of structure, systems or processes and practices. A consultant is geared more on an organization-wide scope, in a collaborative relationship, rather than on an individual aspect (Biech, 2007; Block, 2011; Sperry, 2008; Tordoir, 1995). Furthermore, consulting is a proximate, yet distinct, from other concepts such as coaching, mentoring and training. As regards to a coach, this professional aims at identifying the skills and capabilities that are within the person and enabling people to use them to the best of their ability (Beck, Gregory, & Carr, 2009; Gregory, Beck, & Carr, 2011; Rogers, 2008; Sperry, 2008). In fact, whereas consulting is largely informational, coaching is heavily inspirational and focused on skill development. Furthermore, a mentor is a guide and advisor that focus on enhancing a person's role effectiveness (Waters, Clarke, Ingall, & Dean-Jones, 2003) and on promoting a person's professional and/or personal development and not a specific task (Fisher, 1994), whereas a trainer aims at teaching specific skills or knowledge to the client (Harrison, 1992). Moreover, managerial work is more often associated with decision making, work overload, role related problems and uncertainty (French, Caplan, & van Harrison, 1982).

Alvesson (1995, 2002) argued that consulting environments may be described as ambiguity-intensive. From a content and physical standpoint, consultants work close to their clients. Consequently, these organizations act as open systems (Weick, 1995). Moreover, the demands of work in consultancy, namely expectations from the client, lack of free time, work overload, secrecy and frequent travelling can be major SoS (Block, 2011; Kipping, 2002; Leung, Chan, & Olomolaiye, 2008; Sturdy, Handley, Clark, & Fincham, 2009; Turner, 1982).

Despite the findings described previously, the literature on management consulting is scarce (Block, 2011; Johri, Cooper, & Prokopenko, 1998; Lacey, 1995). Moreover, the study of occupational stress specifically remains at the periphery of current research on consultants' conceptualizations. In fact, to date, little research has yet focused in broad assessment for consultancy professionals or in the association between self-perceptions of occupational stress (SPoOS), SoS and SMS among management consultants. Therefore, this study aims to make a unique contribution to the existing literature by (a) eliciting categories that emerged from management consultants' perspectives upon SPoOS, SoS and SMS, (b) finding latent constructs that can work as major determinants in management consultants' conceptualization of SPoOS, SoS and SMS, and (c) examining the potential explanatory mechanisms of the cited concepts.

Instead of being measured based on the theoretical assumptions or on the researchers' own definitions, we assert that to have a better understanding of what actually constitutes management consultants' conceptualization of SPoOS, it is essential to explore their narratives. Because elements constituting stress are considered personal, self-reports of those involved in the work of consultancy, eliciting and modelling the knowledge and perceptions of consultants is central to the assessment process.

## Materials and methods

### Sample and participant selection

A total of 39 eligible individuals, aged 23 and over ( $M = 38.0$ ;  $SD = 9.2$ ; range 23–56), 53.8% male, 59.0% married, 92.3% with a college degree, comprised the sample for the current study. Participants were recruited by a non-probabilistic convenience sampling procedure. Participants had to be employed and work as management consultants in consultancy organizations (Biech, 2007; Block, 2011; Tordoir, 1995), and their scope of work was classified accordingly to existing literature (European Federation of Management Consultancies Associations, 2010). All the participants in our study had to have the academic background and/or working experience for the demanded type of management consulting, as required by the consulting organization and clients. Table I shows the characteristics of the interview informants.

### Measures and procedure

Semi-structured interviews were performed in participants' own homes. Participants were provided with a brief description of the study over the phone and invited to participate in an in-person interview. Interviews were conducted between April and October 2011 and lasted between 20 and 50 min.

As a general outline for the interviews, we considered stress in a psychological approach, as a broad-ranging function of the dynamic interaction of subjective and objective elements (Cox et al., 2000), and the consultant's perceptions of stress that are experienced by the professional while performing management consulting services.

Data were content analysed using the following procedure: (a) development of major emergent categories, mutually exclusive, that reflected the 39 interviews, for each one of the three pre-existing categories, SPoOS ('what is occupational stress for you?'), SoS ('what are in your opinion, the sources for stress in workplace?') and SMS ('how do you manage stress in work?'); (b) creation of a list of coding cues; (c) analysis of verbatim quotes and characterizations for best fit for a given emergent category; (d) definition of sub-categories, within and across the narratives while preserving the principle of homogeneity of the category and (e) derivation of major emergent categories until

**Table I.** Participant characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%	<i>M(SD)</i>
Gender			
Male	21	53.8	
Female	18	46.2	
Educational level			
High school education	3	7.7	
College graduate	36	92.3	
Type of college education			
Business	16	41.0	
Information technology	14	35.9	
Behaviour sciences	9	23.1	
Scope of consultation services			
Business consulting and information technology consulting	13	33.3	
Development and systems integration	10	25.7	
Outsourcing of value added services	9	23.1	
Other services	7	17.9	
Participant's experience as consultants			
≤5 years	13	33.3	
6–10 years	15	38.5	
≥11 years	11	28.2	
Religion			
Catholic	23	59.0	
Atheist	8	20.5	
Protestant	8	20.5	
Marital status			
Married or in a relationship	23	59.0	
Single	10	25.6	
Divorced	6	15.4	
Nationality			
Portuguese	39	100.0	
Age			
23–56			38.0 (9.2)

Total sample, *n* = 39; *SD* = standard deviation.

the point of theoretical saturation was reached (Bardin, 2007; Morse, 1995).

The approach to the analysis was based on an overarching concern for reflecting the participants' experiences. To this end, the researchers decided on the word sense as the most appropriate unit of analysis as it would best reflect participants' language usage and the style variations among the participants (e.g. the tendency of some participants to repeat ideas) (Mattis, 2002).

Our structure of sub-categories and categories was then subjected to an external review, and critical feedback was obtained from reviewers with experience with working adults. An independent analysis of the 39 interviews was performed by a jury of two psychologists (both faculty), and a final group co-resolution regarding the categories was made.

Representation of the associations between the emergent categories obtained from the narrative analysis, and latent constructs that can work as major determinants in consultants' SPoOS, SoS and SMS,

was assessed by a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). Data were analysed using SPSS for Windows (version 19.0; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL).

The ISPA, Instituto Universitário, the Autonomous University of Lisbon and the University Institute of Economy and Management approved the study. Informed consent was received from all participants and the study protocol was approved by the Research Unit in Psychology and Health's coordination.

## Results

### Content analysis: emergent categories of SPoOS, SoS and SMS

Results from content analysis suggest five emergent categories of answers for SPoOS, namely (a) 'intellectual disturber', (b) 'physical disturber', (c) 'professional handicap', (d) 'organizational weakness' and (e) 'work attribute'. Stress was mostly perceived as an intellectual disturber (31.4%), as seen in Table II.

These participants verbalized that stress brought difficulties to their intellectual performance within their work.

When I feel stressed, I cannot concentrate on my work. (Participant 17) (Table II)

Regarding the SoS, the jury identified a total of 12 categories: (a) 'pressure for the results', (b) 'high workload', (c) 'blame culture', (d) 'ineffective management', (e) 'secrecy', (f) 'frequent travelling', (g) 'poor physical working environment', (h) 'job insecurity', (i) 'relationships at work', (j) 'career development', (k) 'weak leadership' and (l) 'lack of free time'. High workload (15.1%) and pressure for the results (14.4%) were the most mentioned SoS, as evidenced in Table II.

I've been working six days per week for the last two months. It's been very hard for my family. (Participant 9) I am obliged to have a number of on-going projects per year and this is a huge source of stress for me. (Participant 27) (Table II)

As regard to SMS, 11 categories of answers emerged, namely (a) 'counselling', (b) 'coaching', (c) 'team work', (d) 'organizational culture', (e) 'leadership', (f) 'employment assistance programmes (EAP)', (g) 'work design and ergonomics', (h) 'work planning and scheduling', (i) 'after-work socialization', (j) 'team building and bonding' and (k) 'work-family integration'. Moreover, coaching (19.0%), counselling (17.8%) and after-work socialization (16.6%) were the most mentioned SMS (Table II).

I need to speak to someone more experienced that can help me making the most of my career. (Participant 7) Counseling sessions have been very important to help me dealing with my work

**Table II.** Summary of major categories resulting from content analysis of the pre-categories 'self-perceptions of occupational stress', 'sources of stress' and 'stress management strategies'

Pre-category	Category	Category frequency of occurrences	Category percent overall respondents	Examples of participants' interview quotes
Self-perceptions of work stress	Intellectual disturber	38	31.4	'When I feel stressed, I cannot concentrate on my work.'
	Physical disturber	20	16.5	'I feel this heavy load on my back when I am stressed and sometimes I have diarrhoea.'
	Professional handicap	8	6.6	'I feel that my professional performance is affected by my stress.'
	Organizational weakness	23	10.0	'I believe that if one works in a stressful workplace, this weakens the organizational environment.'
	Work attribute	32	26.4	'Stress comes with work. There is nothing we can do about it.'
Score of 'self-perceptions of work stress'		121	100.0	
	Sources of stress			
	Pressure for the results	41	14.4	'I am obliged to have a number of on-going projects per year and this is a huge source of stress for me.'
	High workload	43	15.1	'I've been working six days per week for the last two months. It's been very hard for my family.'
	Blame culture	18	6.3	'If something goes wrong and the client does not renew the contract, there must be someone to be blamed for this.'
	Ineffective management	10	3.5	'I get very stressed when my project manager makes wrong decisions that affect all of us.'
	Secrecy	9	3.2	'Sometimes I feel very stressed with the fact that all the work contracts are confidential.'
	Frequent travelling	19	6.7	'I spent my last three years in airports. Time changes and different food get me stressed.'
	Poor physical working environment	9	3.2	'Our office has excellent conditions but I spend most of my time in the clients' office and some have very poor working environments for the consultants.'
	Job insecurity	36	12.7	'I feel my job is never safe, especially now with this entire crisis.'
Score of 'sources of stress'	Relationships at work	30	10.6	'Consultants are extremely competitive and I know I cannot show all the cards. This is very stressful for me.'
	Career development	36	12.7	'When I feel that I am really stressed, I don't focus on my career and everything becomes on hold.'
	Weak leadership	13	4.6	'Sometimes the project manager is not the right person because I do not feel that he has leadership skills. Sometimes I have to make the important decisions.'
	Lack of free time	20	7.0	'My family and I get very stressed when I have to give up part of my holidays because of project deadlines.'
		284	100.0	
	Stress management strategies			
	Counselling	29	17.8	'Counseling sessions have been very important to help me dealing with my work stress.'
	Coaching	31	19.0	'I need to speak to someone more experienced that can help me making the most of my career.'
	Team work	3	1.8	'My best strategy is to work within a team. I like to have people around me when I am working.'
				(Continues)

Table II. (Continued)

Pre-category	Category	Category frequency of occurrences	Category percent overall respondents	Examples of participants' interview quotes
Score of 'stress management strategies'	Organizational culture	7	4.3	'I believe that a strong organizational culture helps me understanding the purpose of my work and my boundaries. This decreases my level of stress.'
	Leadership	6	3.7	'When I have the chance of working with a good leader, everything goes smoothly. I know that he knows what he is doing.'
	Employment assistance programmes	26	16.0	'I strongly believe that employment assistance programs can ease my levels of stress for specific problems that might come in my way.'
	Work design and ergonomics	5	3.1	'Our new open space layout was a great idea. I feel much more integrated in our office now.'
	Work planning and scheduling	22	13.5	'I am very organized and work planning and scheduling is essential for keeping me away from stress.'
	After-work socialization	27	16.6	'We always go out for a coffee after work. That really helps me relieving my daily stress.'
	Team building and bonding	3	1.8	'My experience is that these involve physical activities and because of that, these are great opportunities to relax and to be away from our indoors daily pressure.'
	Work-family integration	4	2.5	'I believe that we should have more events in which we can bring our own family, such as a summer barbecue.'
		163	100.0	

stress. (Participant28) We always go out for a coffee after work. That really helps me relieving my daily stress. (Participant 34) (Table II)

Because men and women may experience stress differently, an Asymptotic Chi-Square Test was used to analyse if the two sex groups diverged significantly concerning SPoOS, SoS and SMS. No significant differences between the two groups were found regarding these three total scores. However, significant differences were found in two of the SoS categories: secrecy ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.6$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and poor physical working environment ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.8$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In detail, secrecy was verbalized by only one female participant, whereas eight men reported it as SoS. Poor physical working environment was pointed out by 38.1% of the men. Conversely, no women reported it as an SoS.

Furthermore, and because perceptions can change as a function of the amount of experience, an Asymptotic Chi-Square Test was used to analyse if the three consultant groups with different types of amount of experience diverged significantly concerning SPoOS, SoS and SMS. No significant differences between the three groups were found regarding the SPoOS, SoS and SMS's total scores. Yet, significant differences were found in three of the SoS categories: ineffective management ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.7$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); relationships at work ( $\chi^2(4) = 13.9$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and weak leadership ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.5$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, significant differences were found in three of the SMS categories: team building and bonding ( $\chi^2(4) = 8.6$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); work planning and scheduling ( $\chi^2(4) = 11.6$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and after-work socialization ( $\chi^2(4) = 14.4$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In detail, no experienced consultants verbalized ineffective management, whereas 35.7% of the remaining consultants reported it as SoS. Relationships at work was indicated by 85.7% of the consultants with less than 10 years, whereas only 27.3% of the more experienced consultants reported it as SoS. Weak leadership was pointed out by the totally of the more experienced consultants. Yet, only 42.8% of the remaining consultants indicated it as a SoS. Team building and bonding was reported by 3.8% of the consultants with more than 5 years of experience, whereas 17.9% of the remaining consultants verbalized it as SMS. Work planning and scheduling was verbalized by 25.0% of the less experienced consultants, whereas 45.5% of the remaining consultants indicated it as SMS. Finally, after-work socialization was reported by 63.6% of the more experienced consultants, whereas only 28.6% of the remaining consultants indicated it as SMS.

### Multiple correspondence analysis of the emergent categories

Multiple correspondence analysis assesses the correlational structure of the pre-categories in our study:

SPoOS, SoS and SMS. Thus, findings indicate a model for each pre-category, with diverse factors and factor loadings.

Self-perceptions of occupational stress is better explained by a two-dimension model. The two factors 'organization-oriented' and 'person-oriented' explained 72.1% of total inertia (variance) observed (Table III).

As regard to SoS, a three-dimension model formed by 'job concerns', 'organizational constraints' and 'career expectations' was indicated by MCA as a best-fit solution and explained 72.2% of total inertia (Table IV).

Stress management strategy is best explained in a three-dimension model (accounting for 87.7% of total variance) outlined by 'group dynamics strategies', 'organizational culture strategies' and 'individual support strategies' as evidence in Table V.

**Table III.** Two-dimensional representation for 'self-perceptions of occupational stress': factor loadings for each dimension, mean loadings and % inertia (variance) explained

Categories	Dimensions		Mean
	Organization-oriented	Person-oriented	
Intellectual disturber	0.010	<b>0.456</b>	0.233
Physical disturber	0.184	<b>0.588</b>	0.386
Professional handicap	<b>0.636</b>	0.147	0.392
Organizational weakness	<b>0.780</b>	0.054	0.417
Work attribute	<b>0.481</b>	0.271	0.376
Eigenvalue	2090	1516	1803
Inertia	0.418	0.303	0.361
% of variance	41,810	30,329	36,069

The bold entry refers to the factor where the category loading has the highest score.

**Table IV.** Three-dimensional representation for contributors to 'sources of stress': factor loadings for each dimension, mean loadings and % inertia (variance) explained

Categories	Dimensions			Mean
	Job concerns	Organizational constraints	Career expectations	
Pressure for the results	0.037	0.195	<b>0.474</b>	0.235
High workload	<b>0.177</b>	0.003	0.018	0.066
Blame culture	0.151	<b>0.492</b>	0.111	0.251
Ineffective management	0.246	<b>0.530</b>	0.008	0.261
Secrecy	0.300	<b>0.458</b>	0.001	0.253
Frequent travelling	<b>0.809</b>	0.032	0.017	0.286
Poor physical working environment	0.203	<b>0.583</b>	0.000	0.262
Job insecurity	<b>0.530</b>	0.011	0.062	0.201
Relationships at work	<b>0.588</b>	0.043	0.016	0.216
Career development	0.007	0.063	<b>0.798</b>	0.289
Weak leadership	0.210	<b>0.625</b>	0.012	0.283
Lack of free time	<b>0.809</b>	0.032	0.017	0.286
Eigenvalue	4064	3067	1534	2889
Inertia	0.339	0.256	0.128	0.241
% of variance	33,869	25,562	12,787	24,073

The bold entry refers to the factor where the category loading has the highest score.

## Discussion

This study indicated the emergence of objective (e.g. frequent travelling) and subjective categories (e.g. blame culture), as SoS in workplace. Regarding SPoOS, participants highlighted stress as an intellectual disturber (31.4%), supporting existing literature (Cox et al., 2000; Kivimäki et al., 2003). As to SMS, participants emphasized individual support strategies (42.8% of overall narratives).

In our study, coaching (19.0%) and counselling (17.8%) were the most reported SMS. Unpredictably, sport was not verbalized as one of the SMS, as indicated in previous studies (Brown, Gilson, Burton, & Brown, 2011; Eriksen et al., 2002; Sjogren et al., 2005). These results indicated the relevance of stress management for the respondents and supported existing literature (Dilworth & Kingsbury, 2005; Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Ivancevich et al., 1990; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Kets De Vries, 2004; Siegrist, 1990; van der Hek & Plomp, 1997).

Despite the fact that we found no significant differences between men and women regarding the SPoOS, SoS and SMS's total scores, significant differences were found in two of the SoS categories. Our findings do not corroborate previous research that indicates that women reported higher levels of stress compared with men. However, evidence regarding the role of gender in workplace stress and stressors has been inconsistent (Miller et al., 2000; Palmer & Gyllesten, 2005).

Participants indicated different academic background as well as diverse experience as management consultants. Although we found no significant differences between the three groups regarding the SPoOS, SoS and SMS's total scores, significant differences were

**Table V.** Three-dimensional representation for 'stress management strategies': factor loadings for each dimension, mean loadings and % inertia (variance) explained

Categories	Dimensions			Mean
	Group dynamics strategies	Organizational culture strategies	Individual support strategies	
Counselling	0.407	0.045	<b>0.483</b>	0.312
Coaching	0.444	0.037	<b>0.495</b>	0.325
Teamwork	<b>0.586</b>	0.001	0.160	0.249
Organizational culture	0.078	<b>0.766</b>	0.009	0.284
Leadership	0.046	<b>0.901</b>	0.009	0.319
Employment assistance programmes	0.407	0.045	<b>0.483</b>	0.312
Work design and ergonomics	0.007	<b>0.895</b>	0.043	0.315
Work planning and scheduling	0.016	<b>0.819</b>	0.029	0.288
After-work socialization	<b>0.586</b>	0.001	0.160	0.249
Team building and bonding	<b>0.607</b>	0.012	0.326	0.315
Work-family integration	<b>0.586</b>	0.001	0.160	0.249
Eigenvalue	3770	3523	2357	3217
Inertia	0.343	0.320	0.214	0.292
% of variance	34,276	32,029	21,425	29,243

The bold entry refers to the factor where the category loading has the highest score.

found in three of the SoS and SMS categories. Literature points out that workers perceptions change as function of age and experience and that these differences should be addressed in the workplace (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lattuch & Young, 2011; Murphy, 2007). Moreover, consultants perceive their work depending on their work surroundings, educational backgrounds, goals and conceptual models (Kurpius & Fuqua, 1993).

Multiple correspondence analysis indicated that SPoOS can be explained by two factors: organization-oriented is represented by professional handicap, work attribute and organizational weakness; thus, these employees perceived stress as related to the organization, given the strong relation with profession, work and organization. The second factor, person-oriented, was embodied by intellectual disturber and physical disturber; therefore, these participants perceived stress as a physical and an intellectual personal disturber. These results are in line with previous studies (Bonde, 2008; Cox et al., 2000; Jacobs et al., 2007; Kivimäki et al., 2003; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Siegrist, 1996). If prolonged, they can have adverse effects on physical and mental health (Kivimäki et al., 2003).

Sources of stress is composed of three major factors: (a) job concerns was represented by high workload, frequent travelling, job insecurity, relationships at work and lack of free time; therefore, these workers attributed their SoS to job characteristics, given the strong relationship with work conditions, consequences and demands; (b) organizational constraints was composed by blame culture, ineffective management, secrecy, poor physical working environment and weak leadership; thus, these workers assigned their SoS to cultural and organizational aspects; and (c) career expectations was embodied by pressure for the results and career

development; therefore, these workers reflected upon career issues, supporting existing literature that indicated that workers stress is associated with career prospects (Benyamini, 2009; Bravo, Peiró, Rodriguez, & Whitely, 2003; Ito & Brotheridge, 2009; Nagel, Gender, & Bonner, 2010). Moreover, ineffective management, weak leadership, job insecurity and fear of redundancy can be major SoS (Cox et al., 2000; Hsieh, 2004; Vagg et al., 2002), as well as frequent travelling, quantitative work overload, lack of control over work, lack of free time, relationships at work and lack of social support as some of the various psychosocial SoS (Addae & Wang, 2006; Block, 2011; Cox & Griffiths, 1995; Kipping, 2002; Drach-Zahavy & Freund, 2007; Leung et al., 2008; Sturdy et al., 2009).

Stress management strategy was largely explained by a three-factor model: (a) group dynamics strategies was constituted by 'teamwork', after-work socialization, team building and bonding and 'work-family integration'; hence, these participants highlighted group strategies associated to team work, socialization and family-work integration; (b) organizational culture strategies was composed by leadership, organizational culture, work design and ergonomics and work planning and scheduling, given the strong relation with culture and organization environment and (c) 'individual-support strategies' was embodied by coaching, counselling and EAP, considering the relationship between these three individualized support approaches. Previous studies focused both on organizational stress management and on personal stress management (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Ben-Zur, 2009; Cicero & Pierro, 2007; Ivancevich et al., 1990; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Lapierre & Allen, 2006; Quick et al., 1992). Additionally, literature suggested that *primary* interventions are the least popular, (e.g. changing the nature of the

job or the organization) and may be considered more complex (González-Morales et al., 2006; Jones et al., 1988; Lapierre & Allen, 2006) than simply buying-in some of the other types of interventions (Briner, 1997) such as EAPs, counselling and help lines for the 'troubled employee' (Cooper & Cartwright, 1997; Cox et al., 2000; Dollard & Winefield, 1996; Kompier et al., 1998; Giuseffi et al., 2011; Lindquist & Cooper, 1999). Moreover, Giuseffi et al. (2011) emphasized technology-based solutions such as digital health coaching for stress management.

Yet, the provision and management of such programmes is not straightforward, considering the delicate balance between assisting individuals and protecting and promoting the interests of organizations (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Cox et al., 2000; Quick et al., 1992). Furthermore, Cooper, Allison, Reynolds, and Sadri (1992) and Cooper, Sadri, Allison, and Reynolds (1992) suggested that counselling was effective in improving self-reported psychological health and absence from work but not job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Moreover, previous studies suggest that interventions at the organizational level are beneficial to both individual and organizational health (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Dollard & Winefield, 1996; Kompier et al., 1998).

Also, mixed results, such as higher rates of absenteeism and staff turnover as well as increased self-efficacy and enhanced social support, were obtained by meta-analytical studies (Bettenhausen, 1991; Cohen & Ledford, 1994; Windel & Zimolong, 1997), as a result of the implementation of team work or self-regulated work. Additionally, it is known that organizational socialization is most powerful during organizational entry and relevant for both individual and organizational health (Klein & Weaver, 2000).

Furthermore, collaboration between researchers and psychologists will help to shed light on the forms of bringing forward the potential well-being in the workplace. Future work should circumvent limitations of this study. Because this was an exploratory study exclusively concerning management consultants, a non-probabilistic sampling was necessary to allow basic data and trends, regarding perceptions of stress, to be obtained, without the complications of using a randomized sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Marshall, 1996; Weiss, 1994). Although our sample is big enough for a qualitative study, it is not representative of the entire management consulting population and only reveals the perceptions of our participants. Moreover, differences from results between the sample and the entire population, (e.g. distribution frequencies of consultation services) could influence external validity, indicate systematic bias and skewed results and cannot lead to generalizations and inference making about the entire management consultants' population (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Patton, 2000).

However, participants were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. In fact, considering the objectives of our study, the difficult contact with this group of rarely available professionals and the secrecy around the management consultancy profession, the use of a non-probabilistic sampling was required. Moreover, sampling of participants was performed with the objective of an authentic understanding of stress perceptions and trustworthiness was ensured in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Contrary to studies using randomized sampling, this approach allows the access to difficult samples and, thus, insightful gains into the overall nature of representations of SPoOS, SoS and SMS in the management consultants' workplace (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Potter, 1996). As other qualitative studies, there is no certainty that different researchers would not come up with different categories. Yet, the influence of a single researcher was minimized by the checking of results with external review and with respondents themselves. Qualitative research thus, was necessary to maximize validity and to highlight the need for researchers and health professionals to be aware of the variation in perceptions of the participants. Mazzola, Schonfeld, and Spector (2011) underlined the value of qualitative approaches to the study of occupational stress, especially when used in conjunction with quantitative methods in mixed-method studies.

Because the setting and demands of consultancy work diverges from management, i.e. consultants support organizations in their ability to create options, whereas managers have the responsibility for decisions and implementation (Becker & Seidl, 2007; Block, 2011), further research is pertinent to develop the conceptual framework of SMS, specifically for management consultants. Therefore, the results of this study can form part of a broad assessment for management consultancy professionals, not to date fully investigated. The evidence on variety of stress presented in this paper is a relevant contribution to the potential of the concept of SPoOS in this population and its association with SoS and SMS.

Furthermore, understanding differences concerning stress perceptions in management consultancy is paramount for intervention strategies and policy to these professionals. In brief, we consider the outcomes of this study to be critical in the evaluation of working management consultants, service planning and clinical practice, namely in secondary and tertiary interventions.

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