



Job Burnout: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Job burnout is a serious issue in the growing competitive market for the individual and the organization. The research has shown that persons associated with human services are prone to job burnout. Burnout leads to work exhaustion, and that work exhaustion is a trigger for depersonalization and lack of personal achievement. Prior research has found evidence of the prevalence of job burnout in nursing staff, technicians, teachers, customer service professionals, police, banking personnel, telecom, BPO, IT, Construction, Food Processing, etc. This study examines the factors which predict job burnout and the strategies to mitigate it. Role ambiguity, job security, incentives, interpersonal relations, workload, lack of participation in decision making are some of the factors which are prominent in most of the literature.

KEYWORDS

: Stress, Job Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, self-efficacy, employee turnover, Job Satisfaction, etc

Introduction

Job is a big problem in various industries. Organizations find it difficult to combat the issue of burnout. Burnout is the condition that arises when prolonged stress causes to turn to exhaustion, involvement to turn to cynicism, and efficacy to become a lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009), is a pervasive phenomenon in organizations (Golembiewski, Boudreau, Sun, & Luo, 1998; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Burnout cost a lot to the individual and the organization. Lee and Ashforth (1996) concluded that burnout is significant in explaining a wide range of behaviors and attitudes in stressful work environments. Others have suggested that burnout is a centroid- a dimension related to a very broad array of other variables of social and managerial relevance (Golembiewski, Boudreau, Munzenrider, & Luo, 1996). The job burnout has been studied for more than 40 years in a variety of occupations including nursing staff, technicians, teachers, customer service professionals, police, banking personnel, telecom, BPO, IT, Construction, Food Processing, etc. The literature presents a well-developed conceptual framework of burnout.

The literature present that there are three components of job burnout as emotional exhaustion, cynicism (also referred as depersonalization) and professional in efficacy (also referred as lack of personal achievement). The emotional demand exceeds the available resources to cope with the stress arising from those demands, results in emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization occurs when employees attempt to create emotional distance between themselves and others, thus develops a cynical attitude. The third component, inefficacy is the erosion of an individual's sense of effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

Herbert Freudenberger-a German born American Psychologist in 1974 first defined the term *burnout* as "the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one's devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results". Since then burnout was considered as a multi-component construct. A commonly accepted model holds that the phenomenon is characterized by three inter related components (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The first component is emotional exhaustion, the second is depersonalization, and the third component is inefficacy, is also referred as diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is a state of deplet-

ed energy caused by excessive psychological and emotional demands, depersonalization refers to feeling of callousness and cynicism, and inefficacy is characterized by a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively (Jackson, Turner & Brief, 1987). In order to cope with the emotional exhaustion, individuals withdraw and depersonalize others, causing a loss of personal commitment to their work relationships, eventually resulting in feelings of declining competence and diminished personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

Factors that drive burnout are related to either job demands or job resources. The most commonly cited factor is work overload (also referred as role overload). It has been classified as quantitative or qualitative work overload. Quantitative work overload is the perception of too much of work to complete in a given time period and qualitative work overload occurs when the job requirements exceed skill level (Sanders, Fulks, & Knoblett, 1995). Earlier research shown that excessive prolonged work demands drained emotional resources and energy and caused emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982a). Researchers later confirmed that workload and time pressure are consistently and strongly related to job burnout (Maslach, Schufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Other findings of empirical research that has also shown an association between quantitative and qualitative work overload and variety of physiological, psychological and behavioral strain symptoms (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Miller & Ellis, 1990). If work overload is not managed properly, it may lead to stress, fatigue, accidents, exhaustion, depression and other negative consequences (Fong & Kleiner, 2004).

Role conflict and role ambiguity are two more often cited antecedents of burnout. A stated by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970), role conflict occurs when an employee perceives a discrepancy between expectations conveyed by different sources, while role ambiguity occurs when an employee is uncertain about expectations. Early research established that role conflict and role ambiguity independently have a direct causal relationship with burnout (Jackson, 1983), and subsequent research has supported this finding in a variety of populations including sales persons (Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001), school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005), social workers (Um & Harrison, 1998), information system employees (Sethi, Barrier, & King, 1999). However, these two factors impacted on different degrees; Kirk-Brown and Wallace (2004)

found in their study on workplace counselors that only role ambiguity (and not role conflict) was a significant predictor of burnout.

A lack of autonomy also known as a lack of participation in decision making has been shown to cause worker exhaustion (Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986; Maslach et al., 2001). Jackson et al. (1987) link non-participatory decision making to depersonalization, the second factor of burnout. A lack of autonomy implies an uncontrollable environment and when employees feel the environment is sufficiently uncontrollable, they resort to depersonalizing their relationships (Jackson et al. 1987). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) confirmed that employees who work in impersonal, bureaucratic, rigid or controlling environments experience a higher level of burnout.

Interpersonal conflict has also been identified as a strong predictor of burnout (Gaines & Jermier, 1983). According to Leiter and Maslach (1988), interpersonal conflicts are often negative because of conflicts stemming from organizational policies, conflicting personal values, or disagreement about how the job should be carried out. Other researchers have argued that poorly managed conflict can have long term negative consequences for individual health and well-being, producing burnout (Dignam & West, 1988; Maslach et al., 2001).

The conservation of resources theory holds that people try to maintain their valued resources, and when resources are lost or threatened, stress may occur (Leiter, 1993). Burnout may develop from the prolonged stress created in trying to replace a lost or threatened resource like social support (Houkes et al., 2003). Maslach et al. (2001) differentiated between the effects from a lack of social support from coworkers and a lack of support from supervisors. They found that a lack of support from supervisor is more strongly linked to burnout than lack of support from peers. A lack of feedback from supervisors is linked to all three components of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

The burnout depends on the evaluation of the effort-reward relationship. Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo and Mutanen (2002) found that burnout might result when a worker feels insufficiently recognized by a supervisor, especially in blue-collar profession. Another factor that has been shown in the research of burnout is organizational trust. In exchange for their commitment to the organization, employees expect to receive some assurance of security (Kulnert & Vance, 1992). If an employee does not believe that the organization will uphold its end of this implicit psychological contract, the deficiency of trust may create an environment in which burnout tendencies thrive. Kalbers and Fogerty (2005) have confirmed that the trust construct has a significant impact on two of the components of burnout-depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

Though factors driving burnout tend to be situational rather than individual, many researchers have proposed that burnout is a product of both individual and environmental factors (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Studies have implicated several individual demographic or personality factors as contributors to burnout as well. Kalbers and Fogerty (2005) assert that locus of control, a construct developed by Rotter (1966) to differentiate between individuals who feel they are in charge of the course of their life (said to have an internal locus of control) and individual who believe their destiny is controlled by conditions and events outside of their control (said to have external locus of control), is an important antecedent of the three burnout dimensions. An individual with an external locus of control tends to feel more hopeless and unable to overcome adversity (Luzzo & Ward, 1995).

Another individual factor contributing to burnout is a discrepancy between employee skills and job expectations. Workers with skills that match the demands to their jobs may avoid burnout by working more naturally within organizationally defined expectations (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Kalbers and Fogerty (2005) showed that accountants with higher levels of skills

tend to report less of the reduced professional efficacy, but these skills do not appear to shield them from depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. An individual resource known as coordination expertise can reduce stress in a job. Coordination expertise involves being aware of where expertise is located, recognizing where the expertise's application is necessary, and bringing the needed expertise to bear (Faraj & Sproull, 2000). Due to lack of coordination expertise, individual might experience burnout because of an absence of understanding between team members or because of their inexperience with certain technologies. A high level of coordination expertise may not only reduce emotional exhaustion and depersonalization but it may also have positive impact on the personal accomplishment of the individual (Yashwant Advani et al., 2005). Thus, coordination expertise is considered as contributor to all three components of burnout.

Demographic factors have also been tested by various researchers. Age is the demographic factor that has been linked most consistently with burnout which appears to occur most frequently earlier in one's career (Maslach et al., 2001). Research has shown that stress-prone individuals typically have poor self-esteem (Rosse, Boss, Johnson, & Crown, 1991). An individual's unmet expectations of what he or she can achieve personally, or of what the organization offers, can also lead to burnout (Jackson et al., 1986). Other research indicates that new employees generally feel higher stress, as age and tenure negatively related to burnout levels (Sethi, Barrier, & King, 2004). Over the years, researchers have found that burnout exists to a significant degree among technology professionals (Kumashiro, Kamada, & Miyake, 1989; Sethi et al., 1999; Shih et al., 2013). Shih et al. (2013) point out that burnout of IT workers is a key factor leading to job turnover, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment.

Methodology

This paper is based on the literature review of various papers, books, articles on burnout. The secondary data is use for this paper. The objective is to know about the theories and concepts proved for the study of burnout.

The most commonly used instrument to assess job burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). Because burnout was initially thought to exist only among those who do some type of "people work" (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993), the MBI was developed to measure burnout in the human service profession. When it became obvious that burnout also occurs in other profession, a new version of the MBI was created. This adapted instrument is called the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS), contains the same three dimensions as the original survey, but the items are more generic and do not refer to the people with whom one is working (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). High score on exhaustion and cynicism and low score on professional efficacy are indicative of burnout. The validity and reliability of the MBA-GS have been checked by Jackson et al., 1987; Sethi et al., 1999; Schutte, Toppinen, Kalimo, & Schaufeli, 2000 and Yashwant Advani et al., 2005.

Conclusion

There are three components of job burnout such as emotional exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization and lack of professional efficacy. The factors contribute to burnout includes work overload-quantitative and qualitative, role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of autonomy, interpersonal conflict, organizational politics, job insecurity, lack of social support, lack of support from supervisors, organizational trust. It is also affected by personality and demographic factors such as internal and external locus of control, skill level, coordination expertise, age, tenure of job, etc.

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