

THE INFLUENCE OF JOB DEMAND, EFFORT-REWARD IMBALANCE, AND ILLEGITIMATE TASKS ON JOB BURNOUT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Burnout syndrome, also known as job burnout, is a condition where an individual experiences continuous, uncontrollable emotional exhaustion due to work-related stress and pressure. As a result, a person may feel depleted of energy, worn out, weak, discouraged, have a negative attitude toward their jobs, or be unhappy at work, which can significantly impact their ability to work effectively and maintain relationships with those around them. Additionally, long-term burnout can lead to mental and physical effects such as stress-related illnesses, insomnia, depression, or other illnesses, as well as feelings of isolation and other antisocial behaviors. When exploring the causes, we consider both the internal and external factors that contribute to the formation of burnout. Among them, internal causes include job engagement and job satisfaction. The Job Demands-Resources theory applies to external causes, which include job demands, effort-reward imbalances, and illegitimate tasks. The findings offer guidance on enhancing employee job satisfaction, a strategy that can significantly improve the organization's human resource management. This study's benefits enable entrepreneurs or administrators in the manufacturing industry to address issues such as job demand, effort-reward imbalance, illegitimate tasks, and job satisfaction, thereby preventing job burnout and contributing to the success of the organization.

Keywords: Job burnout, Job satisfaction, Job demand, Effort-reward imbalance, Illegitimate tasks

Introduction

Nowadays, burnout has impacted the quality of life in both workers' physical and mental aspects. Burnout has been an intriguing topic for researchers in many countries. Over the past few decades, numerous theories, models, and studies have emerged, primarily concentrating on employees. However, there has been a dearth of research on private company employees in Thailand. The labor indicator from the National Statistical Office showed that 40.4% of employment was for private-sector employees (Social Statistics Division of the National Statistical Office, 2020). A burnout refers to a feeling of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that is born out of being in a situation whereby emotional needs are present for a long period of time. Affecting the person who is feeling as such both physically and mentally, a burnout may lead to health deterioration, frequent anger, rage, and isolation from society (Jermstittiparsert & Khongkhadee, 2017).

Scholars have been discussing job burnout in the literature since the 1970s. The initial interest in job burnout among employees began with industrial and organizational research toward the end of the 1970s. This was because job burnout is a symptom that arises when employees devote their energy, emotional, and mental resources to their jobs, leading to feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, discouragement, and ultimately, too much frustration to continue working. Employees experiencing job burnouts may lack enthusiasm and interest in

their jobs, become less participatory at work, and fail to initiate or develop new ideas. They may be absent from work more often and even resign from their jobs (Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016). Although burnout was initially considered specific for individual who do "people-work" (Maslach and Jackson, 1981), empirical evidence has since shown that burnout can develop in all occupational (Salanova, et al., 2000; Schaufeli, et al., 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of job demand, effort-reward imbalance, and illegitimate tasks on job satisfaction and job burnout among employees. The study's findings should increase awareness of job burnout and provide valuable insights for organizations seeking supportive factors to enhance employee job satisfaction. In terms of research contributions, this study will offer managerial and practical implications for businesses and human resources.

The purpose of the study and methodology

The aim of this study is to establish a conceptual framework for investigating the causal factors affecting job burnout among manufacturing industry employees in the Eastern Economic Corridor. The author, therefore, presents this by literature review, analytical and synthesized article on the components of job burnout among employees.

Concepts and theories related to job burnout

The concept of burnout was proposed by Herbert Freudenberger, who was working as a psychoanalyst in a clinic in New York since the 1970s (Shepherd, et al., 2011), and it is still widely used at present in psychology and organizational behavior literature (Schaufeli, et al., 2009). Burnout is defined as a symptom of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment at work due to work activity (Maslach, 1982). Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.

The past 25 years of research have established the complexity of the construct and placed the individual stress experience within a larger organizational context of people's relation to their work. Recently, the work on burnout has expanded internationally and has led to new conceptual models. The focus on engagement—the positive antithesis of burnout—promises to yield new perspectives on interventions to alleviate burnout. The social focus of burnout, the solid research basis concerning the syndrome, and its specific ties to the work domain make a distinct and valuable contribution to people's health and well-being (Maslach, et al., 2001).

Currently, many authors have reached a relative consensus on aspects related to burnout. These aspects include: (1) emotional exhaustion, which refers to the release of energy and the utilization of emotional resources; (2) depersonalization, which separates workers from others and causes pessimism among colleagues, customers, and organizations; and (3) diminished personal accomplishment, by which the person comes to a negative self-assessment (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). So, job burnout is "a consequence of the perceived disparity between the demands of the job and the resources (both material and emotional) that an employee has available to him or her. When demands in the workplace are unusually high, it becomes increasingly impossible to cope with the stress associated with these working conditions."

Its roots are found in the daily transactions stemming from the debilitating physical and emotional overload that arises from stress on the job.

The enduring exposure to work pressure associates these dimensions with a sense of exhaustion. This leads to workers distancing themselves from clients, becoming cynical and disconnected, and developing a mindset of ineffectiveness within the workplace, despite their level of committed effort. The overworked and exhausted employee, once engaged and motivated, suffers from this syndrome (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Therefore, how an employee can sufficiently reduce its burnout and increase employee satisfaction may largely depend on the attention of its management to the issue of burnout, which can heavily mitigate these effects (Adewa & Agboola, 2020). Making timely managerial decisions, sufficient motivation, organizational support, and low job demand can reduce these effects and increase employee satisfaction. Many studies focused on job burnout in different sectors. However, there has been limited evidence concerning the extent to which job demand, effort-reward imbalance, and illegitimate tasks affect job satisfaction and job burnout among selected employees of the manufacturing industry in the Eastern Economic Corridor, Thailand.

Job burnout is a group of negative symptoms caused by long-term work stress, such as physical and mental exhaustion, job disgust, and lack of job achievement. Subsequently, researchers have put forward many theories about the causes of job burnout. The following are several representative theories:

1. Matching-Mismatching Model: Maslach (1997-2001) proposed the model, positing that job burnout arises from the interaction between individuals and work situations. Maslach and Leiter (2005) noted that the degree of matching-mismatch between work and individual factors, rather than a single factor, causes job burnout: the larger the gap, the more likely it is to occur.

2. Conservation of resource theory (COR theory): COR theory focuses on the influence of social and cultural factors on job burnout and explains the mechanism of job burnout with demand and resources. Resource conservation theory holds that people are trying to acquire and preserve valuable resources, and job burnout will occur when they lose these valuable resources.

3. Equity theory: Equity theory holds that people evaluate their relationships with others according to their input and output. Equity theory emphasizes that people in interpersonal relationships seek mutual benefit, with reciprocity being an ingrained tendency. According to Blau (1964), the interpersonal relationship equity theory applies to social exchange. People in high positions anticipate respect, obedience, and appreciation from those in lower positions.

4. A dual-level social exchange model: Proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2005), this model believes that the lack of social exchange in interpersonal relationships and the organizational relationship will lead to job burnout.

Research related to factors affecting job burnout

Many studies over the years have indicated the factors that influence burnout. Although the negative consequences of burnout have been the focus of numerous studies during the last

30 years, the question remains as to why some workers in an organization flourish and others report feeling exhausted and anxious and perceive fewer personal accomplishments. Organizational researchers have proposed that both the individual and the job environment are the causes of job burnout (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013).

In another study, Panis and Aronoson (quoted by Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) declared that job burnout is caused by emotional and physical fatigue syndrome. On the other hand, burnout is the result of increasing negative trends in jobs and decreasing interest in colleagues. Several factors are effective in creating job burnout, including environmental factors, individual factors, and organizational factors. Additionally, Maslach and Leiter (2005) identified two categories of factors that significantly influence an individual prior to experiencing burnout. The first group, known as situational predictors, comprises six antecedents: (1) workload, (2) control, (3) award, (4) social network, (5) job fairness, and (6) values. The second group includes individual antecedents such as age, gender, marital status, and experience. Cordes and Dougherty (1997) categorized burnout-related factors into three groups: (1) job and role characteristics, (2) organizational characteristics, and (3) personal characteristics.

Job Demands, Job satisfaction and Job Burnout

Job demands, defined as aspects of a job that require sustained effort, are associated with physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Examples include having a high workload, experiencing conflicting demands from managers and clients, and bullying. Job resources refer to aspects of the job that help reach work-related goals, reduce job demands and the associated costs, and stimulate personal growth and development. Colleagues' social support, the flexibility to work from home or the office, and promotion opportunities are examples.

Karasek (1979) has defined high job demand as a high workload. The JDCS model demonstrated the influence of job demand and social support, including supervisory and coworker support, on job satisfaction among Ethiopian nurses (Negussie & Kaur, 2016). Zhang and Duan (2023) have studied the impact of job demand and job resources on job burnout and job satisfaction in global postdoctoral research from 93 countries worldwide. The findings indicate that job demands have a statistically significant direct influence on job burnout. Furthermore, studies have shown that burnout may affect job satisfaction and social support in nurses (Majid, et al., 2021). Therefore, job demands are an external factor that influences both job satisfaction and job burnout. The research has shown that job demand has a significantly positive relationship with satisfaction. Workers will quickly find themselves worn out and exhausted when the extra workload consists of constant physical, emotional, or cognitive effort. Sometimes, employees even distance themselves mentally from their work, resulting in less productivity and reduced efficiency (Ge, et al., 2022). Previous studies reveal an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and all dimensions of job burnout (Ronen & Mikulincer, 2012). That is to say, when the employee's job satisfaction is lower, they are more likely to have job burnout. Furthermore, high job satisfaction will have a significant impact on the work efficiency and overall wellbeing of employees, thus reducing job burnout. Additionally, Ge, et al. (2022) conducted a study on job burnout, providing new insights into influencing factors and potential solutions, and discovered a negative correlation between job satisfaction and job burnout. Considering these concepts and all the related empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are presented:

H₁: Job demand has a negative influence on job satisfaction.

H₂: Job demand has a positive influence on job burnout

Effort-reward imbalance, job satisfaction, and job burnout

An effort-reward imbalance explains the disparate exchange of the employee's job-related efforts and rewards. Time pressure, frequent interruptions, or extra hours worked represent efforts, while esteem and recognition, career promotion, job security, and subjectively adequate pay represent rewards. The indicators compute a ratio that illustrates the disparity between efforts and rewards. Moreover, to further indicate work stress, Siegrist, et al. (2005) integrated the concept of over commitment to the work stress model, which contains time pressure at the job, ruminating, or career sacrifices. Overcommitted employees display specific attitudes, behaviors, and emotions that encourage excessive efforts and desires to gain approval and respect. These attempts often result in taking on extremely demanding tasks and exerting excessive effort to complete them.

Furthermore, they may interpret demands and resources in an incorrect manner. Overcommitted employees are more susceptible to subjectively low rewards due to their disproportionately high efforts, which can lead to frustrations. People view the effort-reward imbalance as an extrinsic component, while they view over commitment as intrinsic.

Ge, et al. (2021) studied the effects of effort-reward imbalance, job satisfaction, and work engagement on self-rated health among healthcare workers and found that effort-reward imbalance had a significant negative correlation with job satisfaction. One possible explanation could be that the participants believed they were receiving lower rewards, such as an unsatisfactory salary and limited career opportunities, compared to their efforts. If they perceive failed reciprocity between efforts and rewards, they will experience emotional distress, which in turn may cause stress-related mental and physical distress (Kuper, et al., 2002). Furthermore, Alvarado, et al. (2012) have studied the effort-reward model and its effect on burnout among nurses in Ecuador. Their conclusion demonstrated that employee effort has a stronger and statistically significant direct effect on emotional burnout. High over commitment reinforces strain reactions, thereby increasing the risk of mental and physical illness. Thus, effort-reward imbalance directly negatively predicts job satisfaction, or the degree of disparity between the reward employees actually receive and the reward they expect, while it directly positively predicts job burnout. Considering these concepts and all the related empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are presented:

H₃: Effort-reward imbalance has a negative influence on job satisfaction.

H₄: Effort-reward imbalance has a positive influence on job burnout

Illegitimate tasks, job satisfaction, and job burnout

Semmer, et al. (2007) grounded the concept of illegitimate tasks in their study on occupational stress. They defined illegitimate tasks as task assignments perceived as either unreasonable or unnecessary. Unreasonable tasks are outside one's occupational duty, while unnecessary tasks make no sense and should not be done (Semmer, et al., 2016). The observation that some occupational stressors are considered typical due to their inextricable connection to the profession serves as the starting point for the development of this concept. The nature of their job makes these foreseeable stressors less stressful for employees. However, employees may view illegitimate tasks as disrespectful because they are not job duties. Illegitimate tasks pose a threat to an individual's self and professional identity, thereby introducing a new concept of stress.

The nature and characteristics of illegitimate tasks suggest they will play a role in predicting positive markers of work well-being, such as job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as a positive and pleasurable state resulting from an individual's job appraisal or job experience. Illegitimate tasks negatively relate to job satisfaction, according to the few

empirical studies (Omansky, et al., 2016). Furthermore, Ouyang, et al. (2022) investigated the impact of illegitimate tasks, collective climate, and psychological entitlement on job burnout in Chinese employees, finding a significant positive correlation between illegitimate tasks and employee psychological entitlement and job burnout. Theoretically, illegitimate tasks could potentially influence job satisfaction. Example: Job characteristics theory states that task significance and task variety (i.e., the degree to which it is challenging) influence the meaningfulness of one’s job. Illegitimate tasks, perceived as unreasonable or unnecessary, detract from significant or challenging work, thereby diminishing the perceived meaningfulness of one’s job. Reduced meaningfulness of one’s job will in turn negatively affect job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Therefore, there will be a negative correlation between perceptions of task illegitimacy and job satisfaction and a positive correlation with job burnout. Considering these concepts and all the related empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are presented:

H₅: Illegitimate tasks have a negative influence on job satisfaction.

H₆: Illegitimate tasks have a positive influence on job burnout

Job satisfaction and job burnout

A person's "likes or dislikes" of their work can have a positive or negative impact on the type of work, the work atmosphere, and interpersonal relationships (Gibson, et al., 2011). Employees' job satisfaction reflects the comfort and utility of their work, and it significantly enhances the organization's current standing.

Job satisfaction plays a crucial role in an employee's working life, as it is essential for maintaining their work efficiency within organizations. Every employee must find satisfaction while working in an organization, and this satisfaction is dependent on major factors that can impact the quality of their performance. Yu-Hsia and Mei-Hsiang (2019) investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout. The results showed a statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, with personal burnout, work-related burnout, and over commitment to work correlated with both inner and external satisfaction. These results provided guidance and evidence for the requirement to increase job satisfaction in order to decrease burnout. Considering the concepts and all the related empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are presented:

H₇: Job satisfaction has a negative influence on job burnout

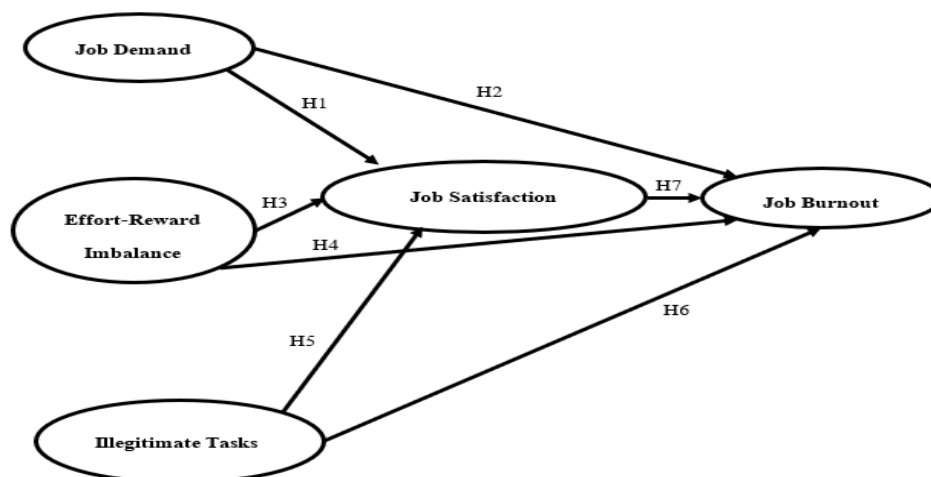


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

The study identified the effects of job demand, effort-reward imbalance, and illegitimate tasks on job satisfaction and job burnout. Job demands, effort-reward imbalance, and illegitimate tasks have a negative influence on job satisfaction but a positive influence on job burnout. The study's findings could offer guidance on enhancing employee job satisfaction, thereby significantly benefiting the organization's human resource management. Moreover, the study's findings can serve as a guideline to enhance the company's human resource management strategy, aimed at preventing job burnout. This includes establishing policies to prevent this issue and managing human resources effectively. This is because illegitimate tasks can further deplete employees' time and emotional resources, making them more susceptible to job demands and less likely to complete important tasks. Job demands can have a negative impact on employees. On the other hand, job demands can also function like challenging stressors, potentially promoting personal growth and achieving goals. Illegitimate tasks may hinder the potential for challenging stressors to exert their positive impact.

Recommendations

Human resources departments should pay special attention to employees with regard to issues related to job burnout by regularly surveying and collecting the perceived causes of job burnout due to constant changes in circumstances, especially when there are changes from management within, or of, the organization. We should encourage employees experiencing job burnout to enhance their job satisfaction in order to prevent fatigue.

Additionally, to further advance our knowledge in this realm, future research should study the causal model of job burnout, investigate the implications of job demand, effort-reward imbalance, and illegitimate tasks, consider the influence of cultural differences, and study other factors that affect job satisfaction and job burnout.

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