EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CYNICISM IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BURNOUT AND EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout

• A state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion caused by a combination of very high expectation and persistent situational stress (Freudenberger, 1974)
  • Emotional exhaustion
  • Cynicism
  • Diminished professional efficacy
• Negative influence of burnout on workplace well-being and productivity

• Antecedents of burnout
  • Job demand, lack of job resources

• Consequences of burnout
  • Demotivation, decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment, absenteeism, high turnover intention, etc.
• Cynicism is the most powerful predictor of turnover intention (Leiter & Maslach, 2009).

• But, cynicism can be a coping strategy in the process of burnout (Brandes & Das, 2006).

• The inconsistent and mixed findings suggest a lack of conceptual and empirical clarity.

• The purpose of the study:
  a) To examine the relation of each burnout component with employees’ job performance and prosocial behavior
  b) To test a conceptual model that incorporates the direct and indirect influences of the three burnout components on job performance and prosocial behavior
THE SEQUENCE OF BURNOUT COMPONENTS

Leiter’s (1993) process model of burnout

- Employees develop a cynical attitude toward the job as a coping strategy
BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

• Task performance (also known as in-role performance)
• Contextual performance (also known as extra-role performance)
• Prosocial behavior
JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES MODEL
(JD-R; BAKKER ET AL., 2004; BAKKER & DEMEROUTI, 2007)

Job Demands

- Workload
- Emotional Demands
- Work-Home Conflict
- Autonomy
- Possibilities Development
- Social Support

Job Resources

- Exhaustion
- Cynicism
• Job demands are the most important antecedents of emotional exhaustion, which in turn predict task performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Hockey, 1993)

• Job resources are the most powerful predictors of contextual performance through cynicism (Bakker et al., 2004)

• Combination of Bakker et al.’s (2004) Job Demands-Resources and Leiter’s (1993) process models

• Propose that burnout starts with emotional exhaustion, developing cynical attitude as a coping strategy

• Emotional exhaustion fostered by job demands negatively influences both task performance and contextual performance.
Hypothesis 1: Emotional exhaustion negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.

Hypothesis 2: Cynicism negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.
Employees with low levels of professional efficacy have a deflated view of their progress, being disappointed with tasks, projects, and relationships (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993)

Hypothesis 3: Diminished professional efficacy negatively affects task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior.
• This study posits the negative effect of the burnout components on prosocial behavior

• Stressful working conditions may wear down employees, leading to burnout, which progressively decreases the employees’ prosocial behavior.

• Employees’ sense of emotional and mental resource depletion avert them from putting extra effort in activities that exceed job requirements (Van Emmerick, Jawahar, and Stone, 2005).

• Resource depletion decreases the likelihood of prosocial behavior (DeWall et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2012)
POSITIVE ROLE OF CYNICISM

- Cynicism can be
  - A strategy that individuals can employ to cope with an unfriendly, unstable, and insecure world (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989, 1991)
  - A defensive, cognitive method of creating a protective distance (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006).
- Brandes and Das (2006) proposed a non-linear relationship between the different aspects of cynical behavior and performance.
- Cynical employees:
  - Do not necessarily convert their displeasure into action (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003)
  - Have an experienced, critical eye, which could be a positive force for change (Brandes & Das, 2006).
Hypothesis 4: Cynicism positively mediates the relationships between the two burnout components: emotional exhaustion and diminished professional efficacy, and the three outcome variables: task performance, contextual performance, and prosocial behavior while emotional exhaustion and diminished professional efficacy have direct negative influences on the three outcomes.
PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Exhaustion

Professional Inefficacy

Cynicism

Task Performance

Contextual Performance

Prosocial Behavior
METHODS

Sample

- 262 working adults attending a large southeastern university in U.S.A

Procedures

- Participants completed two 20-minute paper-based surveys.
- Data were gathered at two times separated by four weeks to help control for common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).
- At Time 1, participants responded to the survey including job performance and demographic items.
- At Time 2, they completed burnout and prosocial behavior instruments.
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Sex
• Male 44.4%
• Female 55.6%

Age
• Average age = 25.54 years;  SD = 7.32

Ethnicity
• Hispanics: 37.7%
• African American: 30.6%
• Caucasian: 23.8%

Marital status
• Single: 77.5%
• Married: 15.3%
• Partnered: 7.2%
MEASURES

• Burnout: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 1996)
• Job Performance: job performance scale developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994)
• Prosocial behavior: a 10-item scale developed by Caprara and Pastorelli (1993)
• Demographic questions: sex, age, ethnicity, and marital status
DATA ANALYSES

• Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the LISREL 8.72 program
• Internal consistency estimates calculated with Cronbach’s alpha to examine the reliability of the data
• Structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the research hypotheses
RESULTS

Measurement Model

- Included 37 items of three burnout components, two constructs of job performance, and prosocial behavior.
- Factor loadings above .4 for the respective manifest variables.
- $\chi^2 = 1482.88, df = 614, p < .01$, RMSEA = .071, CFI = .92, NNFI = .91, IFI = .92 and RMR = .069.
- The model had a reasonable fit to the data.

Reliabilities for Six Factors

- Ranged from .74 to .92 (> .70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994)
HYPOTHESIS 1: EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.

($\chi^2 = 811.95$, $df = 293$, $p < 0.01$, RMSEA = 0.080, CFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.93, RMR = 0.069)
HYPOTHESIS 2: CYNICISM NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.

($\chi^2 = 837.20, df = 293, p < 0.01, \text{RMSEA} = .082, \text{CFI} = 0.91, \text{NNFI} = 0.90, \text{IFI} = 0.91, \text{RMR} = .074$)

Cynicism -> Task Performance: -.21**
Cynicism -> Contextual Performance: -.12
Cynicism -> Prosocial Behavior: -.07
HYPOTHESIS 3: DIMINISHED PROFESSIONAL EFFICACY NEGATIVELY AFFECTS TASK PERFORMANCE, CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE, AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.

($\chi^2 = 879.97, df = 318, p < 0.01, \text{RMSEA} = 0.080, \text{CFI} = 0.92, \text{NNFI} = 0.91, \text{IFI} = 0.92, \text{RMR} = 0.068$)
HYPOTHESIS 4

($\chi^2 = 1528.28$, $df = 617$, $p < 0.01$, RMSEA = 0.073, CFI = 0.91, NNFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.91, RMR = 0.079)

Exhaustion

Professional Inefficacy

Cynicism

Task Performance

Contextual Performance

Prosocial Behavior

.36**

.68***

.38**

-.40*

-.61***

-.44**

-.74***

-.74***

-.55***
DISCUSSION

- The results of correlational and SEM analyses supported the negative, direct effect of emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy on each of the dependent variables.
  - Consistent with Bakker et al.’s (2004) JD-R model and the extant literature
- Professional inefficacy demonstrated the strongest relations with the dependent variables.
  - Efficaciousness beliefs related to one’s reduced ability and sense of inadequacy on the job are powerful negative predictors of performance and prosocial behavior (Xu et al. (2012).
- Cynicism was linked negatively to task and contextual performance, while emotional exhaustion was negatively linked to contextual performance (Bakker et al., 2004).
• This study tested the conceptual model including the direct and indirect effects of burnout on the dependent variables.
  • Emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy directly influenced both types of performance and prosocial behavior.
  • Emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy indirectly influenced the dependent variables through the cynicism variable.
• The mediating role of cynicism in the relation between emotional exhaustion and the dependent variables.
  • Leiter’s (1993) prediction that emotional exhaustion occurs first, which leads to cynical attitude as a coping strategy was supported.
  • Consistent with Leiter and Brandes and Das (2006), cynicism became a protective mechanism that supported increased, rather than reduced performance and prosocial behavior.
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

• Introducing organizational practices to reduce unreasonable job demands and increase job resources

  *Examples*
  • Make the employee’s workload more manageable
  • Clarify role-related expectations
  • Provide timely and appropriate performance feedback
  • Allow for increased autonomy

• Implementing ways to reduce the scores on emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy might logically yield vital, positive individual- and organizational-level outcomes.

• Cynicism can be a way to alleviate employees’ work frustrations and stress

  • Squashing cynicism at work may be not only ineffective but harmful (Brandes & Das, 2006).
  • Train employees to use appropriate levels of cynicism, guided by organizational norms, as a coping strategy to manage daily stressors
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- Due to the sample being drawn from a single site, the results should not be generalized beyond this study.
- Future research with more proportionally representative samples needed.
- Longitudinal study of the conceptual model needed for further confirmation of the strength found by this study.
- Experimental or quasi-experimental research encouraged to test interventions on reducing emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy and determining each variable’s effect on the outcome variables.
- Additional significant outcome variables should be tested. (e.g., engagement, organizational commitment, turnover intent, and incivility)