

The Influence of Self-monitoring and Locus of Control on Burnout of Thai Employees

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Abstract

Many employees suffer from the long term effects of stress which leads to exhaustion and eventually leads to burnout which is the last stage of stress. Not only unable to carry out the normal duties, employees who experience burnout may need to seek medical assistance as well as psychological help since a person experiences lack of self-esteem and dissatisfaction with the job, physical and mental symptoms and lower levels of productivity when experiencing burnout. Previous researches indicated that burnout may result from work related factors as well as some personality traits of the employees. This study focused on the influence of self-monitoring and locus of control on burnout. Three dimensions of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were emphasized as the consequences of the self-monitoring behavior. A sample size of 395 Thai employees in management and operational positions were selected randomly. The Structural equation modeling and t-test analyses were performed to test hypotheses. The results indicated that higher self-monitoring employees had lower depersonalization. Employees with external locus of control had higher depersonalization and emotional exhaustion compared to those with internal locus of control. In addition, employees with management and operational positions had no difference in locus of control and self-monitoring level.

Keywords: Burnout; Self-Monitoring; Locus of Control; Thai Employees

Introduction

“You cannot be as E-ffective when you are IN-fected.”(Johnnie, Dent Jr, ND)

The term burnout became popular with Freudenberger after 1960 (1974) and was considered a social problem rather than an academic construct. Later, Maslach (1976) labeled the term burnout for those in service occupations who were detached from others. Initially, the term burnout was frowned upon by academics until the Maslach Burnout Inventory was developed (MBI: Maslach and Jackson, 1981a, 1981b, 1986). Cerniss (1980a) agreed that with the era of modernization people experienced more workload and problems had to be solved by professionals' rather than colleagues.

Burnout is prevalent among employees these days owing to the fact that multi-tasking and balancing work and family is a major preoccupation. Many employees could be susceptible to the long term effects of stress which leads to exhaustion and eventually leads to burnout. Selye (1967) determined that the body goes through three definite stages of alarm, mobilization and exhaustion when confronted with stressors. When depleted of resources during the last stage and with continuous exposure to stressors the body breaks down to experience irreversible outcomes. When an employee actually experiences burnout the results can be disastrous in that the employee may need to seek medical assistance or psychological help and normal duties cannot be carried out. More accurately it is not the symptoms itself that cause burnout but the process of time which is important. Bibeau (1989) claimed that overall, a person can experience lack of self-esteem and dissatisfaction with the job, physical and mental symptoms and lower levels of productivity when experiencing burnout. Three dimensions of burnout are emotional exhaustion (feeling drained out), depersonalization (impersonal feelings towards others) and reduced personal accomplishment (low evaluation of oneself) (Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Research studies indicate that personality traits and social support can impact psychological well-being and alleviate the negative impact of stressors from the environment (Akert et al. 2007; Cassel, 1976; Cobb,

1976). Social psychologists claim that a person can adapt behavior to a situation to create either an impression or present themselves in a favorable way in accordance with the social cues (Gould, 1993; Snyder, 1979). Furthermore, Rotter (1966) initially proposed that persons can either possess internal locus of control or believe that their actions are important for controlling life events or that the person can possess external locus of control and believe that external factors are responsible for life events. The relevant question is, **“Do certain personality traits ameliorate the degree of burnout?”**

Review of Related Literature

Studies conducted on burnout focus on a person’s characteristics like personality, attitude and demographic factors (Kizilci et al., 2012; Ghasemian, Tabatabaei & Ebrahimi, 2014) as well as external factors like organizational, occupational and job characteristics (Maslach et al., 2001). Studies have indicated that personality factors like self-efficacy, self-esteem, traits like extraversion, openness to experience, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, hardiness, internal locus of control were related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment aspects of burnout (Alarcon et al., 2009). Besides, if there is little congruence between the individual’s personality and the job, the higher the level of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 1997, Leiter & Maslach, 2001, 2004).

As self-monitoring is essential to promote personal insight when a person is emotional, high self-monitoring employees would be able to better monitor and react to the social environment, adjust themselves to the social norms, and also protect themselves from the excessive stress. As such, they are expected to be able to avoid burnout than workers who do not adjust themselves (Stets & Turner, 2007; Wharton, 1993). Yukiko and Yuko (2006) also found that employees who had low-self monitoring with unstable interpersonal relationships reported higher burnout experience. In addition, they found that this tendency was stronger among young and less experienced employees who lived alone. A research that examined self-monitoring as a moderator between personality traits and performance indicated that persons

with high self-monitoring were allocated better supervisory ratings of interpersonal performance but not necessarily higher ratings for peer and task performance (Barrick, Parks & Mount, 2005). Some research contradicts that self-monitoring is not always a boon and reveals that high self-monitors feel lower levels of job satisfaction as well as organizational commitment than low self-monitors (Day & Schleicher, 2006), and therefore could be expected to experience more role conflict and burnout compared to low self-monitors. Thus, the negative relationship between self-monitoring and burnout is expected. Hence, the first hypothesis is proposed as:

H1: Self-monitoring is negatively related to burnout

H1a: Self-monitoring is negatively related to emotional exhaustion

H1b: Self-monitoring is negatively related to depersonalization

H1c: Self-monitoring is positively related to personal accomplishment

Spector (2008) and Hellrigel et al (2010) defined locus of control as “**the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events which affect them**”. Grob (2000) argued that levels of stress depend on one’s perception of ability to cope. Internal locus of control persons are accepting of situations and in fact get excited when they feel in charge (Owusu-Ansah, 2008). A more recent study conducted by Roddenberry and Renk in 2010 also confirmed similar findings in that persons with external locus of control could suffer from more physical and psychological illness. Hsu (2011) discovered that high internal locus of control persons accept their disappointments and successes since they accept responsibility for these outcomes. Kulshrestha and Sen (2006) agree that internal locus of control people are happier than their counterparts since are able to change situations they feel are not satisfying. Therefore, the difference of burnout between people with internal and external locus of control should be illustrated. Thus, the second hypothesis emphasizing this difference is proposed as:

H2: Employees who have internal and external locus of control have different levels of burnout

H2a: Employees who have internal and external locus of control have different levels of emotional exhaustion

H2b: Employees who have internal and external locus of control have different levels of depersonalization

H2c: Employees who have internal and external locus of control have different levels of personal accomplishment

Previous researches (e.g. Wang et al. 2004; Tennant, 2001; Paterniti et al. 2002) indicated the relationship between psychological distress and job demand and some work conditions such as high job demands, low job control, and insufficient work support as well as social support. People who were exposed to different level of job demands i.e. work overload, time pressure, work responsibility, etc. tend to have different level of stress and its consequences such as anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Employees with different working positions would face with different working conditions. People in management level might have higher job responsibility and demands with decision making and leading tasks while those in operational level might have lower job control but higher demand on job performance. Thus, the level of burnout may be different across the working positions. To understand the different of burnout associated with the work position, the third hypothesis is proposed as:

H3: Employees with management and operational positions have different levels of self-monitoring and locus of control

Methodology and Data Analysis

A sample size of 400 employees working as full time employees in two work positions namely, administrative positions and management levels with over a year of experience, were chosen using the convenient sampling technique. Data were collected via in-person drop-off technique at the public areas.

To measure burnout levels, the Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) burnout inventory (MBI) scale was utilized. The MBI consists of

22 statements that measure three dimensions of burnout: 1) emotional exhaustion, 2) depersonalization, and 3) personal accomplishment. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the pre-test was 0.80.

The self-monitoring scale was modified in 1987 from the original version of Mark Snyder developed in 1974. Julian Rotter's scale developed in 1989 was used to measure locus of control. Both the above scales are bipolar hence Cronbach's Alpha was not necessary. The self-monitoring scale consists of 18 dichotomy items i.e. true-or-false questions which can be scored in accordance with the scoring key. Answers that are consistent with the key would be given 1 point. Thus, the score varied from 0 to 18. The locus of control scale consisted of 29, A/B choice items. The items were scored in accordance with the scoring key. Six items were faking scales. Only 23 items were used to verify the locus of control. Thus, the score varied from 0 to 23.

Data Analysis, Findings and Conclusions

At the onset the data were analyzed descriptively as seen in Table 1. The reliability of the three dimensions of burnout was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients and all three were 0.822, 0.874, and 0.727 which were above the 0.7 cutoff point.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Major Constructs

Constructs	Mean of Sum Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Emotional exhaustion	3.675	0.885	1.14	5.86
Depersonalization	3.226	1.057	1.00	5.71
Personal Accomplishment	4.005	0.655	2.13	5.63
Self-Monitoring	8.828	2.843	0	18.00
Locus of Control	10.732	3.257	2	22.00

Notes: Each item is measured based on 6-point Rating scale for Burnout. Self-monitoring and Locus of Control were scored based on the scoring key in which the score varied from 0-18 and 0-23.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the construct validity of the survey data and to ensure that the measurement model was qualified enough for the analysis with the structural equation modeling for hypotheses 1. The t-test was used to test hypothesis 2 and 3. Good fits of the model were illustrated. The χ^2/df was 2.851 which was less than the maximum allowed of 3.00. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.981, incremental fit index (IFI) was 0.976, and the comparative fit Index (CFI) was 0.976. All exceeded the requirement of 0.90. The RMSEA was 0.32 which was less than the cutoff point 0.05. Thus, the data were qualified for the SEM in the next stage.

The self-monitoring was assigned as an independent variable while three dimensions of burnout i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment were considered as dependent variables. The mean score of each burnout dimension were used while the self-monitoring score based on the scoring key was utilized. Structural equation model was developed successfully. The well fits of the model were illustrated. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.9721, incremental fit index (IFI) was 0.937, and the comparative fit Index (CFI) was 0.936. All exceeded the requirement of 0.90. The RMSEA was 0.239 which was less than the cutoff point 0.05. Thus, the structural relationships among constructs were valid and the hypotheses could be tested from the SEM analysis results.

Table 2: Structural Relationship Estimated of Self-Monitoring and Burnout

Hypotheses and Paths in the Model	Estimated Relationship Coefficients	t-value	p-value
H1a Self-monitoring → Emotional Exhaustion	-0.184 (-0.087)	-1.757	0.079
H1b Self-monitoring → Depersonalization	-0.356 (-0.137)	-2.795	0.005
H1c Self-monitoring → Accomplishment	0.146 (0.079)	1.666	0.096

Notes: For the Estimated Relationship Coefficient, figures shown in each cell indicate the unstandardized coefficients where that shown in the brackets are standardized coefficients; Squared Multiple Correlations of Emotional Exhaustion = 0.041; Depersonalization = 0.054; and Accomplishment = 0.113

Hypothesis 1, self-monitoring is negatively related to emotional exhaustion (a) and depersonalization (b) and positively related to personal accomplishment (c), was partially supported by the data, since a significant negative relationship between self-monitoring and depersonalization ($\beta = -0.356$; $p < 0.01$) is illustrated but that of emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.184$; $p > 0.05$) and personal accomplishment ($\beta = 0.146$; $p > 0.05$) were not found. Hypothesis 1b was supported by the data while hypothesis 1a and 1c were not. A significant negative relationship between self-monitoring and depersonalization indicated that employees with higher the self-monitoring experienced lower levels of depersonalization. This finding was supported from previous research findings. Stets and Turner (2007) and Wharton (1993) suggested that high self-monitors behaviors can be better predicted by the environment while low self-monitors can be predicted by traits. High self-monitors are likely to behave differently towards members of different groups with whom they interact. As such, they are expected to be able to avoid burnout than workers who do not adjust themselves. Yukiko and Yuko (2006) also found that employees who had low-self monitoring with unstable interpersonal relationships reported higher burnout experience. Those employees who have better skills to adjust the way they treat others and do what the situation demands may “sweet talk” and treat people pleasantly to enhance their social value and adjust their behaviors rather than “lose it” easily and treat people with indifference and aloofness. Priority is given to being the preferred employees by high self-monitors (Day & Schleicher, 2006). In professional networks, high self-monitors can develop a better social exchange (Mehra et al, 2001), display more organizational citizenship behaviors (Blakery, Andrews, & Fuller, 2003) and focus on making an appearance leading to impression management (Turnley & Bolino, 2001), compared to low self-monitors.

Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah and Ames (2006) supported this view and discovered that high self-monitors were perceived as more generous than low self-monitors and as a result were given higher status levels, were better at exchange relations and better at judging others' interpersonal exchange even though, displaying generosity may not always be with the intention of helping, the investment is made with a some expectation of return, which could be some elevated position from their peers and colleagues with who they work. Segrin and Taylor (2007) agreed that possessing social skills can help high self-monitors with better satisfaction in life, self-efficacy of different situations, happiness, hope and better quality of life. In view of the above situation it is obvious that high self-monitors will experience lower levels of depersonalization.

Table 3: Difference of Burnout, Locus of Control, and Self-monitoring between Different Types of Employees.

Constructs	Locus of Control		Mean Comparison	
	Internal (n=221)	External (n=171)	t-score	p-value
Emotional Exhaustion ¹	3.595 (0.929)	3.780 (0.818)	2.091	0.037
Depersonalization ²	3.094 (1.115)	3.417 (0.954)	3.096	0.002
Personal Accomplishment ³	4.025 (0.631)	3.974 (0.685)	0.755	0.451
Work Position				
	Officers/Operators (n=209)	Management (n=183)		
Locus of Control ⁴	10.907 (3.210)	10.622 (3.232)	0.874	0.383
Self-Monitoring ⁵	8.907 (3.109)	8.794 (2.542)	0.390	0.697

Remark: 1. Equal variance not assumed; F=6.092; p=0.014
 2. Equal variance not assumed; F=9.998; p=0.002
 3. Equal variance not assumed; F=0.758; p=0.385
 4. Equal variance assumed; F=0.000; p=0.984
 5. Equal variance not assumed; F=6.921; p=0.009

Hypothesis 2, there is a difference of burnout between internal and external locus of control employees was partially supported by the data, since the results indicated the differences of emotional exhaustion ($t=2.091$; $p<0.05$) and depersonalization ($t=3.096$; $p<0.01$) dimensions of burnout, between internal and external locus of control, with internal locus of control employees having a lower mean of 3.595 compared to external locus of control employees with a mean of 3.780, for emotional exhaustion. Internal locus of control employees also possessed a lower mean of 3.094 compared to external locus of control employees with a mean of 3.417 for depersonalization. Personal accomplishment was not different in external and internal locus of control employees. Table 3 indicated that employees with internal of control were more inclined to experience less burnout overall, especially for the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization

Persons with high internal locus of control believe that their behaviors can result in the reward because of their own actions but external locus of control persons do not see the connection and believe that what happens in their lives is beyond their control (Rotter, 1966). Internals believe that they are in charge of their fate (Boone, van Olffen & van Witteloostuijn, 2005) in contrast to externals who believe that supervisors, managers, the organization and the universe are in control of their actions (Tillman et al, 2010).

Emotional exhausted persons experience fatigue and possess low levels of energy in contrast to persons who experience depersonalization and treat others in an uncaring and indifferent way (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Leiter and Maslach (1988) found that stressful situations can possibly lead to both emotional exhaustion and less to depersonalization, but may not impact personal accomplishment. The results of this study also confirm that personal accomplishment/feeling worthless was not different for both internal and external locus of control persons.

Persons with internal locus of control may find that a situation can act as a stimulus since they believe that they can have control over the situation (Owusu-Ansah, 2008). These persons may not lack energy levels and also go out of the way to treat employees well (Taylor, 2010). Qiang, Bowling and Eschleman (2010) also discovered that internal locus of control person have a tendency to be proactive and find feasible solutions to problems in contrast with external locus of control persons who tend to avoid conflict. Ali, Pormosa, & Ali (2015) recently indicated that internal locus of control persons have more confidence in their ability to communicate which leads to higher levels of individual capabilities. A study on auditors in Taiwan (Hsieh & Wang, 2012) showed that although being in the same situation, auditors with internal locus of control, were capable of taking actions to cope with job stress and eventually suffered from less perceived job burnout. The studies indicate that the characteristics of internals make them more hardy and capable of dealing with stressors since they attempt to change the factor which causes the stress in the workplace eventually impacting burnout (Rydell & Henricsson, 2004).

Hypothesis 3, employees with management and operational (administrative) positions have different levels of self-monitoring and locus of control was not supported by the data. The difference of personal accomplishment between internal and external locus of control as well as the differences of locus of control and self monitoring level of employees who work in management and administrative/operating levels were not found.

Table 3 indicates there are no differences in self-monitoring, locus of control and personal accomplishment in either management or administrative positions.

Significance and Implications for Future Research

Burnout is considered a pathogenic factor could result in fatigue and eventually exhaustion resulting in several that could result like lack of vigor and enthusiasm, anxiety, displeasure and eventually a break down.

The present study investigated the influence of self-monitoring and locus of control on burnout. As indicated, high self-monitors experience lower levels of depersonalization. Furthermore, internal locus of control employees experienced lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than employees with an external locus of control. Self-monitoring and locus of control personality traits are significant for many organizational activities and the study could be broadened to include more personality traits.

If burnout is experienced because of internal factors rather than the external work environment it is necessary to train persons to seek out new challenges by portraying the differences of each experience and getting them involved in different activities so as to create variety and excitement (Skovholt, 2001). This involves self- monitoring and locus of control which helps people become more sensitive to sensitive to situational cues and readily adapt their own behavior appropriately. Employees who are high self-monitors tend to be better with communication, successful organizational leaders, and good in changing positions which require adjustment of behaviors (i.e., positions in which incumbents work with people in different departments or organizations). They are also more likely than low self-monitors to be promoted within the organization and to receive better jobs and promotions. Thus, higher level of self-monitoring should be promoted.

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