

Exploring the Causes of Employee Burnout and Providing Countermeasures

Xiangye Xu *

School of Intercultural Studies, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, 330000, China

* Corresponding Author Email: shaynexxy@outlook.com

Abstract. Job burnout is a common workplace problem, and its existence is very harmful to personal health. Recent years, research on job burnout in various industries has made some progress. However, there is still a lack of detailed discussion on the causes of job burnout. In addition, the measures to solve job burnout still need to be standardized and systematized. Therefore, the subject of this article is to study the causes of job burnout and provide feasible suggestions. After analyzing and comparing previous literature, this study finds that employee burnout will be affected by three factors: individual, enterprise and society, and the problem of job burnout in manufacturing and service industries is more serious. On this basis, this article offers four recommendations for leaders including humanism, fairness and trust, personal development and social support.

Keywords: Job burnout; Employee; Employer; Society; Management.

1. Introduction

The concept of job burnout was first proposed by Herbert Freuden-Berger in 1974. Burnout is defined as a syndrome triggered by chronic stress in the workplace [1]. The main manifestations are loss of work motivation, reduced work efficiency, loss of personal emotion, and negative work attitude. These negative reactions can negatively affect the employees themselves. Numerous studies have shown that job burnout is a common problem around the world, and workers in different countries and regions have shown a high proportion of job burnout [2]. Among the many factors affecting mental health, job burnout has a particularly strong impact on individual mental health, and is one of the important reasons leading to the increased risk of depression [3].

As a result, job burnout has attracted the attention of the society, which has aroused the thinking and research of many scholars. In the past ten years, researchers in psychology, management and behavior have conducted detailed investigations on employee burnout in the workplace, trying to understand the causes of burnout and take feasible measures [4]. At present, most of the relevant researches are conducted on a single industry or enterprise. For example, limit the scope of research to the financial industry and focus on the discussion of job burnout within the financial industry. So, do the causes of employee burnout vary by industry? What is the impact of jobs in different industries on employee burnout? Is there a more detailed reason to explain job burnout? Research on these issues is conducive to deepening the public's thinking on the causes of job burnout. In the 21st century, job competition is particularly fierce, and both employees and employers hope to have a good workplace and working atmosphere, so as to promote personal development and normal operation of enterprises. It is beneficial to provide measures and implementation basis for solving the problem of employee burnout, which is of great significance to personal health, business operation and social governance.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand how to reduce job burnout in the workplace, and to provide leaders with reasonable suggestions to solve the problem of employee burnout. This study will conduct literature research and comparative analysis, which includes two parts: the first part will analyze and summarize the causes of job burnout, and the second part will discuss the different formations of job burnout. Finally, this research will provide reality-based recommendations to help leaders address burnout.

2. Reasons for Employees' Job Burnout

Most research on how burnout develops has focused on job demands and job resources [4]. Job demand usually refers to the money, time, physical labor, emotional burden, etc. paid by employees to complete the work. For example, high-intensity work in manufacturing plants (labor burden), service workers in catering, hotels, and aviation (emotional burden), high commuting costs and commuting time in super-large cities, etc. Work resources generally refer to the support an employee receives on the job. For example, a good relationship with colleagues, standardized management, salary, positive suggestions and feedback from the boss, and employees' right to choose independently. Job demand is positively correlated with job burnout, and higher job demand leads to higher job burnout; job resources are negatively related to job burnout, and more job resources lead to lower job burnout [4].

In the process of analyzing the reasons, this research will discuss the role played by individuals and enterprises in causing job burnout based on positive and negative influencing factors. In addition, social factors will also be taken into consideration. After collecting relevant data, three tables were made, respectively expounding the causes of job burnout from three aspects: employees themselves (see table 1), enterprises (see table 2), and society (see table 3). Each table will be accompanied by a detailed explanation to help people better understand.

Table 1. Factors of employees themselves.

Positive Factors	Negative Factors
● Professional identity ● Job Satisfaction ● Work autonomy ● Positive psychological capital	● Work pressure ● Illegal Mission ● Job insecurity

As can be seen from table 1, among the positive factors, professional identity is closely related to job satisfaction. Previous studies show professional identity directly affects job satisfaction and indirectly reduces employee burnout by increasing job satisfaction [5]. Moreover, work autonomy is also an influential factor to one's job satisfaction. Employees' work autonomy will be affected by the behavior of their bosses [4]. Bosses giving employees more autonomy at work will help improve employees' work initiative, creativity, and enthusiasm, which will also reduce employee burnout [6,7]. Positive psychological capital includes four dimensions: optimism, strength, hope and self-efficacy [8]. Employees with positive psychological capital will have long-term and achievable ideals. In the face of pressure, difficulties, adversity, conflicts and failures, they are more inclined to strengthen their confidence, resolve conflicts and solve difficulties with positive emotions. This makes them less likely to experience burnout at work. They can gain personal growth at work, and at the same time, they can gain a healthy mind and body.

Among the negative factors, job stress refers to the high demands of work, which require a lot of emotional and reflexes to deal with. This is especially true in the service industry [4]. Illegal tasks refer to work tasks that do not meet employee expectations and would violate professional identity. Illegal tasks can harm the psychological rights of employees, which can lead to burnout [9]. Job insecurity is a kind of subjective pressure generated by employees themselves. Through their own interpretation, employees have negative judgments about the working environment and their own future, resulting in negative emotions, loss of work motivation, and reduced work efficiency. This is also an important reason for job burnout [10].

Table 2. Enterprise Factors.

Positive Factors	Negative Factors
● Standardized management ● Excellent working atmosphere ● Efficient operating system	● Negative atmosphere ● Insecure leadership style ● Inefficient operating system

Referring to table 2, negative behavior and a negative atmosphere in the workplace are strongly linked to burnout. After employees experience some negative behaviors or bad atmosphere in the workplace (such as unfair treatment, discrimination, abuse, immoral competition, etc.), they are 8 times more likely to experience burnout than ordinary employees. This type of burnout increases the likelihood of employee turnover and ultimately leads to a brain drain from the business [2]. In addition, employee burnout is also related to the company's performance system, and employees who are strongly driven by performance are more likely to feel burnout [11]. Therefore, positive behaviors and atmosphere in the workplace are conducive to reducing employee burnout, while negative behaviors and atmosphere will trigger employee burnout.

In addition, leadership style can also affect how employees feel at work. A safe leadership style will help ensure the psychological safety of employees, and on this premise, improve the enthusiasm of employees. On the contrary, insecure leadership will have negative effects, and employees will not be motivated from such leadership. Employees develop feelings of distrust and insecurity toward their superiors, which can hurt their performance at work [12]. The high-efficiency operation of enterprises is regarded as an important way to improve employees' work enthusiasm and organizational performance. Employees in enterprises with high-efficiency operating systems will reduce job burnout and their work enthusiasm will increase [6].

Table 3. Social Factors

Positive Factors	Negative Factors
● Good social support ● Safe and stable society	● Customer complaints and grievances ● Lack of social support ● Cyberbullying ● An unsafe society

As shown in table 3, among the positive factors, good social support includes high-quality social relationships, community support, psychological assistance, crisis management, and medical care. A safe and stable society has an optimistic economic situation, stable policies, and a good social environment (less crimes, no terrorism). An unsafe society usually has an unstable economic and political situation, high crime rates, terrorism, etc. An unsafe society will increase the external pressure on employees, leading to an increase in their sense of insecurity and job burnout [13]. Customer complaints and grievances will directly affect the enthusiasm of employees and cause damage to the company's reputation [10]. As a behavior of using electronic devices and the Internet to carry out personal attacks, cyberbullying will have a continuous impact on the physical and mental health of employees. Cyberbullying is more difficult to detect and more likely to produce harmful results than traditional aggression. Employees subjected to cyberbullying are more likely to show negative reactions such as low creativity and low motivation, which eventually lead to employee burnout and turnover [14].

3. Discussion on job burnout

Among all kinds of industries, the problem of job burnout in the service industry and manufacturing industry has received more attention. A large number of studies on burnout syndrome

focus on education, tourism, catering, medical care and other industries. In general, workers in the service industry need to provide services to others, which is often accompanied by emotional consumption, and these workers will be emotionally stressed. These people are more prone to burnout in emotional consumption, for example, nurses, teachers, restaurant servers, resort employees, bank employees, flight attendants, etc. [1,4,5,7,9]. Studies of the banking industry in the Middle East have shown that the probability of bankers experiencing burnout problems ranges from 19% to 54% [1]. Job burnout in the manufacturing industry is mainly due to job characteristics. These workers usually have high labor intensity, long working hours, and monotonous work content, and job burnout is easy to appear on them [15]. More than half of the employees in China's manufacturing industry have burnout syndrome [15]. The number of employed people in China's manufacturing industry is quite large, and the incidence of burnout that exceeds half will undoubtedly cause serious social problems, and occupational health will be challenged.

Among the demographic characteristics, there is no consistent conclusion on the impact of gender on job burnout. Gender is not a variable of interest in most studies. But there are still some data showing that in some industries, the pressure of men is higher than that of women. In China, the emotional exhaustion of male teachers is more severe than that of female teachers [16]. Among manufacturing workers, the incidence of job burnout among male workers is higher than that among female workers [15]. From the perspective of age, workers have a higher risk of job burnout during the first 6 to 10 years of starting work, and around 25 years old is the peak period of job burnout syndrome [15,16]. Young people have higher self-expectations and have higher goals and pursuits, but the reality usually does not meet their expectations. This is considered to be one of the main causes of job burnout among young people [16]. In addition, it is worth mentioning that middle-aged and elderly workers are also considered to be high-risk groups for job burnout. As they age, their cognitive and executive skills decline, and their job performance may not be as good as that of younger adults [17]. This makes middle-aged and older workers more vulnerable to age discrimination in the workplace, which is an important factor leading to job burnout.

By comparing the research on job burnout in China and other countries, the research on job burnout in China also focuses on the service industry, especially service workers. Interestingly, Chinese workers appear to be more tolerant of negative workplace behavior than workers from other countries. Employees in China have shown a tendency to compromise in this regard, with a lower turnover rate than other countries [2].

4. Reality-Based Advice

4.1. Humanism: Treat employees as human beings, not working machines

Based on the perspective of humanism, leaders need to pay attention to employees themselves, narrow the distance with employees, and listen to and understand their demands. The demands of employees directly reflect the current problems faced by enterprises, and solving these problems will help enterprises reduce the rate of employee burnout [2]. Leaders can take this initiative in three steps: First, effectively communicate with employees in various forms such as questionnaires, interviews, seminars, general meetings, etc., to understand the needs of employees. Secondly, the leader conducts research on the needs of employees, evaluates their feasibility, determines effective goals, and processes the needs in order of priority. Finally, the indicators of job burnout are included in the evaluation system of the company's key performance indicators. Each executive department summarizes the results, begins planning and adopts corresponding strategies to reduce employee burnout.

4.2. Make the workplace full of trust and fairness

Making every employee feel trusted and fair is an important job for leaders. To do this, leaders need a comprehensive set of measures to eliminate bad behavior in the workplace. This includes rules and regulations to restrain bad behavior, self-reflection of leaders and fostering a supportive work

environment. Under the combined effect of these three points, negative behaviors will be effectively suppressed, it will be easier to build trust between employees and leaders, and employees will feel fair and just.

4.3. Provide employees with development opportunities

Leaders' long-term support for employees' personal development will help employees fight burnout, and it can also help companies retain talents. Leaders allocate resources to help employees learn, explore, and grow. For employees, their skills can be upgraded and their potential can be tapped. For leaders, this will keep employees productive while reducing the company's need for new employees and reducing the financial burden of recruiting new employees. It is a development plan that benefits both employees and employers.

4.4. You are not alone: Setting up employee support departments

A company cannot change the social environment. If there is a lack of support in society, it is difficult for companies to change this situation. However, enterprises can set up special departments to provide employees with necessary support. For example, enterprises can provide psychological counseling to employees who are experiencing job burnout, or to provide some financial or resource support to employees who have difficulties in life. In this way, companies can establish emotional connections with employees, reduce employees' job burnout, and improve employee performance. What is more, a harmonious, sincere and trusting relationship should be established between leaders and employees [4]. Leaders need to have high adaptability, understanding and empathy. Leaders can support employees by affirming their value, helping them achieve their goals, and caring about their well-being. These intimate relationships are important to a person, and managers should learn to understand and respect them, and provide help for them.

5. Conclusion

Employee burnout presents challenges to leaders and managers around the world and is an important issue that needs to be addressed promptly. This study synthesized the literature in the fields of psychology, management, etc., and summarized the factors that lead to employee burnout: work pressure, illegal tasks, job insecurity, negative atmosphere, insecure leadership style, inefficient operating system, customer complaints, lack of social support, cyberbullying, unsafe society. In addition, burnout is more common in some industries, such as manufacturing and service industries. In China, the pressure of male workers in manufacturing and education is higher than that of female workers. Both new and older workers are at higher risk of burnout. Reality-based recommendations are given to leaders to combat employee burnout. However, there are still some limitations in this research. For example, the collection of industry information may be insufficient. In the future, this deficiency can be made up for by analyzing more literature or in the form of questionnaire survey.

References

- [1] Tehrani, S.A., Keshtkar, A., Ramasamy, A. et al. The worldwide prevalence of burnout syndrome among bank employees: a systematic review and meta-analysis protocol. *Syst Rev.*, 2021(10), 283.
- [2] Brassey, J., Coe, E., Dewhurst, M., Enomoto, K., Giarola, R., Herbig, B., and Jeffery, B. Addressing employee burnout: Are you solving the right problem? May 27, 2022.
- [3] Chen, Z.Y., Guo, F., Fang, Y. 2022 National Mental Health Survey Report: Current Situation, Influencing Factors, and Service Status. In: Fu, X.L., Zhang, K., Chen, X.F., Chen, Z.Y. (Eds.). *Blue Book of Mental Health: Report on the Development of National Mental Health in China (2021-2022)*, Social Science Literature Press, 2023, 1-29.
- [4] Gabriel, K.P., Aguinis, H. How to prevent and combat employee burnout and create healthier workplaces during crises and beyond, *Business Horizons*, 2022, 65(2), 183-192.

- [5] Kim, Y-K., Kim, H-J. The Impact of Professional Identity of Vocational Training Teachers in Disability Vocational Rehabilitation Facilities on Exhaustion: Centered on the Media Effect of Job Satisfaction. *Disability and Employment*, 2021, 31(4), 53-75.
- [6] Dorta-Afonso, D., Romero-Domínguez, L., Benítez-Núñez, C. It's worth it! High performance work systems for employee job satisfaction: The mediational role of burnout, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2023(108), 103364.
- [7] Benitez, M., Orgambidez, A., Cantero-Sánchez, F.J., León-Pérez, J.M. Harmonious Passion at Work: Personal Resource for Coping with the Negative Relationship between Burnout and Intrinsic Job Satisfaction in Service Employees. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023, 20(2), 1010.
- [8] Park, S-H. The Mediating Effect of Positive Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Emotional Labor and Job Exhaustion in Sports Center Workers. *Journal of the Korean Society of Sports Science*, 2021, 30(2), 679-692.
- [9] Ouyang, C., Zhu, Y., Ma, Z., Qian, X. Why Employees Experience Burnout: An Explanation of Illegitimate Tasks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022, 19(15):8923.
- [10] Jeon, J-K., Bang, Y. The effect of job instability of hotel employees on job burnout and customer orientation. *Culinary Science & Hospitality Research*, 2022, 28(3), 175-188.
- [11] Fastje, F., Mesmer-Magnus, J., Guidice, R. and Andrews, M.C. Employee burnout: the dark side of performance-driven work climates. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 2023, 10(1), 1-21.
- [12] Moriano, J.A., Molero, F., Laguía, A., Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P.R. Security Providing Leadership: A Job Resource to Prevent Employees' Burnout. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021, 18(23), 12551.
- [13] Ahmed, S.S., Ali, G.A., Xu, X.H.Y., Ahmed, S.S. Job Stress and Burnout Among Employees Working in Terrorist-Ridden Areas. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021(12), 667488.
- [14] Mushtaq, W., Qammar, A., Shafique, I. and Anjum, Z.-U. Effect of cyberbullying on employee creativity: examining the roles of family social support and job burnout. *Foresight*, 2022, 24(5), 596-609.
- [15] Liu, X.M., et al. Current status and influencing factors of job burnout among manufacturing workers in my country. *Environment and Occupational Medicine*, 2023, 40(04), 396-404.
- [16] Ni, Y., Jiang, J.P., & Liu, J.J. A Review of Research on Job Burnout. *Social Science Trends*, 2022(11), 79-84.
- [17] Marchiondo, L.A. Older Age Discrimination at Work: Not So Weak and Feeble, *Work, Aging and Retirement*, 2022, 8(4), 335-338.