

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION: HOW DOES IT RELATE TO WORK ENGAGEMENT?

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Abstract - People- to some extent- are largely or partly affected by emotions in life as well as in work. Emotion exhaustion definitely influences the quality of the job of the employees. Authors intend to examine the factors that can possibly affect emotional exhaustion and the relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement. The research was conducted with the assistance of Smart PLS software through quantitative method with data of employees working in Hochiminh city. Results of the study showed that ethical leadership has negative relationship to emotional exhaustion while it has positive relationship with challenge demand. In addition, there bears a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement. In theory, previous researches were invigorated through the results of the study. In practice, ethical leadership should be appreciated, and challenge demand should be minimized to prevent the incurrence of emotion exhaustion- an effective navigator for low engagement at work.

Key words - emotional exhaustion; work engagement; challenge demand; ethical leadership

1. Introduction

In many distinct sectors of life, emotion is the most fundamental and essential factor which governs many individual activities; especially in the business sector, this factor has significant impacts on the standard operation of organizations. Emotion includes a variety of aspects in which emotional exhaustion gets the most attention from both researchers and administrators for the reason that its negative effects on personal and collective benefits are the top concern in most organizations. Having a clear understanding of most aspects of emotional exhaustion will be the most efficacious solution to undesirable situations that can occur in the organization related to personnel. In fact, under different environmental conditions and properties, there is a large number of different factors contributing to the formation of emotional exhaustion and also its resulting consequences are being explored by researchers. In 2015, Zheng and partners [1] developed a model of psychological processes in which emotional exhaustion is directly and indirectly influenced by ethical leadership through team cohesion. Meanwhile, in 2013, there is a project carried out by Arshadi & Shabbazi with the aim of finding out the impacts of workplace characteristics (security, trust in senior management, distributive justice, and information sharing) on the intention to quit and emotional exhaustion is an intermediary [2]. On the other hand, Li et al. investigates the effects of two types of job demand on driving anger with the participation of emotional exhaustion and work engagement [3]. In research formulated by Skaalvik & Skaalvik, emotional exhaustion is seen as a possible factor leading to the intention to quit of teachers [4]. Extensive data sources from previous

studies are the basis for the development of this project. Furthermore, scholars have recognized the possibility of job demand and leadership leading to emotional exhaustion, in addition, the intention to quit the job and the emotional cohesion is proposed to be the consequences of emotional exhaustion. Final conclusions about the level of correlation between the factors will be drawn as soon as the data collection is completed. The research team has expected that the results will help entrepreneurs who are looking for solutions to their organizational problems and will also inspire future studies.

2. Background

2.1. Theoretical framework

This research is based on the JD-R theory which was developed by Demerouti [5], and scholars have found that there is a remarkable correspondence between their research ideas and the properties of this theory; on the other hand, it can be considered that this project is one of many scientific studies in the world inspired by the discoveries of Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli [6] in JD-R theory. In particular, both the JD-R theory and its model are central for organizations and enterprises that have a need for a comprehensive approach as regards work engagement and health [7]. This theory is acknowledged that it will serve as a supporting tool and furthermore, it is a solid foundation for further progress of this research.

2.2. Definition of work engagement

Work engagement is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74), and that is of an affective-cognitive nature and persistent duration [6]. Thanks to high vigor, employees invest their energy and effort in work. With dedicated workers, their works are significant and meaningful, and they experience a sense of pride while performing work-related activities. Furthermore, people who are absorbed in work devote cognitive resources to, and maintain concentration on, work-related tasks.

2.3. The research model and hypotheses

2.3.1. The impact of challenge demand on emotional exhaustion

The concept of the challenge demand is concretized as requirements that cost an individual's efforts and energy to get benefits and advancement in the job [8]. Besides, previous studies on the challenge demands of researchers have yielded positive conclusions about its potential gains related to the employee's work state and mental energy [9].

According to the JD-R model, job demands are believed to be the main cause leading to the exhaustion of the individual's physical and mental health and burnout. Therefore, there is a perception that job demands have a positive relationship with exhaustion [6], [10]. However, in past studies, due to the lack of clarity on two different aspects of job demands, the true nature of the relationship between them with emotional exhaustion has not been distinguished. With regard to the challenge demand, the generalizations of this factor in the conceptual section have shown that it is highly likely to be positively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Understandably, challenges often promote personal learning, development, and overcoming, so it is emotional leverage, not a mental harm factor.

H1: There will be a negative relationship between challenge demand and emotional exhaustion.

2.3.2. The impact of ethical leadership on emotional exhaustion

Ethical leadership is a concept related to the performance of consistent and relevant behaviors through personal acts and interpersonal relationships; besides, this factor also refers to the promotion of positive behaviors and attitudes for others through two-way interaction, strengthening, and decision-making [11]. Bellingham shows that the distinctive trait of ethical leaders is that they care about the development of their subordinates that is conducted through trust, providing authority and responsibility [12]. On the other hand, ethical leadership is like a factor that drives employees' ability to try their best.

There have been many views that ethical leaders tend to show concern for others and treat everyone without prejudice; likewise, integrity is at all times present with the appearance of ethical leaders from which they promote ethical conduct towards other members of the organization [11]. Ethical leaders always require common workplace conduct to be disciplined; organizational frameworks will make it easier for employees to accomplish goals, they will also find energy in dedicating effort thanks to motivation and commitment [13]. On the other hand, because of the clearly demonstrated ethical leadership's responsibilities and expectations along with their open communication, employees are provided a clear awareness of the organization and society's expectations [11]. Some researchers have found that leadership ethics is a valuable resource for employees; this is explained based on the theory of resource conservation in which the emotional exhaustion of employees can be significantly reduced thanks to ethical leadership [14].

H2: There will be a negative relationship between ethical leadership and emotional exhaustion.

2.3.3. The impact of hindrance demands on emotional exhaustion

From a general perspective, job demands involve workload, time pressure, and responsibility [15]. Hindrance demand also has general characteristics of job demands but different from the challenge one, it makes employees easily discouraged and do not want to dedicate as much as before. Moreover, certain undesirable

situations or events, which are part of hindrance demand, may prevent employees from advancing and learning. Also because hindrance demands are obstacles in the working process, employees must expend more energy to overcome difficulties and this also means that in the long run, burnout can occur. The research team hypothesized to support speculations about the relationship between hindrance demand and emotional exhaustion.

H3: There will be a positive relationship between hindrance demand and emotional exhaustion

2.3.4. The impact of emotional exhaustion on work engagement

In many previous research papers, emotional exhaustion is concretized as a state of physical and mental decline [16] it is also certain disorders in attitudes and behaviors that often occur in high-pressure working environments [17]. The fatigue and feeling exhausted of individuals by the assigned missions are the two main characteristics of emotional exhaustion [18], [19].

In many cases, when workers show signs of emotional exhaustion, they often face a decline in psychological resources and their ability to contribute themselves is no longer the same as before [20]. And individuals experiencing this situation also exhibit less satisfaction with the organization than their average employees, and as a result, their current job engagement is also negatively affected [21]. There is a remarkable point about the relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement that is the source of the deficiencies in emotion that come from both circumstances and people [22], [23], [24]. There is a truth that the stability in the employee's task execution process always comes from the balance between internal and external elements; instability from any job aspect will also lead to negative outcomes like resignation intentions, lack of engagement, impaired work performance, and more.

H4: There will be a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement.

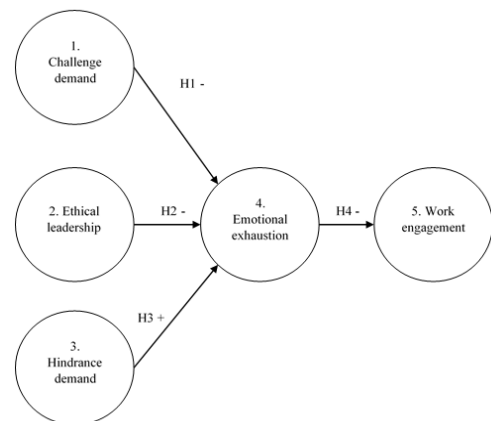


Figure 1. The research model

3. Methodology

With a view to evaluating the relationship between variables, a quantitative approach was utilized. Items of challenge demand, hindrance demand, emotional

exhaustion were adopted from Feng Li [3]. Items of ethical leadership were withdrawn from Dianhan Zheng [1]. All items were translated from English to Vietnamese with advices of English teachers. A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure these items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Accordingly, a survey questionnaire was developed to collect data from employees working in Hochiminh city – one of the most bustling cities in Vietnam and takes up a large amount of labor nationwide. The survey has two stages. Firstly, authors run a pilot of 30 respondents to check the reliability and validity of items. Authors also contacted respondents to check the meaning of the questionnaires and to revise the questionnaires (if necessary). Next, authors did an official survey. Thanks to the relationship with human resources managers, authors sent the link of questionnaire to their organizations. A total of 216 questionnaires was distributed and collected online for data analysis. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used by using SmartPLS version 3.2.8

4. Results

The majority of the respondents are less than 35-year-old (70%), and have bachelor's degree and above (77%). Females accounted 65% of respondents.

The assessment of research model has two stages: (1) Evaluating the relationships between indicators and their variables; (2) Evaluating the relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Assessment of the measurement model:

At the same time, authors check the reliability of indicators, the internal consistency, the convergent validity and discriminant validity of constructs. Indicators with low outer loading below 0.4 should be removed from the constructs while others higher than 0.7 should be kept from the constructs [25], [26]. In addition, indicators with outer loadings between 0.4 and 0.7 should be dropped only when dropping them leads to the improvement in the composite reliability or the average variance extracted. All CR values are higher than 0.7, thus, all constructs achieve the internal consistency (Table 1). They also achieve convergent validity when AVE values are higher than 0.5 [27]. HTMT ratio is used to assess the discriminant validity. All variables achieve discriminant validity when HTMT ratio is below than 0.900 [28]. Thus, all values are qualified enough for the standard of HTMT ratio (Table 2).

Table 1. Variables' information

Variables	Outer loading	CR	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Outer weight
A. Challenge demand (CHALL)		0.832	0.781	0.503	
CHALL1	*				
CHALL2	0.835				0.473
CHALL3	0.689				0.162
CHALL4	0.571				0.117
CHALL5	0.619				0.143

CHALL 6	0.795				0.425
B. Ethical leadership (ETHI)		0.894	0.9	0.589	
ETHI1	*				
ETHI 2	0.535				-.093
ETHI 3	0.683				0.009
ETHI 4	0.781				0.145
ETHI 5	0.874				0.408
ETHI 6	0.895				0.398
ETHI 7	0.779				0.279
C. Hindrance demand (HIN)		0.805	0.69	0.511	
HIN 1	0.843				0.487
HIN 2	0.713				0.357
HIN 3	0.641				0.204
HIN 4	0.644				0.316
D. Emotional exhaustion (EMO)		0.899	0.859	0.641	
EMO 1	0.786				0.235
EMO 2	0.684				0.177
EMO 3	0.813				0.264
EMO 4	0.863				0.294
EMO 5	0.846				0.266
F. Work engagement (WORK)		0.934	0.908	0.606	
WORK 1	0.776				0.25
WORK 2	0.815				0.153
WORK 3	0.815				0.135
WORK 4	0.675				0.115
WORK 5	0.704				0.093
WORK 6	0.768				0.193
WORK 7	0.854				0.158
WORK 8	0.803				0.181
*: items are removed from the constructs					

Table 2. HTMT ratio, Inner VIF values and R² values

Variables	HTMT ratio				Inner VIF values		R-square
	A. CHALL	B. ETHI	C. HIN	D. EMO	D.EMO	F. WORK	
A. CHALL					1.478		
B. ETHI	0.374				1.024		
C. HIN	0.697	0.414			1.492		
D. EMO	0.364	0.205	0.662			1.000	39%
F. WORK	0.312	0.593	0.319	0.444			18.1%

Assessment of the structural model:

The evaluation of structural model includes four issues: collinearity issues, the significance and relevance of the structural model relationships, the level of R², the f² effect size. The model does not have collinearity issues when all inner VIF values are smaller than 5 with

significance =10%, all p-values (except for p-value 20%-higher than 10%) are accepted, thus, H2, H3, and H4 are supported whereas H1 is rejected. The results in table 3 show that ethical leadership has negative influence on emotional exhaustion and hindrance demand positively affects emotional exhaustion. Thus, H2 and H3 is confirmed. Also, work engagement appears to be negatively influenced by emotional exhaustion, which proved hypothesis H4. From the table, based on coefficient's values, we can conclude that hindrance demand has stronger impact than ethical leadership on emotional exhaustion.

The minimum R^2 value is 0 and the maximum R^2 value is 1. The higher R^2 value is, the higher-level predictive accuracy the research model has. R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can, as a rule of thumb, be respectively described as substantial, moderate, or weak [25], [29]. As seen in the table, it is conclusive that the research model has weak level of predictive accuracy. The R^2 of value of emotional exhaustion is 0.39, meaning that the three independent variables "challenge demand", "ethical leadership", and "hindrance demand" account 39% in order to interpret the movement of the dependent variable "Emotional exhaustion". The R^2 value of "work engagement" is 18.1 %.

Moreover, the difference of exogenous in explaining the movement of endogenous is an important issue. This measure is referred to as the f^2 effect size. Three values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35, respectively, express small, medium, and large effects of the exogenous latent variable [30]. The results from Table 3 shed light on the fact that ethical leadership and hindrance demand have medium effect on emotion exhaustion. Correspondingly, emotional exhaustion also has medium influence on work engagement.

Table 3. Path coefficient- f^2 value

Hypothesis	Coefficient	P Values	Conclusion	f-square	Level of predictive accuracy
H1	0.087	20%	Rejected		
H2	-0.301	10%	Supported	0.145	Medium
H3	0.542	0%	Supported	0.323	Medium
H4	-0.430	0%	Supported	0.226	Medium

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Theoretical implications

The research is conducted in an attempt to test the relationship between three antecedents: challenge demand, ethical leadership, and hindrance demand and emotional exhaustion. Also, the research aims to find out how emotional exhaustion affect work engagement. Findings are supportive of the hypotheses that ethical leadership negatively influences emotional exhaustion whereas hindrance demand positively affects emotional exhaustion. In addition, research also confirms the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and work engagement. With the supported hypotheses, the research has made some vital theoretical contributions.

5.2. Practical contribution

Based on the results of the research, it is highly recommended that employee engagement can be tightened through the minimization of emotional exhaustion. This can be done by increasing ethical leadership and decreasing hindrance demand. Based on the value of the outerweight, among the factors that lead to emotional exhaustion, workers show a strong enthusiasm for hindrance demand. Thus, this factor should not be taken for granted. Hindrance demands could possibly drain employees' energy and discourage them, thus leading to lower level of work engagement. Moreover, the importance of emotional exhaustion should not be neglected. Were people mental disorder, they would not have full concentration and ability to focus on the job they are performing, thus the engagement rate is low.

5.3. Limitations and further researches

Despite some contributions, it is undeniable that the research still has some restrictions. Firstly, there are other factors rather than the aforementioned factors that influence emotional exhaustion. Secondly, the research has not considered the effect of demographics on emotional exhaustion. Finally, the framework of this study was tested only in Hochiminh city, which brings about chances for further research.

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