Burnout, Job Characteristics, and Intent to Leave: Does Work Experience Have Any Effect

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Abstract
Recent changes in employment conditions due to globalization, innovation, and economic crisis have made many employees vulnerable to job burnout. The literature shows that innovation can have both positive and negative impacts on employees’ well-being. The implementation of new technology may increase job demand, employees feeling of emotional exhaustion, and intentions of leaving. This study examines if the number of years of work experience may moderate the level of burnout felt by employees (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment), their perceptions of job characteristics (i.e., job demand, decisional latitude, and social support) and their intent to leave. Data are collected among agents and advisors working at a Canadian high education institution, a few months after the implementation of Banner, an information system used to manage and query students’ data. The results show no significant effect of work experience on burnout and job characteristics, but a positive significant effect on intent to leave. Experienced employees are not more prepared than their less experienced colleagues. The findings suggest that employers should increase job resources (e.g., training, feedback, and social support at work) during the implementation of new technology.

Keywords: work experience, burnout, job content, intent to leave, technological change

INTRODUCTION

Even though the main objective of the use of new technology (e.g., new information system) is to increase work efficacy and efficiency, its implementation may have negative effects on workers’ mental health (Salanova et al., 2000). Many researchers, such as Moore (2000), report that employees operating in a technological work environment are most vulnerable to burnout. New technology induces anxiety and reduces employees’ productivity. However, high exposure to the new technology and experience using it (i.e., more self-efficiency, more self-confidence, and less anxiety) enhance users’ appraisal (i.e. positive evaluation) and reduces burnout incidence and level (i.e., low emotional exhaustion and less cynicism) (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2000).

The present study focuses on the introduction of the Banner system (a new information system used to manage and query students’ data) in a Canadian high-education institution. Employees in the service sector are highly vulnerable to burnout given the number of demands made on them by users and a lack of time to fulfill these demands (Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001). The implementation of a new “complex” information system can create stressful condition that may increase the development of higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among service staffs. Before the introduction of the new system, users (agents and advisors) had high expectations, but a few weeks later, several of them developed a negative appraisal of the new system, generating a decrease in their well-being (e.g., increased level of stress and strain). Employees found the Banner system less easy to use, more complex than the prevailing system, reducing their perception of personal self-efficacy. This “new” work environment context engendered a decrease in employees’ performance and self-perceived competence.

This research examines if the employees’ number of years of experience may attenuate the impact of the implementation of a new technology and its negative influence. Several studies have examined the possible relation between experience in a job (or a field) and employee burnout, but reported non-conclusive results (Brewer and Shappard, 2004). Some studies have shown no correlation between years of experience and burnout (e.g., Russel et al., 1987), whereas others found significant correlations. Brewer and Shappard (2004) report a small negative correlation between years of experience and emotional exhaustion, one of the components of burnout. Their meta-analysis reveals that workers in a type of job for longer periods of time are less likely to experience burnout than those who have worked in that type of job for shorter periods.

Taking in consideration the non-conclusive results reported in previous studies, the aim of this research
is to test again for the effect of the number of years of experience on burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) in the context of the implementation of a new information system technology. In addition this research examines the effect of the number of years of experience on employees’ perceptions of job characteristics (job demand, decisional latitude, and social support) and their intent to leave.

**BURNOUT, JOB CHARACTERISTICS, AND INTENT TO LEAVE**

**Burnout**

Burnout is defined as “a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one’s occupation and doubtful of one’s capacity to perform” (Maslach et al., 1996). The most well-known view of burnout is that proposed by Maslach (1982) and Maslach and Jackson (1986). They describe burnout as a work-related construct, involving three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally exhausted by one’s work and drained by others (Maslach, 1982, 1993; Maslach and Jackson, 1986; Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001). Depersonalization refers to feeling impersonal and detached from work (Maslach, 1982, 1993; Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Personal accomplishment refers to one’s feeling of successful achievement, competency, and adequacy at work (Maslach, 1982, 1993; Maslach and Jackson, 1986; Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001). High levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low levels of personal accomplishment engender burnout. Employees, who are suffering from burnout, experience emotional exhaustion, then detachment from work, and feelings of inefficacy and inadequacy (Maslach, 1993).

While the burnout phenomenon has been noted in occupations involving extensive direct client contact (for example, service staffs), high levels of burnout can be present in different professions (Maslach et al., 1996; Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001; Schutte et al., 2000). Research suggests that burnout has negative effects for both the organization and the individual. Burnout engenders poor self-esteem (Pines, 1993), feelings of disaffection (Dunham and Varma, 1998), feelings of a loss of self-efficiency (Maslach et al., 1996), cynical attitude (Maslach et al., 1996), a depletion of physical and emotional resources (Maslach et al., 1996), a loss of enthusiasm (Dunham and Varma, 1998), and depression and anxiety (Bakker et al., 2000). At the organizational level, burnout decreases the job satisfaction level, increases presenteeism and reduces work performance and productivity, increases the intent to leave and turnover rates, reduces organizational commitment levels, and increases health care costs (Brewer and Shappard, 2004; Demerouti et al., 2009; Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004; Hogan and McKnight, 2007).

Several factors have been related to burnout: workload and time constraints, conflict and role ambiguity, lack of support from other colleagues and superiors, presenteeism, inability to conciliate work life and family life, technological work environment, and employees’ personal characteristics such as psychological and socio-demographic individual characteristics (Demerouti et al., 2009; Zellars et al., 2000). For instance, Zellars et al. (2000) report that the five personality factors explain the burnout dimensions. Extraversion and openness are negatively related to ‘diminished personal accomplishment’. Neuroticism is found to be related to higher emotional exhaustion levels; and openness to experience is negatively associated with depersonalization. Layman and Guyden (1997) advocate that introverted persons are at higher risk of experiencing burnout than are extroverted people. Demerouti et al. (2009) suggest that job demand increases pressure to attend work while employee feels sick (i.e., presenteeism), which in turn gives rise to burnout. Specifically, they report that emotional exhaustion and presenteeism are reciprocal, and that depersonalization is an outcome of presenteeism. Schaufeli et al. (1995) show that the use of technology is positively related to nurses’ feeling of burnout, and has a direct negative influence on objective and subjective performance.

**Job Characteristics**

During the past four decades, a number of studies found that unfavorable job characteristics have an impact on job-related stress and burnout (Bakker et al., 2004). The Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) (Karasek, 1979; Johnson, and Hall, 1988) is one of the most prominent works in research on the relationship between work conditions, burnout, and health. The model identifies three important job characteristics: job demands, job control (decisional latitude), and social support. Job demands refer to the work load, time constraints of the job, role conflict, and intellectual requirement (Karasek, 1979; 1985). Decision latitude refers to work autonomy, ability to control his or her work activities, and participation in decision making. Social support refers to social-emotional support and resources assistance with work tasks. Social support is an important potential buffer against job demand and job stress (Bakker et al., 2004) because supervisors and colleagues might provide important emotional, informational, and practical benefits (Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001).

Numerous studies report relationships between job characteristics and burnout: job demand and emotional exhaustion (Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2001; Demerouti et al., 2009), job demand and depersonalization (Demerouti et al., 2009), social
support and emotional exhaustion (Russel et al., 1987), social support and depersonalization (Greenglass et al., 1997; Russel et al., 1987), social support and personal accomplishment (Greenglass et al., 1997; Russel et al., 1987), decisional latitude and emotional exhaustion (Taris et al., 2005), decisional latitude and depersonalization (Taris et al., 2005), and decisional latitude and personal accomplishment (Taris et al., 2005).

Intent to Leave
Intent to leave is indicative of a current dissatisfaction with one’s employment and is found to be the strongest predictor of an employee’s actual turnover decision (Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002; Michael and Spector, 1982). A heavy workload (i.e., high job demand) is a precursor to job stress and burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and increased intent to leave. For instance, Lee and Mowday (1987) show that organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job involvement all predict intentions of leaving, which, in turn, explains actual turnover.

METHODOLOGY
Measurement
The burnout is assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach and Jackson, 1986; Maslach, Jackson and Leiter, 1996). The MBI is the most widely used instrument in burnout studies (Schaufeli and Greenglass, 2001). It consists of three sub-scales and 22 items: emotional exhaustion (nine items: e.g., “I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job”), personal accomplishment (eight items: e.g., “I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems”), and depersonalization (five items: e.g., “I don’t really care what happens to some recipients”). The respondents rate the frequency of experienced feeling related to each of the 22 items on a seven-point scale. Never (0), A few times a year or less (1), Once a month or less (2), A few times a month (3), Once a week (4), A few times a week (5), and Every day (6).

Job demand, decision latitude and social support are measured using the Job Content Instrument (Karasek, 1985; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Job demand is measured with a nine-item scale (e.g., ‘My job requires long periods of intense concentration on the task’). Decisional latitude is assessed using 9 items (e.g., ‘My job requires me to be creative’). Social support, received from a supervisor and a colleague, is measured using 7 items (e.g., ‘My supervisor pays attention to what I say’). Responses vary from 1=“totally disagree” to 4=“totally agree”. Intent to leave is assessed using a five-item scale adapted from previous works (e.g., ‘I definitely think of leaving my job since the introduction of Banner’).

Experience is measured by two indicators: (1) the number of years, respondents have worked for the University; and (2) the number of years they have worked as agents and advisors. Respondents are also invited to complete some demographic information.

Sample
The population includes 184 agents and advisors working at a Canadian higher education institution. Most of the employees working at these positions (agent or advisor) are female. The institution implemented the Banner system in 2009. The employees were invited to complete the online survey in March 2010. Sixty-one percent (112 employees) completed the survey, including 104 women and 8 men. Taking in to consideration the lower sample size for male employees, we retained only female employees’ respondents. Previous studies show that women are more susceptible to burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1985). For instance, Maslach and Jackson (1985; MBI study) look for sex differences across a wide range of service occupations, and find that women report higher levels of emotional exhaustion and lower levels of personal accomplishment than men. Men, however, report a greater depersonalization than women.

The number of years of experience at the University ranged from 2 to 41 with a mean of 17.2 years. The number of years of experience as advisor or agent ranged from 1 to 31 with a mean of 8.4.

RESULTS
The reliability of the scales is tested and supported. The Cronbach alpha values are all at an acceptable level: 0.70 (decisional latitude), 0.92 (social support), 0.79 (job demand), 0.90 (emotional exhaustion), 0.72 (depersonalization), 0.69 (accomplishment), and 0.82 (intentions of leaving). Means are calculated for job demand (i.e., mean of the nine-item scale), decisional latitude, social support, and intentions of leaving.

In accordance with Maslach and Jackson (1986), total scores for the three burnout dimensions have been recoded. For the emotional exhaustion subscale, total scores of 27 and over are indicative of high emotional exhaustion, scores between 17 and 26 are indicative of moderate emotional exhaustion, and scores below 17 are indicative of low emotional exhaustion. For the depersonalization subscale, scores of 13 and over reveal high depersonalization, scores of 7 to 12 reveal moderate depersonalization, and scores lower than 7 reveal low depersonalization. For accomplishment, scores of 39 and over are indicative of low accomplishment, scores between 32 and 38 are indicative of moderate personal accomplishment, and scores lower than 32 are indicative of high accomplishment. The results show that 47% of advisors and agents report a high level of emotional exhaustion, 22.2% report a high level of depersonalization (21.1% show a moderate level of
deal with emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. The mean levels reported by respondents for the three job characteristics are 3.126 (decisional latitude), 3.200 (job demand), and 3.106 (social support). These indicators reveal a high level of workload, decisional latitude, and social support.

The intent to leave mean level is 2.252. This moderated level of intent to leave reveals that the high levels of burnout (due to the implementation of the Banner system) are counterbalanced by the high levels of social support and decisional latitude.

Correlation analyses are done to examine the relationships between experience, burnout dimensions, job characteristics, and intentions of leaving. The results show that the number of years of experience within the institution has no effect on the three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and accomplishment). For job characteristics, the number of years of experience within the institution does not influence job demand and social support levels, but has a significant effect on decisional latitude. This means that employees who have worked for the institution for longer periods perceive higher decisional latitude compared to those who have worked for a shorter period. The number of years of experience as advisor or agent does not have any significant effect on burnout dimensions and job characteristics. Finally, the number of years of experience within the institution and the number of years of experience at the same position both have significant positive effects on intent to leave. This means that experienced employees report more intentions of leaving their job compared to less experienced employees.

Table 1. Correlation analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Number of years working within the institution</th>
<th>Number of years working as advisor or agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>.155 (0.122)*</td>
<td>-.048 (0.638)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>.148 (0.163)</td>
<td>0.080 (0.453)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accomplishment</td>
<td>-.143 (0.192)</td>
<td>-.188 (0.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job demand</td>
<td>-.060 (0.561)</td>
<td>-.138 (0.179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisional latitude</td>
<td>.244 (0.015)*</td>
<td>-.17 (0.864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>.007 (0.947)</td>
<td>-.036 (0.736)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to leave</td>
<td>.409 (0.000)*</td>
<td>.292 (0.004)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Correlation (p-value); * Significant (p<0.05).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study reports that the implementation of new technology may influence job demand and burnout. Approximately half of the respondents report high levels of emotional exhaustion and more than forty-percent report moderate or high levels of depersonalization. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicate low or moderate levels of personal accomplishment. To gain a better understanding of the negative effect of a new technology on employees' well-being, future research is encouraged to use longitudinal approaches in order to examine the evolution of burnout levels before, during, and following the implementation of new technology.

The number of years of experience did not alleviate the burnout levels felt by agents and advisors. This means that work experience does not have an impact on how employees feel emotional exhaustion generated by the implementation of the new information system. This result reveals that employees who have worked at the same position (agent or advisor) or for the same employer for longer periods of time experience the same level of burnout as employees who have worked for shorter periods. Future research is encouraged to examine if other individual personal factors may alleviate burnout. For instance, this study did not control for factors such as self-efficiency and work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is a major contributor to burnout, whereas self-efficiency reduces feelings of emotional exhaustion and increases feelings of professional competency (Schaufeli and Greenlass, 2001).

Bakker et al. (2004) show that several job demands and resources interact to predict chronic stress and burnout. Indeed, previous research shows that decisional latitude and a high level of support from supervisors and colleagues reduce the effect of work overload on burnout (e.g., Bakker et al., 2004). Thus, in cases where employers show a high level of social support to employees, the job demand and anxiety caused by the use of new technology did not result in high levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. Supervisors are encouraged to develop high-quality relationships with employees, and to provide timely and quality feedback to them. In accordance with the job demand-resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), an increase in job resources (e.g., increase of social support at work, training, performance feedback) reduces the effect of job demand (work-load, stress, anxiety).

Training is still one of the most important factors that facilitate the acceptance and use of new technology. Torkzadeh et al. (1999) and Salanova et al. (2000) report that computer training significantly increases...
computer-users’ self-efficacy. Indeed, Salanova et al. (2000) show that employees with high (low) computer self-efficacy display a lower (higher) burnout level when computer training is high (low). During the implementation stage of new technology, employers are highly encouraged to provide training regardless of employees’ experience.

The results indicate that the higher the number of years of experience, the greater the intentions of leaving among agents and advisors. These findings mean that the implementation of new technology may increase turnover among experienced employees. Indeed, experienced employees report a high level of decisional latitude. In the context of this study, experienced employees who used the previous system for a longer period are likely to show a high level of resistance to the adoption of the Banner system. Experienced employees found the new system (i.e., Banner system) less useful and more complex compared to the prevailing system (these observations are based on several comments formulated by the system-users). In the context of this study, experienced workers were seemingly more vulnerable and had developed a negative evaluation of the new information system, which might explain their intentions of leaving. In fact, the inability to cope with new technology causes what researchers call “techno-stress” (e.g., Tu et al., 2005). Employers should recognize the techno-stress phenomenon and its negative effects. The development of a technological committee aiming to facilitate the transition between the former and the new system (Banner) is recommended. Finally, in order to reduce technology resistance, the new technology should be implemented gradually (Tu et al., 2005).

Although this research has provided an insight on the potential relationships among work experience, burnout, job characteristics, and intentions of leaving, future studies using longitudinal design are encouraged to examine these links before, during, and after the implementation of new technology. It would be also interesting to consider employees’ personal characteristics (psychological and sociodemographic) as a moderate variable of these relationships.

REFERENCES


