

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB-STRESS AND BURNOUT: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND CREATIVITY AS PREDICTOR VARIABLES[#]

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The study aimed to understand whether organizational support and individual's creativity will moderate effects of job stress and burnout, so an inverse relationship between organizational support, creativity, and burnout was predicted to occur. Sample of the study comprised of 70 individuals employed with private corporate firms and private banks. A linear regression model was applied on all variables. The resulting model was found to be significant. $R = .523$, $F(2,67) = 12.622$, $p < .0001$, with job stress as the dependent variable. Job stress and burnout were inversely related to organizational support, however individual's creativity level did not effect either the level of stress or burnout. Results are discussed in the light of present findings and their implications for creating organizational environment conducive for better productivity and performance.

Amongst various strategies that organizations adopt to reduce burnout and improve organizational commitment, perceived organizational support is reported to be an effective coping strategy. That is the extent to which an organization cares about the well being of its members, listens to their complaints, tries to help them when they have problems and treats them fairly. Feelings of knowing that an organization cares about its members is likely to help reduce work stress. Research has shown that nurses who perceive high levels of organizational support are less likely to experience negative feelings and emotions when they take care of AIDs patients. Organizational support is also likely to help mitigate some of the negative feelings and

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emotions generated by downsizing and layoffs (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutehison, & Sowa, 1986).

Emotional support from immediate superior can help group members cope better with job stress. A study compared the illness rate between two groups of employees who felt they had their boss's support, suffered only half as much illness in 12 months as those who felt they lacked such support (Kirmeyer & Dougherty, 1988, 1992). In a study on burnout and organizational sources of social support in human service professions, Haque and Khan (2001) compared women doctors and nurses working in public hospitals of Lahore. Results suggested that the relationship between home-work stress and burnout was moderated by organizational sources of social support predominantly in nurses.

Parker and Griffin (2002) reported that lack of perceived support for equal deployment of women police was associated with over performance demands for women leading to increased level of job stress. Whereas, perceived organizational support makes available external sources that can mitigate stressful feelings. Does being creative provide intrapersonal sources that can buffer feelings of stress and burnout?

Researches point out that creative workers tend to have different intellectual and personality characteristics from their less creative counterparts. Creative people are in general more mentally flexible than others, which allow them to overcome the traditional way of looking at problems (Dubrin, 1994). Creative people are also resistant to frustration in the sense that they have a high tolerance for ambiguity and chaos. Their ability to handle frustration and problems through non-traditional, flexible ways may also contribute towards finding better ways to cope with stress too, being able to think beyond conformist ideas makes available more options to a creative person, thus making him more apt in dealing with outside pressures.

Creativity is a decision making process that produces novel and useful ideas. Creativity's most obvious value is in helping the decision maker identify all viable alternatives. Creativity within the individuals is determined by the joint effects of number of factors. Amongst these, most relevant to organizations are personal characteristics task-relevant, knowledge and intrinsic motivation. Creativity is enhanced when members of an organization feel that what they are working is important (Dubrin, 1994). In today's world most of us are aware that employee stress is an increasing problem in organizations and a major thrust in human resource management is

helping employees stay healthy and achieve wellness. To be healthy and well is to achieve a state of mental and physical well-being that makes it possible to function at one's highest potential.

Job stress is the effect of tension on an employee by the job pressure to fulfill job assignment and to respond to deadlines. Considerable evidence suggests direct effects of job stress on illness like hypertension, coronary heart disease, and low back aches (Cahill & Landsbergis, 1995).

Studies in the U.K. in 1980s suggest that workplace stress multiply the cost due to industrial action by more than ten folds. The studies also suggest that with an alarming rise in the coronary heart disease and its relation to work, stress is of utmost importance in public health, community, and working people (Ellis, 1999). Amongst various reasons for stress the studies have highlighted poor management, bullying, downsizing, threats to financial security, psychological well being, and career development.

Burnout is a general feeling of exhaustion that develops when an individual simultaneously experiences too much pressure and too few sources of satisfaction (Moss, 1981). Job burnout has serious consequences for employees and employers. A survey by Northwestern National Life Insurance Company found that 34% of U.S. workers considered seriously leaving their jobs because of long-term stress. 33% expected to burnout soon. The survey also found that 14% said they had quit or changed jobs because of workplace stress (Dubrin, 1994).

Studies have also pointed that psychological consequences of burnout may lead to behavioral consequences e.g., bullying, acts of violence, aggression and decreased productivity (George & Jones, 1996). Garman and Corrigan (2002) examined burnout in psychosocial rehabilitation teams and its effects on patient satisfaction. The authors revealed significant relationships between team burnout and patient satisfaction. Research on burnout has thus far focused primarily on the individual, however Garman's findings show that in work environments in which team work is emphasized, a group level burnout can also emerge.

The present study was designed to test the prediction that organizational support and creativity will moderate effects of job stress and burnout. So, an inverse relationship is predicted to occur between organizational support, creativity, job stress, and burnout.

METHOD

Sample

For the present study 70 individuals employed with private corporate firms and private banks constituted the sample. Within the organizational hierarchy these individuals belonged to the middle management with at least more than a year's employment at their present designation. The mean age of the sample was 32.4 years. The sample constituted men only.

Instruments

(i) *Professional Life Stress Scale*

Professional Life Stress Scale (Fontana, 1989) has 22 items consisting of descriptive statements. For each item, the subject has to make a single choice which best applies to him/her. The scale generates ranges indicating different levels of stress that an individual can experience.

(ii) *Burnout Scale*

Burnout Scale (Pines & Aronson, 1989) has 21 items. For each item the respondent is required to generate a single score on a 7-point rating scale ranging between 1-7. The respondent is required to answer, how often does he experience (e.g., feeling tired or being weary, etc.). The scale provides a cumulative burnout score, where a score higher than 5 indicates an acute state and a need for immediate help.

(iii) *Perceived Organizational Support Measure*

Perceived organizational support measure (Eisenberger et al., 1986) has 16 items. On this scale the respondent has to indicate his degree of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale ranging between 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree, on items (e.g., the organization values my contribution to its well being).

(iv) *Creativity Scale*

Creativity Scale (Randsepp, 1997) has 50 items. The individual taking up the test has to indicate with a letter A, B, C, D, and E the degree or extent to which he/she agrees or disagrees with each

statement such as 'I like hobbies that involve collecting things', 'I feel that a logical step-by-step method is best for solving problems. To compute the final score each response is circled and assigned a value which is added up to generate different ranges indicating level of creativity for an individual'.

For the purpose of data collection, individuals designated at the middle hierarchal positions were contacted personally, they were briefed about the nature of study stating that it aims to study different attitudes and feelings that people experience within their work environment. The participation in the study was purely on voluntary basis. After obtaining informed consent, participants were requested to fill in the scales which were presented in the form of a booklet along with a demographic form. All administration was individual. Upon completion the participants were thanked, they were also told that group results arising out of the present study could be shared with them upon request.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of all the variables.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of the variables (N = 70)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	32.3571	8.6528
Years of work	5.3286	6.0331
Years of experience at present position	2.3571	2.0923
Stress	14.3000	7.2679
Burnout	2.7429	.8788
Creativity	.6429	7.7685
Organizational support	4.6171	.9852

Table 2*Intercorrelations Between the Variables (N = 70)*

Variables	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
I Age	-						
II Years of Work	.660**	-					
III No. of Years at Present Position	.517**	.628**	-				
IV Stress	.019	.029	.016	-			
V Burnout	.065	.062	.008	.732**	-		
VI Creativity	.258*	.225	.179	.113	.026	-	
VII Organizational Support	.125	.040	.109	.523**	.425**	.208	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ **Table 3***Interactions Predicting Relationships Among Job Stress, Burnout, Organizational Support and Creativity*

Order of Entry

Dependent				
Variables	Predictors		R	R ²
I Stress	Organizational Support x Creativity		.523	.274
II Burnout	Stress		.732	.535

 $F(2,67) = 78.282$; $p < .0001$

To determine whether creativity and organizational support moderate job stress and related feelings of burnout, a linear regression model was applied on all variables. The resulting model was found to be significant ($R = .523$, $F(2, 67) = 12.622$, $p < .001$ with job stress as the dependent variable. (Table 2 & 3). Suggesting that job stress is positively related with burnout and inversely related to organizational support creative thinking was not related to either job stress or burnout.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has widely documented the adversity of job stress and the stress – burnout relationship. For example, according to

Healy (1991) jobs are cited by 27% of workers as the single greatest stress factor in their lives ahead of divorce and death.

Mental health workers estimated that as many as 15% of managers suffer from critical levels of job stress that eventually adversely affects their job performance (Business Week, 1988).

In terms of organizations, effects of stress, include decreased productivity, poor morale, increased staff conflict, absenteeism, increased over work, and overtime. Stressed individuals are also more likely to demonstrate poor judgment and are at risk to “cut corners” and engage in more hazardous practices (Fisher, 2001).

Organizational factors that contribute to resultant feelings of burnout include bureaucratic organizations and emotionally demanding relationships with clients. Poor team cohesion and interpersonal conflict at work also contribute to burnout (Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996).

The present study was designed to explore factors that help to moderate job stress and related feelings of burnout. Findings arising out of this study highlight the importance of organizational help and support in mitigating the effects of stress. The findings did not support the assumption regarding creativity as a moderating factor. Hence, thinking in diverse ways does not effect stress feelings, but having a supportive environment does. Creativity, however, has been found to be inversely related to number of years of experience suggesting that creativity drops as number of years of experience increase. The present sample consists of people working in the private organizations, where environment is more competitive and offers lesser degree of job security as compared to the public sector. Most jobs are contractual in nature which require annual or bi-annual renewals of contracts. To maintain job stability, employees are required to enhance their competency level through continual skill upgrading. Such pressures make institutional support all the more imperative and valuable for an employee. The present analysis does not reveal the nature of stressors for these employees, however the overall impact of supportive environment leads to the inference that organizations can play an important role in reducing a lot of psychological and physical health risks resulting from stress.

The results from the present study also suggest that person's ability to think in diverse ways do not play a role in reducing stress. Probably, this idea has to be further elaborated that employees need to be trained in developing strategies and ways within themselves, thus

enabling them to be more independent and diversified in dealing with stress.

There has been considerable amount of work done suggesting the key role of social support as a buffer against stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Support helps in decreasing the effects of the stressful event on the perceived meaning of the stressor (Taylor, 1992). Considerable research indicates that people who receive emotional or material support from others are healthier than those who receive little support (Broadhead, Kaplan, & James, 1983; Sarason & Sarason 1986).

The professional literature offers many recommendations for the use of social support to reduce stress. For example, Villeco (1977) suggests that supervisors should provide empathy and feedback to employees when they are under stress. Also, workers should meet together to discuss difficulties, either informally (Frankenhaeuseur, 1977) or in organized gatherings (Shannon & Saleeby, 1980). Organizations which provide opportunities for social networking, do curtail stress for example, in a medical field setting, results of a series of workshops aimed at increasing social support among physicians and nurses indicated marked improvement on a variety of psychological, social, and performance induces (Bair & Greenspan, 1986).

The present study has evidence to suggest that if organizations can build a support network, within the organizational set-up, it would lead to obvious changes in the employees' stress levels, with consequent improvement in the organization's overall performance. Organization can offer diverse sources of stress-coping strategies including stress – inoculation training, team building, and by providing hand on training facilities. Employee assistance Programmes and family counseling has been initiated in the west for more than a decade. In Pakistan also, some of the private organizations now hire professional services to help employees deal with personal and professional stressors. Probably, the need is for a large-scale provision of such support facilities within organizations.

Every organization has its own unique set of stressors. There is also ample evidence that failure to deal with this issue leads to serious consequences for individual employees, their families, the work place environment, and the employer. Managers and leaders need to address issues of work/life. By maximizing effective strategies, leaders, and managers enhance their global competitiveness while creating positive work environments for their employees. Support and help can translate a high strain job into a more productive one.

The present study focused primarily on the corporate and banking employees working in private sector, it would be interesting to probe patterns prevalent in the governmental organizations. In Pakistan, public sector has innumerable core issues like low pay scales, authoritarian hierarchical structure of organizations where employees have little if any sources of support. The situation has become worse in recent years because of lay offs and downsizing.

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