

Definition, Measurement and Related Research of Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract: Emotional exhaustion is a hot research topic in human resource management. The study of emotional exhaustion begins with the study of job burnout, with the deepening of the study, the importance of emotional exhaustion has gradually emerged, gained more and more attention, and the research has gradually matured. By sorting out and reading related literatures at home and abroad, we can find that scholars have reached a consensus on the definition and measurement of emotional exhaustion. The research on the antecedent variables of emotional exhaustion is mainly carried out from three aspects: individual level, organization level and situation level. The outcome variables of emotional exhaustion are mainly personal and organizational achievements. In the future, we can study the influencing factors and results of emotional exhaustion at the organizational level, and continue to broaden the research perspective of emotional exhaustion.

1. The background of emotional exhaustion

The study of emotional exhaustion begins with the study of "burnout". In the model proposed by Maslach and Jackson(1981)[1], the word "emotional exhaustion" first appeared as one of the individual stress levels of job burnout. They think that job burnout is a psychological syndrome and a response to long-term interpersonal stress at work, The three key dimensions of this response are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and the reduction of personal sense of accomplishment. By studying clinical cases, Israeli psychologist Pines(1981)[2] defined job burnout as exhaustion in physical psychological and emotional aspects, which was caused by individuals being in emotional situations for a long time. Include physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion and psychological exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion appears here as one of the clinical manifestations of job burnout.

With the deepening of research, scholars have gradually found that emotional exhaustion has become the most prominent manifestation of job burnout, and even Gaines and Jermier(1983)[3] put forward that emotional exhaustion is equivalent to job burnout. Piko(2006)[4] pointed out that although these three dimensions have potential importance, more and more studies have confirmed that emotional exhaustion is the best indicator to measure job burnout. Shirom(1989)[5] thinks that emotional exhaustion is the core meaning of burnout, and defining burnout as emotional exhaustion helps to distinguish it from other social science concepts. Similarly, the field research by Lee and Ashforth(1993)[6] shows that emotional exhaustion plays a central mediating role in the process of burnout. Halbesleben and Bowler(2007) [7]also pointed out that almost all concepts of job burnout regard emotional exhaustion as its main component. The research of Zhang Lin(2011)[8] shows that emotional exhaustion has a stronger predictive power on outcome variables than the other two dimensions. The importance of emotional exhaustion has been highlighted, and it has gradually become the research object of many scholars. Based on this, this paper integrates the related research of emotional exhaustion.

2. Definition of emotional exhaustion

Maslach and Jackson(1981)[1] were the first to define the concept of emotional exhaustion, They thought that emotional exhaustion is a psychological state when personal emotional resources are

exhausted, and they can no longer offer themselves at the psychological level. In the follow-up study, Maslach et al(2001)[9] further defined emotional exhaustion as fatigue caused by excessive use of physiological psychological and emotional resources, which is a result of stress response caused by the stressors in the workplace. This concept has been recognized by scholars at home and abroad and widely used. In addition, some scholars continue to define emotional exhaustion on this basis, Demerouti et al(2001)[10] think that emotional exhaustion is a kind of work reaction which is caused by excessive demands and related to stress, showing depression, tension and complaining. Li et al(2017)[11] pointed out that emotional exhaustion is a state of physical and psychological exhaustion, and it is one of the most abnormal states in contemporary high-pressure working environment. Chinese scholar Li Chaoping and Shi Kan(2009)[12] defined emotional exhaustion as the feeling of exhaustion of physical and psychological resources caused by paying a lot of emotional resources at work. It can be seen that domestic and foreign scholars have no substantive differences and obvious disputes on the definition of emotional exhaustion. Zhou Mi(2020)[13] summarized the previous definitions, and thought that generally speaking, emotional exhaustion is the gradual exhaustion of emotional resources during the process of employees' working pressure, which leads to physical and psychological fatigue, and the specific emotional expression is anxiety and malaise.

3. Measurement of emotional exhaustion

The emotional exhaustion scale developed with the job burnout scale. In the job burnout scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) [1], the emotional exhaustion sub-dimension includes nine items. Five years later, Maslach and Jackson (1986) [14] further improved and merged the emotional exhaustion scale, and finally formed a six-item measurement scale for the dimension of emotional exhaustion. Zhang Li et al (2014)[15] used the revised Emotional Exhaustion Scale in their research, and applied it to the research of emotional exhaustion caused by job insecurity, and got good research results.

The initial research object of job burnout is employees in service industry, such as employees in catering industry and hotel, With the continuous expansion of research scope, employees in various industries have been included in the study of job burnout. In the follow-up research, the MBI scale is developed, which is universal and more universal. The current Job Burnout Questionnaire has five versions: MBI-SS (Student Edition), MBI-ES (Educational Edition), MBI-HSS (Service Edition), MBI-GS (General Edition) and MBI-GS Domestic Revised Edition. Li Chaoping (2003)[12] was authorized by Professor Michael Leiter, a questionnaire developer, to revise MBI-GS in China. According to the actual situation of organizations and individuals in China, the MBI-GS domestic revised scale was adjusted again, The research results proved that the scale had good reliability and validity, and then it was adjusted again by Maslach and Schaufeli to form a five-item emotional exhaustion scale. Domestic scholars Niu Wanjie (2015)[16] and Qian Zhen (2017)[17] have proved the feasibility of this scale.

4. Related research

The related researches on emotional exhaustion are classified and summarized from two aspects: antecedent variables and outcome variables (as shown in Figure 1):

4.1 The antecedent variables of emotional exhaustion

According to the existing literatures at home and abroad, the research on antecedents of emotional exhaustion is mainly carried out from three aspects: individual level (demographic characteristics, personality traits, motivation, emotion, emotional labor, job insecurity and job engagement, etc.), organizational level (leadership style, job characteristics, organizational trust and organizational culture, etc.) and situational level (customer hostility, etc.).

4.1.1 Individual level

Demographic characteristics. Relevant information in this area is easier for researchers to obtain. Carson (2001) [18] found that women scored higher in emotional exhaustion than men. Bekker et al (2005) [19] found that female nurses had a higher degree of emotional exhaustion in an empirical study of 404 nurses. Maslach and Jackson(1981)[1] also found that marital status is related to emotional exhaustion, and the scores of emotional exhaustion frequency and intensity of single and divorced people are obviously higher than those of married people.

Personality traits. As for the influence of personality traits on emotional exhaustion, most scholars study it from the perspective of "Big Five" personality traits. Zeng Chuikai and Shi Kan (2007)[20] pointed out that neurotic employees are critical of the working environment, have poor ability to cope with work pressure, are prone to depression, anxiety and other negative emotions, and are not good at adjustment, resulting in a backlog of bad emotions, which makes it difficult to cope with the problems at work, and often feel exhausted. Kammeyer-Mueller et al(2016)[21] conducted a 10-day diary study on 133 nurses and found that neuroticism had a significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion. Lee and Chelladurai(2016)[22] proposed that emotional intelligence can alleviate emotional exhaustion caused by surface playing strategies. Scherer and Zapf (2020)[23] further pointed out that one kind of emotional intelligence, the ability of emotional regulation, can regulate the relationship between three different emotional labor strategies and emotional exhaustion, and is a potential resource to promote emotional labor.

Motivation. Kammeyer-Mueller et al(2016)[21] found that external motivation has a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion, while internal motivation has a significant negative impact on emotional exhaustion. This is because the external motivation is the consumption of personal resources, and the internal motivation is the resources that become difficult to obtain with the increase of fatigue before work. As a kind of motivation, work enthusiasm has been proved to have a significant negative impact on emotional exhaustion. Work enthusiasm, as a kind of work motivation, has also been proved to have a significant impact on emotional exhaustion. The research results of Chen et al(2019)[24] on catering industry show that harmonious and enthusiastic front-line employees tend to take deep behaviors to protect themselves from emotional exhaustion, while passionate front-line employees tend to take shallow behaviors, which in turn is more likely to exhaust their emotional energy.

Emotions. Previous studies have shown that emotions will consume individual psychological resources, thus affecting emotional exhaustion. Wright and Cropanzano(1998)[25], based on the resource conservation theory, found that positive emotions have a significant negative impact on emotional exhaustion, while negative emotions have a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion. Xu et al (2018) [26] found that emotional variability has an impact on emotional exhaustion, and plays an intermediary role in the process of self-instability and pessimism affecting emotional exhaustion.

Emotional labor. Emotional labor plays an important role in the study of emotional exhaustion, and is considered as the most important antecedent variable affecting emotional exhaustion. Hur et al(2015)[27] pointed out the positive influence of shallow behavior on emotional exhaustion in an empirical study of 256 flight attendants, in which organizational support played a moderating role. David and Totterdell (2016) [28] and Qian Shiru et al (2016)[29] found that shallow behaviors in emotional labor have a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion. However, another dimension of emotional labor, deep behavior, has a positive or negative impact on emotional exhaustion. Chinese scholars Chen Ruijun and Qin Qiwen (2011) [30] confirmed the negative predictive effect of deep behavior on emotional exhaustion. Sun Yang et al (2013)[31], taking preschool teachers as samples, found that natural behavior and deep behavior in emotional labor have significant negative effects on emotional exhaustion, while shallow behavior has significant positive effects on emotional exhaustion. However, the research of Yagil and Medler-Liraz (2017) [32] pointed out that the deep behavior of emotional labor has no effect on emotional exhaustion.

Job insecurity. Zhang Li et al(2013)[15] verified that job insecurity has a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion, and emotional labor plays an intermediary role between them. In addition, social support plays a negative role in regulating the influence of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion. Zhang Jihao (2018)[33] took 344 nurses as samples, and the results showed that job insecurity had a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion played a partial mediating role between job insecurity and nurses' job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Job involvement. Li Zongbo et al(2013)[34] conducted a questionnaire survey on college counselors based on the job requirements-resource model, The empirical results show that job involvement has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion, in which work-family conflict plays a completely mediating role, and organizational support as a moderating variable can alleviate the negative impact of both. Hu Qiao and He Quan (2018)[35] investigated 172 nurses and 273 police officers with a longitudinal research design of sampling twice a year, The results showed that in the police sample, workaholics had a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion after one year; However, in the nurse sample, job involvement has a significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion one year later, and work-family conflict has mediating effect in both relationships.

4.1.2 Organizational level

Job characteristics. Maria et al(2018)[36] found in an online questionnaire survey of 843 German police officers that job requirements predicted a higher degree of depression and anxiety, in which emotional exhaustion played an intermediary role. In addition, job resources alleviate the impact of job requirements on emotional exhaustion, and have a significant negative impact on depression and anxiety.

Leadership style. Most of the existing studies have explored the influence of leaders' abusive management and leaders' exchange relationship on emotional exhaustion. Zhu Xiaomei et al(2015)[37] took 226 enterprise employees as samples, and found that the stronger the employees' perceived abusive management from their superiors, the higher the employees' emotional exhaustion, which made them more prone to counter-productive work behaviors. Xi Yanping (2016)[38] applied the theory of social exchange and resource conservation, and took 283 full-time employees in three provinces as samples, The results showed that emotional exhaustion and employees' trust in supervisors played multiple mediating roles between abusive management and employees' turnover intention. In addition, two empirical studies by Schermuly and Meyer(2016)[39] have verified the negative impact of leadership exchange relationship on emotional exhaustion, which is mediated by psychological empowerment.

Organizational trust. Wang Hongli and Zhang Juejun (2016)[40] take 351 employees' three-stage longitudinal data as samples, and the research shows that organizational trust will have a significant positive impact on employees' job stress and role load, and then lead to employees' emotional exhaustion.

Organizational culture. Knudsen et al(2006)[41] divided organizational culture into three dimensions: centralized decision-making, distributive justice and procedural justice to evaluate the relationship between emotional exhaustion and it. The results show that centralized decision-making has a significant positive impact on emotional exhaustion, while distributive justice and procedural justice have a significant negative impact on emotional exhaustion.

4.1.3 Situational level

In recent years, the research on the influencing factors of emotional exhaustion based on the situation level has been widely concerned, and scholars mainly explore it from the perspective of customers. Deery et al(2002)[42] used the survey data from 480 telephone service operators to show that the intensity of interaction with customers will positively affect the emotional exhaustion of employees. Goldberg and Grandey(2007)[43] found in an experiment simulating interaction with customers that customer hostility increased the overall emotional exhaustion of employees and increased the number of errors in the call. Chinese scholars Lin Yan and Wang Zhizeng (2017)[44], based on the theory of emotional events, found that customer bullying has a positive effect on

employees' emotional exhaustion, and job embeddedness plays a negative role in the relationship between them.

4.2 Outcome variables of emotional exhaustion

Studies have shown that emotional exhaustion is related to personal and organizational achievements. Such as personal physical and mental health, turnover intention, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, personal performance, and organizational performance.

4.2.1 Individual level

Physical and mental health. Choi et al(2018)[45] took 386 nurses in South Korea as samples, The study showed that the higher the score of emotional exhaustion, the stronger the depression, anxiety, traumatic experience and stress, and the negative impact of emotional exhaustion on strength, self-esteem, resilience and quality of life. Chinese scholars Chen Ruijun and Qin Qiwen (2011)[46] found that emotional exhaustion played an intermediary role between emotional labor and depression and anxiety in a survey of 328 retail employees.

Turnover intention. Employees with emotional exhaustion may have turnover intention and quit the working environment. Cropanzano et al(2003)[47] pointed out that emotional exhaustion can positively predict turnover intention based on social exchange theory. Chinese scholars Zhao Huijun and Xi Yanping (2016)[48] discussed from the perspective of resource conservation theory based on the survey data of 221 full-time employees in service-oriented enterprises, The results show that emotional exhaustion plays a partial intermediary role in the process of shallow behavior affecting employees' willingness to leave; Organizational support negatively regulates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employees' turnover intention. In addition to turnover intention, absenteeism is also regarded as the result variable of emotional exhaustion, Bekker et al(2005)[19] found that emotional exhaustion leads to more absenteeism in a survey of 404 nurses.

Job satisfaction. Based on a sample of 102 university teachers, Koon and Pun(2018)[49] found that high job requirements lead to emotional exhaustion, which in turn leads to a decline in job satisfaction. Chinese scholar Zhang Jihao et al(2018)[33] took 344 nurses as samples, and the survey results showed that emotional exhaustion played a partial mediating role in job insecurity and nurses' job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Organizational commitment. Cole(2010)[50] and others took 869 military personnel and civil servants as samples, Empirical research showed that emotional exhaustion had a significant negative impact on organizational commitment, which in turn had a negative impact on turnover intention. □

Personal performance. Chinese scholars Lin Yan and Wang Zhizeng (2017)[44] took the front-line employees and supervisors of a hotel in Lanzhou as survey objects, and proposed that emotional exhaustion played an intermediary role in the relationship between customer bullying and employees' job performance.

4.2.2 Organizational level

The research on the influence of emotional exhaustion on organizational level is still scarce, and the existing research mainly discusses the negative influence of emotional exhaustion on organizational performance. Arens and Morin(2016)[51] take 380 teachers and 7899 fourth-grade students as research samples, The analysis results show that there is a direct negative impact between teachers' emotional exhaustion and students' school scores, standardized test scores, school satisfaction and views on teachers' support. In other words, emotional exhaustion has a significant negative impact on job performance. Cropanzano et al(2003)[47] found that the negative performance of an employee will probably affect other employees in a group, and the individual effect will evolve into the low performance effect of the group. In addition, Halbesleben and Buckley(2004)[52] think that the low performance of the whole organization will lead to disharmony within the organization, low salary level of employees and low trust of leaders in the organization, which in turn will lead to employees complaining about the organization, their loyalty will drop and their willingness to leave.

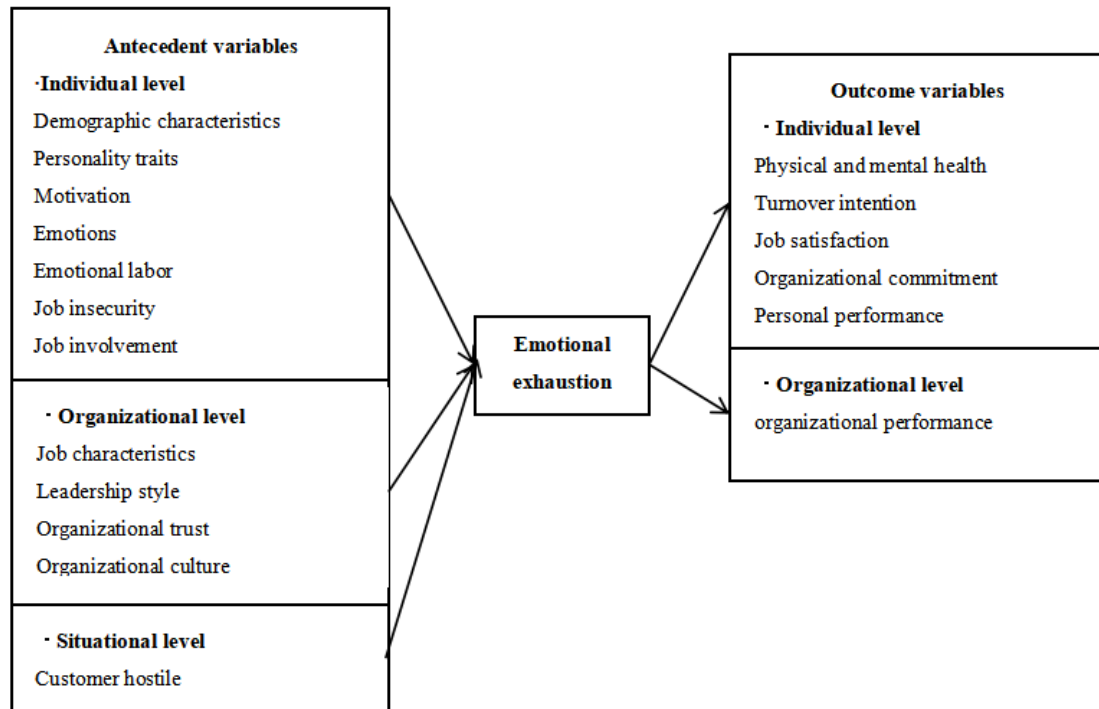


Figure 1. Antecedent and outcome variables of emotional exhaustion

5. Review and prospect of research

With regard to the definition and measurement of emotional exhaustion, through the integration of domestic and foreign literatures, it can be found that the current research on emotional exhaustion is relatively mature, and the definition and measurement of emotional exhaustion have reached a general consensus. As for the research objects of emotional exhaustion, the samples of early research are mainly limited to teachers, nurses, hotel employees and so on. The related research on emotional exhaustion in recent years focuses on the relationship between managers and employees, and further expands and deeply studies the subject and influence of emotional exhaustion.

The influencing factors and results of emotional exhaustion at organizational level need to be further explored. Existing researches mainly focus on how individual factors affect emotional exhaustion, but there is little discussion on how organizational level affects emotional exhaustion of employees. In addition, the research on the impact path of emotional exhaustion is relatively scarce, especially the impact of emotional exhaustion on the organizational level remains to be studied.

The research perspective of emotional exhaustion needs to be further broadened. Most of the existing studies use resource conservation theory to explain the formation mechanism and influence mechanism of emotional exhaustion, and matching theory can be used to study the formation mechanism of emotional exhaustion.

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