

Burning Both Ends: Examining Overload, Trait Motivation, and Burnout Through the Person-Environment Interaction

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Burnout has received substantial attention in academic literature and popular media due to its extensive breadth and detrimental impact on individual and organizational outcomes. To effectively address and combat the phenomenon, it is important to understand the boundary conditions in which burnout occurs and the individual and environmental interactions that predict burnout. In the current study, the relationships among burnout, overload, and trait motivation were investigated. Data were collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk from a sample of working professionals. Overload was negatively related to approach motivation and positively related to avoidance motivation and burnout. Approach motivation was negatively related to burnout, while avoidance motivation was positively related. A series of moderation models were tested to understand the interaction between trait motivation and overload in the relationship to burnout. The moderation results were not confirmed, but the main effects were significant. Understanding relevant boundary conditions and individual differences associated with motivation and burnout will equip organizational leaders and decision-makers to effectively combat the phenomenon and preserve employee well-being.

Keywords: burnout, trait motivation, overload, occupational health psychology, job demands

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees worldwide are experiencing unprecedented, and often unmanageable, demands. Now more than ever, employees are prone to burnout as they struggle to manage increased emotional stress, and the demands of family caregiving, along with existing work responsibilities. For example, recent research examined work and non-work boundary dynamics and highlighted the accelerating influence of boundary violations contributing to burnout during the pandemic (Rapp et al., 2021). In addition, the percentage of employees who report being consistently burned out has increased for both men and women from 2020 to 2021 (Thomas et al., 2021). Many organizations are concurrently facing unparalleled effects to their ability to attract and retain talent (Ducharme, 2021). These organizations are taking onus in alleviating the phenomenon and recognize that a one-size-fits-all solution will not work (Moss, 2021). However, despite the breadth of research that currently exists, there is a need for continued research on the boundary conditions in which burnout occurs. Findings like these can inform evidence-based best practices for supporting employees and remediating burnout, to retain a healthier and more productive workforce.

An important way to understand how individual differences contribute to burnout is through trait motivation (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000). Trait motivation influences how one interacts with the environment (Johnson et al., 2008), emerging most clearly through individuals' tendencies toward approach or avoidance (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000). Trait motivation can have an influence on the individual experience of stress *and* the subsequent reaction to that stress (e.g., burnout). In the current study, we sought to expand the existing literature on burnout by incorporating the interaction between the person (i.e., trait motivation) and the environment (i.e., overload) in its relation to burnout. Although the environment plays a critical role in the development of burnout symptoms, it can be inflated or minimized based on aspects of the person and their motivations. The results of such research will provide organizations with additional strategies to combat the development of burnout and preserve a workforce of healthy employees.

BURNOUT OVERVIEW

Burnout is most often considered an affective reaction to ongoing stress in the workplace, whereby exposure to prolonged stress leads to the depletion of intrinsic resources (Maslach et al., 2001; Shirom, 2011). The symptoms of burnout include emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). Emotional exhaustion reflects the basic individual stress component of burnout and represents feeling depleted of one's physical and emotional resources (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Cynicism refers to a negative or excessively detached attitude toward work (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Finally, the personal accomplishment aspect of burnout reflects the self-evaluation dimension and refers to feelings of incompetence that arise with the syndrome (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). With residual effects on organizational outcomes like job performance and work attitudes, in addition to employees' mental and physical health, the severity of this syndrome is difficult to ignore (Maslach et al., 2001; Shirom, 2011).

Burnout has received substantial attention in the organizational psychology and occupational health psychology literature due to the detrimental influence it has on both individual and organizational outcomes (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Shirom, 2011; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). For the organization, it can result in increased absenteeism, reduced performance and career satisfaction, and turnover, which translate directly into business costs like lower quality products, reduced customer base, and increased hiring (Barthauer et al., 2020; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Additionally, burnout results in numerous health costs like increased hospital admissions and chronic work disability (Ahola et al., 2009; Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2009). These outcomes have reciprocal effects, which only enhance the influence of burnout and increase its associated costs. Thus, organizational leaders and strategists should make it a priority to reduce the likelihood of burnout amongst employees.

JOB DEMANDS AND RESOURCES AND THE PERSON-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION

Job demands and resources are critical correlates of burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Alarcon, 2011). Job demands are aspects of the job that are physical, social, or organizational, and require sustained effort from the employee which, in turn, results in psychological costs (Cole et al., 2012). Examples include role ambiguity, workload, quantitative demands, client-related demands, and work pressure (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Job resources are the physical, social, or organizational aspects of a job that help employees to achieve their work goals and stimulate growth or learning (Bakker et al., 2014; Cole et al., 2012), as well as to reduce and/or meet demands (Cole et al., 2012). Examples include social support, opportunities for development, participative decision making, and autonomy (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Previous research has demonstrated job demands are more predictive of burnout than is (lack of) job resources (Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

While the link between job demands and resources with burnout is well-documented, in this study we seek to consider how individual differences in trait motivation influence the person-environment interaction as it relates to burnout. Researchers have previously included individual differences in isolation (e.g., see Alarcon et al., 2009; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). However, it is the full interaction between the person *and* the environment that jointly predict an outcome (Lewin, 1951). In the current study, we sought to understand this interplay in the context of job demands, trait motivation, and burnout.

TRAIT MOTIVATION

Motivational traits are stable “individual differences in preferences related to approach and avoidance of goal-directed effort expenditures” (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000, p. 753). They are considered trans-situational and differ from motivational skills or competencies that can be developed (Chen et al., 2004). Research in the educational and organizational literature suggests individual differences in these motivational traits influence the individuals’ subsequent behaviors and self-regulatory mechanisms (Heggestad & Kanfer, 2000). Accordingly, the types of goals selected by individuals relate to the mechanisms or approaches they use to persist through difficulties and maintain motivation.

Kanfer and Heggestad (1997) proposed a motivational trait approach that distinguishes between two superordinate complexes, namely, approach and avoidance. Approach motivation consists of personal mastery, characterized by an individual’s tendency to approach learning, goal performance, and high performance (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). Approach motivation is associated with positive emotionality, a strong drive to achieve goals, and sensation-seeking (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Torrubia et al., 2001). Avoidance motivation consists of motivation related to anxiety. It refers to the tendency to experience negative states when faced with aversive stimuli and the desire to avoid them (Chen et al., 2004; Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). Avoidance motivation is associated with negative emotionality, trait anxiety, and low levels of activity (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007).

The ways whereby individuals vary on these motivational traits influences their behavior and affect. Trait motivation can influence the goals one pursues and how one reacts to adversity (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2000). Previous research supports this claim through organizationally relevant outcomes like task performance, citizenship behaviors, deviance, and learning (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). The understanding behind much of this research lies in the mapping of approach and avoidance onto two separate biologically-based motivation systems: behavioral activation system (BAS) and behavioral inhibition system (BIS) (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). Approach motivation is related to BAS and associated with having a motivation to learn (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Torrubia et al., 2001). Avoidance motivation is related to BIS and associated with negative reactions like stress or strain (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). Research suggests approach and avoidance motivation capture more depth than many other personality frameworks, including the FFM (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). Understanding the relationship between job demands, burnout, and individual differences in approach and avoidance will help to illuminate the patterns and conditions under which burnout is likely to develop and how that plays out in an organizational setting.

CURRENT STUDY

In the current study, we captured the interaction between the person and the environment by testing a model whereby the relationship between job demands and burnout was moderated by trait motivation. Based on this model, we presumed the relationship between job demands and burnout would be weakened or strengthened depending on the individuals' level of approach or avoidance motivation. We tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Consistent with previous research (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001), we expect job demands (i.e., overload) will positively relate to burnout (i.e., high emotional exhaustion, high cynicism, and low personal accomplishment).*

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): *According to the broaden and build theory, one's immediate thought-action repertoire broadens from positive emotions which, in turn, builds one's personal resources (Frederickson, 2001). Approach motivation is related to positive emotionality and, thus, can act as a personal resource that buffers the influence of stress (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). Accordingly, we expect approach motivation will negatively relate to burnout.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): *Avoidance motivation is related to negative emotionality and, thus, may contribute to heightened levels of stress or strain, increasing the likelihood that an individual will experience burnout (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989). Accordingly, we expect avoidance motivation will positively relate to burnout.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Based on the principles of the person-environment interaction (Lewin, 1951) and the differing relationships that approach or avoidance motivation are expected to have with burnout, we expect the relationship between job demands and burnout will be moderated by trait motivation such that approach motivation will weaken the association, while avoidance motivation will strengthen it.*

METHOD

Data Collection and Participants

Secondary data analysis was employed on a dataset collected in 2017 using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Data collection efforts were led by a large, global organization that specializes in providing best practice insights and technology for leaders in various business domains. The dataset included responses from 1054 employees from different organizations and industries within the United States, across a number of variables relevant to organizational research. Due to the size of the survey, data were collected in three waves to reduce the burden on participants and increase the quality of responses (e.g., reduce survey fatigue). This practice also reduces the effects of common method variance. Study participants were required to have one job (i.e., their primary employment) which they supplemented by working on MTurk. Participants who met this criterion could access the first wave of the survey, which contained a measure of trait motivation (see Measures section below). Participants who successfully submitted the first wave were invited to complete the second wave at the time of their choice, which contained a measure of job demands. Continuing this procedure, participants who successfully submitted the second wave of the survey were invited to complete the third wave at the time of their choice, which contained a measure of burnout. The average time between submission of wave one and wave two was 9.11 days ($SD = 12.04$ days), and between wave two and wave three was 24.60 days ($SD = 10.95$ days). Upon removing respondents who failed to answer at least one of the instructed response items correctly and those who dropped out before completing all study measures, 246 respondents remained and were included in the analysis. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the final sample.

Measures

Job Demands

A measure developed by the original researchers was used to capture job demands. This measure was initially created and validated as part of a larger study intended to understand organizational context factors and their association with leader performance (Johnson & Arad, 2018). It includes items related to various dimensions within the broader context of the organization, team, and role (Johnson & Arad, 2018). For the current study, we focused on the context surrounding one's role as it relates to overload. Such demands, in addition to role stress and work pressure, contribute significantly to burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Job overload consists of three items and a sample item includes, "It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do." Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A Cronbach's α of .80 was obtained in the current study.

Trait Motivation

Kanfer and Ackerman's (2000) Motivational Trait Questionnaire (MTQ) was used to assess the motivational traits of personal mastery (for approach motivation, 16 items) and motivation related to anxiety (for avoidance motivation, 19 items). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very untrue of me*) to 7 (*very true of me*). An example item for personal mastery is, "I thirst for knowledge." An example item for motivation related to anxiety is, "I am able to remain calm and relaxed in stressful situations." In the current study, the MTQ maintained acceptable internal consistency with $\alpha = .93$ for personal mastery and $\alpha = .95$ for motivation related to anxiety.

Burnout

The 16-item MBI-GS was used to measure burnout. It assesses the three burnout components in general terms to remain applicable for various occupations (Schaufeli et al., 1996; Schutte et al., 2000). Both emotional exhaustion and cynicism consist of five items, while personal accomplishment is comprised of six (Schutte et al., 2000). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). An example item for emotional exhaustion is, "I feel used up at the end of the workday." An example item for cynicism is, "I have become less enthusiastic about my work." An example item for personal accomplishment is, "In my opinion, I am good at my job." A pattern of scores indicative of burnout is high on emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and low on personal accomplishment (Schutte et al., 2000). The MBI-GS maintained good internal consistency in the current study with $\alpha = .95$ for emotional exhaustion, $\alpha = .90$ for cynicism, and $\alpha = .87$ for personal accomplishment.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Characteristic	Description
Age (years)	$M = 35.13, SD = 10.35$
Gender	53% male, 46% female, >1% prefer not to answer
Race	68% Caucasian, 14% Asian, 6% African American, 6% more than one race, 5% Hispanic, 1% Other
Education	50% bachelor's, 20% some experience in a college or university, 16% master's or professional degree, 9% technical/associate degree or certificate/diploma, 4% high school, 5% other
Industry	14% technology, 11% government or non-profit, 11% education, 11% healthcare, 7% financial services, 7% retail, 5% professional services, 34% other
Role	66% junior or senior individual contributor roles, 33% management role, >2% executive-level role
Organizational tenure (months)	$M = 70.68, SD = 74.86$
Role tenure (months)	$M = 57.03, SD = 60.09$

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are provided in Table 2. Overload positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism, but negatively correlated with personal accomplishment, supporting H1. Personal mastery (i.e., approach motivation) negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism, but positively correlated with personal accomplishment. In contrast, motivation related to anxiety (i.e., avoidance motivation) positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and cynicism, but negatively correlated with personal accomplishment. Thus, personal mastery was negatively related to burnout, while motivation related to anxiety was positively related to it, thereby lending support to H2a and H2b.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERCORRELATIONS

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. EE	(.95)					
2. CY	.73**	(.90)				
3. PA	-.29**	-.44**	(.87)			
4. PM	-.20*	-.25**	.49**	(.93)		
5. AM	.47**	.40**	-.36**	-.34**	(.95)	
6. OV	.47**	.34**	-.22**	-.13*	.24**	(.80)
Mean	17.27	17.15	30.55	86.68	71.35	10.18
SD	7.79	7.37	6.29	14.61	24.19	4.46

Note. $N = 246$. Entries on the main diagonal are Cronbach's alphas. EE = Emotional Exhaustion subscale; CY = Cynicism subscale; PA = Personal Accomplishment subscale; PM = Personal Mastery subscale; AM = Motivation Related to Anxiety subscale; OV = Overload

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the potential moderating influence of trait motivation on the relationship between job demands (i.e., overload) and burnout. Both overload and personal mastery had significant partial effects in the full models for predicting emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment (Tables 3 through 5). The two-predictor model accounted for 25%, 16%, and 26% of the variance in predicting emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment, respectively.

Similarly, both overload and motivation related to anxiety had significant partial effects in the full models for predicting emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment (Tables 6 through 8). The two-predictor model accounted for 36%, 22%, and 15% of the variance in predicting emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment, respectively.

Using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017), the potential moderating influence of trait motivation on overload and each burnout scale was examined. Both personal mastery and motivation related to anxiety failed to moderate the relationship between overload and emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment (see Models 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 from Tables 3 through 8). These results do not lend support to H3—there was no evidence to suggest trait motivation moderates the relationship between job demands and burnout.

TABLE 3
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION FROM OVERLOAD AND APPROACH MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent	
			<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1 <i>R</i> ² = 0.245 <i>F</i> (2, 243) = 39.389, <i>p</i> < .001	<i>X</i> (OV)	.794	.098	<.001
	<i>Z</i> (PM)	-.076	.030	.012
	Constant	15.785	2.939	<.001
Model 2 <i>R</i> ² = 0.245 <i>F</i> (3,242) = 26.201, <i>p</i> < .001	<i>X</i> (OV)	.794	.098	<.001
	<i>Z</i> (PM)	-.074	.031	.016
	<i>X</i> × <i>Z</i>	.002	.007	.739
	Constant	17.293	.438	<.001

Note. *N* = 246. OV = Overload; PM = Personal Mastery, representing Approach Motivation. Model 2 includes the interaction term.

TABLE 4
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING CYNICISM FROM OVERLOAD AND APPROACH MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent	
			<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 3 <i>R</i> ² = 0.161 <i>F</i> (2, 243) = 23.230, <i>p</i> < .001	<i>X</i> (OV)	.519	.098	<.001
	<i>Z</i> (PM)	-.106	.030	<.001
	Constant	21.055	2.931	<.001
Model 4 <i>R</i> ² = 0.163 <i>F</i> (3,242) = 15.690, <i>p</i> < .001	<i>X</i> (OV)	.519	.098	<.001
	<i>Z</i> (PM)	-.102	.030	.001
	<i>X</i> × <i>Z</i>	.006	.007	.414
	Constant	17.196	.437	<.001

Note. *N* = 246. OV = Overload; PM = Personal Mastery, representing Approach Motivation. Model 4 includes the interaction term.

TABLE 5
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM OVERLOAD AND APPROACH MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent	
			SE	<i>p</i>
			Y (Personal Accomplishment)	
Model 5 $R^2 = 0.264$ $F(2, 243) = 43.470, p < .001$	X (OV)	-.223	.078	.005
	Z (PM)	.201	.024	<.001
	Constant	15.363	2.343	<.001
Model 6 $R^2 = 0.264$ $F(3, 242) = 28.912, p < .001$	X (OV)	-.222	.078	.005
	Z (PM)	.203	.024	<.001
	$X \times Z$.002	.006	.738
	Constant	30.569	.350	<.001

Note. $N = 246$. OV = Overload; PM = Personal Mastery, representing Approach Motivation. Model 6 includes the interaction term.

TABLE 6
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION FROM OVERLOAD AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent	
			SE	<i>p</i>
			Y (Emotional Exhaustion)	
Model 7 $R^2 = 0.359$ $F(2, 243) = 68.024, p < .001$	X (OV)	.672	.092	<.001
	Z (AM)	.121	.017	<.001
	Constant	1.764	1.407	.211
Model 8 $R^2 = 0.359$ $F(3, 242) = 45.230, p < .001$	X (OV)	.673	.410	<.001
	Z (AM)	.121	.017	<.001
	$X \times Z$	-.0013	.004	.720
	Constant	17.305	.410	<.001

Note. $N = 246$. OV = Overload; AM = Motivation Related to Anxiety, representing Avoidance Motivation. Model 8 includes the interaction term.

TABLE 7
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING CYNICISM
FROM OVERLOAD AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent <i>SE</i> Y (Cynicism)	<i>p</i>
Model 9 $R^2 = 0.222$ $F(2, 243) = 34.647, p < .001$	X (OV)	.435	.096	<.001
	Z (AM)	.101	.018	<.001
	Constant	5.473	1.466	<.001
Model 10 $R^2 = 0.222$ $F(3, 242) = 23.039, p < .001$	X (OV)	.435	.096	<.001
	Z (AM)	.102	.018	<.001
	X × Z	.001	.004	.771
	Constant	17.119	.427	<.001

Note. $N = 246$. OV = Overload; AM = Motivation Related to Anxiety, representing Avoidance Motivation. Model 10 includes the interaction term.

TABLE 8
UNSTANDARDIZED MODEL COEFFICIENTS FOR MODELS PREDICTING PERSONAL
ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM OVERLOAD AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION

Model	Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent <i>SE</i> Y (Personal Accomplishment)	<i>p</i>
Model 11 $R^2 = 0.150$ $F(2, 243) = 21.446, p < .001$	X (OV)	-.201	.086	.020
	Z (AM)	-.085	.016	<.001
	Constant	38.686	1.308	<.001
Model 12 $R^2 = 0.152$ $F(3, 242) = 14.419, p < .001$	X (OV)	-.202	.086	.020
	Z (AM)	-.084	.016	<.001
	X × Z	.002	.003	.498
	Constant	30.496	.381	<.001

Note. $N = 246$. OV = Overload; AM = Motivation Related to Anxiety, representing Avoidance Motivation. Model 12 includes the interaction term.

DISCUSSION

The serious implications burnout has on the employee and the organization are well-documented within the literature. Burnout predicts a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced job performance (Shirom, 2011; Taris, 2006). Given the extent of these influences, it is important to better understand the cause of burnout and the conditions under which that linkage fluctuates. These findings are increasingly salient as employees continue in their struggle to manage stress and demands, while organizations seek to retain satisfied employees amidst the Great Resignation (Ducharme, 2021). Previous research has highlighted contextual factors relating to burnout, like high demands and low resources. In this study, we also examined how trait motivation may affect the relationship between job demands and burnout. Specifically, we incorporated tendencies for approach or avoidance motivation and explored the person-environment interaction in the context of overload and trait motivation.

Aligned with previous research, we found overload positively related to burnout. This finding is supported by conservation of resources (COR) theory and the job-demands resources (JD-R) model in that job demands require effort and consume resources which, in turn, trigger a health impairment process (e.g.,

burnout) (Bakker et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). We also uncovered relationships not previously studied between trait motivation and burnout. We hypothesized personal mastery would act as a personal resource helping one to combat stress and the development of burnout (Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007). This hypothesis was based on COR theory and Frederickson's (2001) broaden and build theory (Hobfoll, 1989). We found those with higher levels of personal mastery (i.e., approach motivation) were less likely to feel burnt out. In contrast, those with higher levels of motivation related to anxiety (i.e., avoidance motivation) were more likely to feel burnt out. These identified relationships were significant and held true for each component of burnout. Those who are inclined toward approach motivation will be better equipped to respond productively to boundary violations (e.g., like overload) and guard against burnout, while those who are inclined towards avoidance motivation will be more likely to experience burnout.

This finding is important as it illustrates the influence of individual differences related to trait motivation. Understanding differences such as these provide leaders with essential information to identify which subordinates may be at risk for burnout and manage them accordingly. By knowing an employee has a motivational tendency for avoidance and, accordingly, is at risk for burnout, a leader can actively pursue a dialogue with them to understand what resources might be needed or to connect them with opportunities to build resilience against increased demands. For example, enabling employees to craft their resources results in increased engagement and job satisfaction, as well as decreased burnout (Tims et al., 2013). In addition, interventions linked to building resilience or psychological capital results in positive influences to well-being (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2006; Vanhove et al., 2016).

By incorporating trait motivation into the relationship between job demands and burnout, we tested for an interaction between person and environment. Based on research drawing from stress and person-environment (PE) fit theory, we hypothesized the person (i.e., trait motivation) and the environment (i.e., job demands) would interact to jointly contribute to burnout (Folkman & Lazarus, 1990; Lewin, 1951; van Vianen, 2018). We expected at higher levels of approach motivation, the relationship between overload and burnout would be weakened, while at higher levels of avoidance motivation, the relationship would be strengthened. However, we did not find evidence to support our hypotheses. Perhaps the relationship between job demands and burnout is so pervasive that trait motivation fails to have an interacting influence on it. Regardless of one's tendency toward approach or avoidance motivation, a feeling of being overloaded by demands may inevitably lead to burnout. We also found a positive relationship between avoidance motivation and overload. In this case, perhaps avoidance motivation already influences the perception of demands and, thus, cannot be captured through the interaction term as modeled in the current study. Nonetheless, the two-predictor models contributed to a significant portion of variance. Both variables (i.e., overload and trait motivation) were significant individual predictors, reinforcing the importance of trait motivation on the occurrence of burnout.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Across a sample of employees from a variety of industries, it was confirmed that overload and burnout are positively related. In conjunction with earlier research, these findings highlight the pervasiveness of this relationship. Therefore, organizational management should seek to ensure the demands made on employees are reasonable. If demands are too high and cannot be reduced, management can consider what resources can be provided to employees, or what changes can be implemented to help reduce the risk of burnout. For example, in the context of burnout, COR theory indicates social support can increase an employee's pool of resources *and* replace or reinforce resources that are lacking (Halbesleben, 2006). Accordingly, if job demands cannot be avoided, providing additional resources like social support can curb the long-term effects of stress.

Relationships between trait motivation and burnout were also uncovered. Employees who have low levels of approach motivation and/or high levels of avoidance motivation are at a higher risk of experiencing burnout. Thus, managers can work with employees to better understand their motivational make-up and provide support or structure reinforcements accordingly. For example, individuals high on motivation related to anxiety are more susceptible to negative emotionality and, as a result, may be overly

hard on themselves. Providing these individuals with additional support like professional coaching to help develop their self-compassion and emotional agility may be beneficial (Chen, 2018; David, 2016). Research suggests professional coaching is an effective strategy to enhance employee well-being (Jeannotte et al., 2021). This finding can also be considered in the context of selection. For example, individuals who are high on approach motivation may be ideally suited for jobs that have a higher risk of burnout due to high demands.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study is not without some limitations. To begin, data were collected from employees in the United States via MTurk. The use of MTurk for research in the social sciences has increased significantly and is supported within the literature (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Landers & Behrend, 2015; Paolacci et al., 2010). It has benefits like reducing the influence of range-restriction and higher-order organization-specific characteristics (e.g., culture), as well as increasing sample diversity in comparison to the student samples that are often utilized in the social sciences (Landers & Behrend, 2015). However, future researchers should also explore non-MTurk samples outside of the United States to increase generalizability. In addition, related to the study design, each measure was only captured once. Accordingly, a temporal relationship amongst the variables cannot be determined and it is impossible to make a causal inference from our findings despite being collected over time. Future researchers should consider alternative methods to further test the current study results.

In addition to the suggestions made above, future researchers should incorporate different job demands (e.g., physical), resources (e.g., autonomy), and individual difference variables related to burnout and motivation. For example, in the current study we examined *trait* motivation. The fields of organizational psychology and motivation science may benefit from additional research on more variable differences like *momentary* motivations. Doing so will allow researchers to better understand *all* the conditions through which the person and the environment can contribute to burnout.

CONCLUSION

The experience of burnout is becoming more common as organizations shift to virtual or hybrid work and the familiar boundaries (e.g., commute) between work and life are eliminated. With serious implications on both the individual and the organization, it is important that research be conducted to better understand the cause of burnout, the associated influence, and everything in-between. Motivational traits affect individuals' behaviors and self-regulatory mechanisms making them an important individual difference to explore in this context. In the current study we support this need by clarifying the relationships between job demands, trait motivation, and burnout. Based on these results, trait motivation does not moderate the relationship between job demands and burnout. However, the two-factor model of overload and trait motivation was significant in predicting burnout. By understanding burnout from a holistic perspective and the role of trait motivation, organizational leaders will be equipped with a better understanding of the conditions under which it is bred and its downstream effects. In turn, this will enable preventative actions to reduce the risk of burnout.

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