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## The Moderating Effects of Motivating Job Characteristics on the Relationship between Burnout and Turnover Intention

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the moderating role played by three motivating job characteristics (autonomy, feedback, skill variety) in the relationship between burnout and turnover intention in a sample of 161 respondents. Data obtained from questionnaires will be analyzed through the SPSS statistical packet program. The Sobel test is used to measure the significance of moderating effects of motivating job characteristics. The findings revealed that employees who reported that they were more exhausted, more cynical, feel less professional efficacy had more intention to leave their organization. However, the findings also indicate that there is no significant moderation effect relationship between motivating job characteristics and turnover intention.

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*Keywords:* burnout, turnover intentions, role conflict, role ambiguity

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### 1. Introduction

Research evidence suggests that burnout is detrimental not only to the individual, but also to the organization, since it could result in absenteeism (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Iverson et al., 1998) poor job performance and reduced citizenship behavior (Cropanzano & Byrne, 2003; Iverson Olekalns & Erwin, 1998; Parker & Kulik, 1995), high turnover intention and low job satisfaction (Himle, Jayaratne and Thyness, 1986; Jayaratne and Chess, 1984; Abu-Bader, 2000), low morale, loss of productivity and efficiency (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Schaufeli 2003). It pose a challenge to both employees and organizations since it is likely to reduce the organization's performance and threaten its long-term competitiveness. Therefore, academicians and practitioners have focused on exploring antecedents and consequences of burnout for the last three decades.

On the other hand, employee turnover is one of the other areas most widely researched in organizational analysis because losing competent employees can negatively affect an organization's competitive advantage. The positive relationship between job burnout and turnover has been demonstrated by several empirical studies (e.g., Moore, 2000;

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Maslach et al. 2001; Harrington et al., 2001; Huang, Chuang, & Lin, 2003; Houkes et.al, 2003; Lee and Shin 2005). Previous empirical studies have confirmed that workers who feel burned out and frustrated with their jobs are more likely to have higher turnover intentions. However, the key contribution of the present study is that it expands on prior research by examining the moderating effects of motivating job characteristics in the relationship between burnout and turnover intentions. Hackman & Oldham (1975)'s job characteristics model proposes that positive job characteristics will provide employees with positive feelings and experiences and these in turn will affect work outcomes, such as intrinsic work motivation (Hackman and Oldham; 1980), job satisfaction (Tiegs, Tetrick, & Fried, 1992; Goldstein, 1989; Becherer, Fred and Lawrence, 1982) organizational commitment (Hunt, Chonko and Wood; 1985, Ramaswami, Agarwal and Bhargava; 1993) and thus decreased turnover intentions (Hackman & Oldham, 1975,1980; Bluedorn's, 1982; Evans, Kiggundu, & House, 1979; Michaels & Spector, 1982).

To sum up, in accordance with previous studies, we expect to find significant relationships among burnout, job characteristics and turnover intentions. First, we present the relevant literature leading to our specific research hypotheses. This is followed by discussions of the method and results of our study. We conclude the article with the implications of the study with regard to existing literature and suggestions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review And Hypotheses**

### *2.1. Burnout and Turnover Intentions*

Since Freudenberg (1974) uttered the term 'burnout' to indicate an inclination to become exhausted by consuming the emotional and physical resources, it has become the focus of researches. Then, Maslach and colleagues (1996) conceptualized burnout as a psychological syndrome composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers the depletion of one's emotional resources mainly as result of a demanding job or stress in the work environment. Cynicism is characterized by a negative, unconcern attitude toward various aspects of the job or people (Koeske and Koeske 1989). Maslach and Pines (1977) stated that employees suffering from cynicism behave like bureaucrats whose duties are routine and uncreative. They are prone to give apathetical responses rather than solving problems and fulfill a request or requirement. The third component of burnout, reduced personal accomplishment is the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly in relation to one's work with clients or interactions with people at work.

Research evidence suggests that burnout is associated with negative outcomes for both individuals and organizations. At the individual level, burnout has been correlated significantly with the experience of psychological distress, anxiety, depression and drops in self-esteem (Maslach et al., 2001). It also has a negative impact on physical health and positively related to morbidity and bodily disorders (Toker et.al. 2005), cardiovascular disease (Appels and Schouten, 1991; Tennant, 1996; Melamed et.al., 2006), Type 2 diabetes (Melamed, Shirom, & Froom, 2003), and some psychosomatic symptoms such as poor appetite, headaches and chest pains (Burke and Deszca, 1986). It also leads to undesirable organizational outcomes such as reduced job performance, satisfaction, productivity, organizational commitment, and creativity (Freundenberg, 1974; Maslach et al. 2001; Lee and Shin 2005; Shirom, 2003; Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Hackman). Perhaps more importantly it is confirmed by many researches as one of the most significant variable that could predict turnover intent (Leiter and Maslach 2009; Knudsen, and Roman, 2008; Harrington et al., 2001; Huang, Chuang, & Lin, 2003; Lingard, 2003; Jung & Kim; 2012). It's evident that burnout and turnover intent might have a negative impact on organizational efficiency as well as welfare of an employee understanding the relationship between them could help minimize their negative impact.

Meyer & Allen (1984) defined turnover intent as an employee's intention to quit his or her present job or organization. According to Carmeli and Weisberg (2006) it starts thinking about leaving an organization, finding another alternative, and finally having turnover intent. If such alternatives do not exist, employees may involuntarily stay in their job, which leads to the problem of a change in attitude and effort and possible decline in performance (Lingard, 2003, p.78). Anyway, for people who stay on the job because of a lack of an attractive alternative, burnout leads to lower productivity and effectiveness at work (Maslach et.al, 2001). When employees leave, companies lose their knowledge, skills, and abilities which can have a detrimental impact upon organizational effectiveness. It involves tangible and intangible costs since critical organizational competencies often are embedded in human resources, who includes individuals' non-codified body of expertise and skills accumulated through experience, and so are highly rare and difficult for competitors to imitate (Wei and Lou, 2005: 1902). For that reason, enterprises' success

is muchly depends on their capability to affect employees' motivation and behaviour to prevent the creative, precious and competent individuals from leaving.

A comprehensive review of the burnout literature reveals that individual who experiences burnout is more likely to quit their jobs. For instance, Jung and Kim (2012) examined the degree of burnout among newspaper firm employees in Korea and found that although, all the three aspects of burnout increased the intention to leave, the level of exhaustion was more statistically significant than either cynicism or professional efficacy. A similar survey was undertaken by Lingard (2003) to explore the experience of 'burnout' among engineers working in the Australian construction industry. The results indicated that cynicism and emotional exhaustion were strong predictors of engineers' intention to leave their jobs. Moreover, job characteristics appear to be more important predictors of burnout than demographic characteristics or personality traits, suggesting that preventive strategies might focus on re-designing engineers' jobs (p.79). Furthermore, Ducharme, Knudsen, and Roman (2008) agreed that the strongest variable that could predict turnover intent was burnout. Finally, Jung et. al., (2012) investigated interrelationships among culinary employees' perception of role stress, burnout, and turnover intent by a data drawn from a sample of 316 employees in a deluxe hotel in Korea. Participants who reported a high level of burnout were more likely to leave their position. In addition, there were moderating effects related to tenure in the causal relationships between employees' burnout and turnover intent (p.2145). Consistent with the previous researches it is hypothesized;

*H1: Burnout will be positively related to turnover intention.*

## *2.2. Burnout, Motivating Job Characteristics and Turnover Intentions*

Job characteristic model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980) predicts that employees' work outcomes are affected by five core job dimensions including skill variety, task significance, task identity, autonomy, and feedback. According the influential model, employees experience meaningfulness if jobs include task variety, task significance and task identity. Skill variety is the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities that utilize the use of different skills and talents. Secondly, task identity refers to the degree which task requires performing the whole process from beginning to the end with visible outcome. Thirdly, task significance is the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organization or in the external. Autonomy encompasses the responsibility and defined as the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out. Finally, feedbacks from the job give an employee direct and clear information of how good or bad s/he is performing. Such information provides the person with the knowledge of the results. These attributes are likely to influence the employees' behaviour and motivation.

The extensive research has linked the motivational job characteristics to various personal and work outcomes including intrinsic work motivation (Hackman and Oldham; 1980), job satisfaction (Tiegs, Tetrick, & Fried, 1992; Goldstein, 1989; Becherer, Fred and Lawrence, 1982) organizational commitment (Hunt, Chonko and Wood; 1985, Ramaswami, Agarwal and Bhargava; 1993) increased work absenteeism (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Wall, Clegg, & Jackson, 1978; Fried and Ferris, 1987), decreased job performance (Liao; 1998; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, Hemingway; 2005) and increased intentions to quit (Evans, Kiggundu, & House, 1979; Bluedorn, 1982, Michaels & Spector, 1982). However, in this study, among five motivating job dimensions, specifically, autonomy, feedback and variety is included in the model since these characteristics generally appear as more strongly linked to work outcomes and well-being of employees (Taris & Feij, 2001; Rentsch & Steel, 1998; Streit & Brannon, 1991; Schmidt & Daume, 1993). These characteristics motivate individuals by producing experiences of meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). We expected autonomy, skill variety and feedback would be negatively related to turnover intention since employees who have resources that promote their job tasks are more likely to invest energy and personal resources in their work roles (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011, p.98).

First, the critical role of feedback in influencing work outcomes emerges from promoting more meaningfulness at work. This implies that employees perceiving a favorable coworker or supervisor feedback environment will become more convinced of the value of their work and are thus more likely to consider work-related goals to be in line with their personal values (Davidson & Stobbeir, 2011). For instance, Ryan (1982) showed that employees who had received positive feedback that was communicated in an informational manner exhibited higher intrinsic motivation

than those who had received positive feedback in a controlling manner (Zhou, 1998, p.264). Feedback about successful performance would lead to satisfaction if the rewards associated with performance were deemed important. According to Earley et al. (1990) feedback on the process of performing a task enhanced performance by serving as a cueing device to aid the development of information search and task strategy (Dodd & Gangster, 1996; p.332). Managers need should give feedback to their subordinates in order to improve, or reinforce positive behaviours. To conclude, positive feedback increases workers' sense of task competence and accomplishment, decreases stress and burnout, increases job satisfaction and these lead to lower turnover intention (Hee & Ling; 2011; p.1061).

Second, employees are expected to benefit from job autonomy because this relevant task characteristic will provide them with the necessary decision latitude, freedom, and responsibility that will make it possible for them to manage their time and work schedule (Battistelli, Montani & Odoardi, 2013; p.30). It is likely that employees will experience an increase in job control by enacting new rules and procedures that permit employees to perform new tasks and allow greater freedom over the timing and order of tasks (Holman et al., 2010; p.86). Conversely, if employees work in a low autonomy environment where there is a little freedom in deciding how to work on the task, and has little control over the process of executing the task, they are likely to experience decreased intrinsic motivation (Zhou, 1998, p.265) and increased job related stress. According to several conceptual papers, the lack of job autonomy reduces personal accomplishment and engenders a depersonalized attitude among workers that leads to burnout (Maslach, Schafeli, & Leiter, 2001; Crodes & Dougherty, 1993; Kim & Stoner; 2008). On the contrary, greater autonomy is associated with improved teamwork and personal growth, better morale and greater responsibility towards work, thus bringing about higher levels of satisfaction and motivation, and less intention to quit (Huang, 2011; Hee & Ling; 2011).

Finally, skill variety is the degree, to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, involving the use of a number of different skills and talents of the person (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). The goals of the variety manipulation are to vary the repetitiveness of the work as well as benefit from using individuals' accumulated skills (Dodd & Gangster, 1996; p.336). Results indicate that skill variety is positively related to satisfaction, motivation, and involvement because it leads employees to experience a higher chance of performing a challenging and interesting job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Humphrey et al., 2007). Variation in work tasks has been found to be positively correlated with job satisfaction even when there is a high level of job stress (Hee & Ling, 2011; p.1060). Dodd & Gangster stated that employees doing a simple, repetitive task showed only a modest increase in satisfaction with an increase in control over how they did the work, while those performing a more complex task showed a marked increase in satisfaction with increased control and independence (1996; p.336). Consequently, variation in job tasks would affect the motivational levels of employees and intention to quit. Taken together, it is hypothesized;

*H2: Motivating job characteristics will be negatively related to turnover intention.*

*H3: Motivating job characteristics will moderate the relationship between burnout and turnover intention in such a way that the relationship is weaker for employees with high levels of motivating job characteristics.*

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Research Goal*

The goal of this study is to investigate the moderating effect of motivating job characteristics on the relationship between burnout and turnover intention. To test the propositions, a field survey using questionnaires was conducted.

#### *3.2. Selection of Sample and Respondents Demographics*

In order to empirically investigate the hypotheses, tools such as e-mail, letter and face to face interviews are used for gathering data from the managers-top, middle or first line. Using the documents of Kocaeli Chamber of Commerce, 38 firms among 650 are identified as the target group of the research because of their availability. Of

the 161 respondents 147 (91%) were men, and 13 (9%) were women. The majority of the participants 153(95%) are married and ranged in age from 31 to 40 years 68(42%). In total, 137 (85%) have a bachelor degree.

### 3.3. Measures

Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (Maslach et al., 1996). It comprises three sub-scales assessing emotional exhaustion (I feel emotionally drained from my work), cynicism (I have become less interested in my work since I started this job) and personal accomplishment (at work, I feel confident that I am effective at getting things done). All items were measured on a five point Likert-type scale where (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The response value for each of personal accomplishment items are reversed before moving on. High scores are indicative of burnout. Questionnaire measuring employee perceptions of the motivating characteristics of the job was measured using "Job Diagnostic Survey" which is developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980). It comprises three sub-scales as the variety of skills (items 4, 8 and 12), autonomy (items 2, 16 and 20); feedback (items 7, 11 and 19). Finally, 3-item scale adapted from Bluedorn (1982) was used to measure turnover intentions.

### 3.4. Data Analysis And Results

To test the reliability of the scales used in the study, Cronbach Alpha scores were calculated for each scale. The Cronbach Alpha scores for each scale were good with overall Alpha reported of 0.65-0.81. Furthermore, in order to identify the underlying structure of various measures exploratory factor analysis using principle components of factor extraction and varimax rotation techniques was performed. It is found that one item in cynicism (I doubt the significance of my work) constitutes a different factor alone and also have a low correlation with all items. After throwing out this item factor analysis is employed again. This time one item in skill variety is loaded strongly on more than one factor and as suggested we discarded it. (Hatcher, 1994.) As a cut-off loading was used 0.40. Most factor loadings were above 0.50 which can be assumed a high level of significance. The results from our factor analysis of the measurement items for each of the subscales (Table 1) imply that measures used in this study have construct validity (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 1. Factor Loading of Scale Items**

<b>Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>Cynicism</b>	<b>Personal Accomplishment</b>	<b>Autonomy</b>	<b>Feedback</b>	<b>Skill variety</b>	<b>Turnover Intention</b>
.708	.729	.820	.751	.778	.823	.823
.694	.679	.806	.686	.743	.702	.765
.585	.591	.703	.601	.562		.735
.540		.606				.549

We calculated means and standart deviations for each variable and correlation matrix of all variables. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations among all scales used in the analyses are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistic, correlations and alpha reliabilities of the mesuares**

Variables		Mean	Std D.	1	2	3
Burnout	1	3.93	0.46	-	-.376**	.368**
Job Charac.	2	2.12	0.42		-	-.300**
Turnover Int.	3	4.18	0.89			-

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 3.5. Model Testing Results

We conducted hierarchical regression analysis to examine the hypothesized relationships among burnout, motivating job characteristics and turnover intentions. In the first step, we entered the control variables of gender, age, and tenure. Gender, age and tenure were not significantly related to turnover intentions although there have been several studies determining the importance of demographic factors in explaining employee burnout and turnover intention (e.g., Jackson, 1993; Somers, 1996; Brewer and Shapard's, 2004; Cordes & Dougherty, Karatepe & Karatepe; 2010). In the second step we investigated the impact of burnout on employee turnover intentions. The results revealed that burnout ( $\beta=-.424$ ) have negative effect on employee turnover intentions. In the third step, the impact of motivating job characteristics (autonomy, feedback, skill variety) on turnover intentions was investigated and the results revealed that motivating job characteristics is related to turnover intentions ( $\beta= -.171$ ). In the last step we entered a two-way interaction term between burnout and motivating job characteristics and found that the relationship between burnout and turnover intention was moderated by motivating job characteristics. Finally, the Sobel test for the moderation model is applied. According to the results the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the moderator variable was not significant (Sobel statistic=0.41,  $p>0.05$ )

**Table 3: Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses**

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
<b>Step 1: Control Variables</b>				
Gender	.036	.059	.032	.018
Age	.024	.023	.016	.003
Tenure	.099	.120	.092	.069
<b>Step 2: Burnout-Turnover</b>		<b>.424 **</b>	<b>.354**</b>	<b>.100*</b>
<b>Step 3: Job Char. -Turnover</b>			<b>-.171*</b>	-.109
<b>Step 4: Moderating Effect Burnout * Job Characteristics</b>				<b>-.070*</b>
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>.159</b>	<b>.211</b>	<b>.224</b>

\*  $P<0.05$  \*\*  $p<0.01$

### Conclusion and Implications

According to the results of this study, employees who reported that they were more exhausted, more cynical, feel less professional efficacy had more intention to leave their organization. This finding support our first hypothesis and also earlier researches (Leiter and Maslach 2009; Knudsen, and Roman, 2008; Harrington et al., 2001; Huang,



Chuang, & Lin, 2003; Lingard, 2003; Jung & Kim; 2012). Across a wide range of studies, turnover intentions were reported to be highly correlated with actual turnover (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Parasuraman, 1982; Mobley, 1977). These findings confirm that measures to prevent burnout could also help to reduce turnover and its associated monetary and nonmonetary costs. Therefore to prevent burnout, favorable working conditions such as reasonable work hours, work group cohesiveness, support from supervisor and colleagues should be provided since these factors have been shown to correlate negatively with turnover intention (Leiter and Maslach, 1988; Jackson et al. 1987). Burnout has such a fatal impact that human resource management cannot afford to ignore it as employees who are depressed would probably not care about excellent quality, creativity, innovation, profitability, and the competitiveness.

Job characteristics appear to be other important predictors of turnover intention. Relatedly it is predicted that if motivating job characteristics can be achieved, employees are likely to feel decision latitude, freedom, and responsibility, that they are doing something important, that their work is valued or that they have control over the process of tasks and thus decreases the negative effects of burnout, and eventually, employee turnover. Relatedly, our third hypothesis that predicts motivating job characteristics will moderate the relationship between burnout and turnover intention was not confirmed although there seems a remarkable decrease in turnover intentions according to the results of fourth regression analysis (see Table 3). In this regard, it is worth noting that, motivating job characteristics variables included in this study (autonomy, feedback and skill variety) were insufficient to lessen turnover intention. Therefore future researches should investigate the moderating effect by including other motivational job characteristics (e.g., task identity and significance or psychological states such as meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results) suggested by Hackman and Oldham (1975). In addition, it is suggested that future work examine this hypothesis using a larger sample and across a range of different jobs requiring a wide range of skills that may increase statistical power.

Like all studies, the current study has some limitations. First, our third hypothesis was not confirmed. Second, we only include three motivating job characteristics although the concept of job satisfaction has been defined in many ways. For instance, Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969) consider five facets of job satisfaction: pay, promotions, coworkers, supervision, and the work itself. Maybe other researchers who are interested in burnout and turnover relationship should replicate the study by including various motivating factors of job. Furthermore, it might also be that contextual characteristics such as organizational culture and climate, management styles and empowerment may moderate the relationship between burnout and work outcomes. Finally another limitation of this research is the low response rate, which inhibits the generalizability of our results.

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