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Influence of Career Needs in Psychological Contract on Job Burnout

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Abstract

The well-adjusted employee is better prepared to promote productive work outcomes. Among factors that have been found in adjustment, employee needs and their experiences on the job are salient. In the Middle East, there is dearth of literature that considered aviation employees' career concerns in psychological contract and job burnout in the aviation industry. Hence, the cross-sectional survey with questionnaires for data collection. They contain the career needs and the adapted Maslach (1996) burnout scales in a sample of 1051 respondents. Findings indicated significant prediction of burnout by career needs ($R^2 = 0.28$, $F=99$, $p<.001$). Sustainability need, career stability, and development need significantly predicted job burnout (career sustainability need, $\beta = -0.20$, $t = -6.88$, $p<.001$; career stability, $\beta = -0.49$, $t = -16.57$, $p<.001$; development need, $\beta = 0.14$, $t = 4.82$, $p<.001$) respectively. Work-life balance was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.02$, $t = -0.75$, ns). It was concluded that the identified career needs are significant factors in employees' perception of job burnout. The outcome necessitated the suggestion to incorporate career needs as components of employees' psychological contract when planning burnout interventions in the industry.

Keywords: Career Needs, Psychological Contract, Job Burnout.

Introduction

The contemporary workplace is characterized by emerging demands on employees. As people are hired, there are expectations from both the employees and their organization, which may be industry specific. The expectations that are largely unwritten but salient, constitute psychological contract. These demands may have implications for employees' concerns in psychological contract and shape their well-being in varying dimensions. Aviation industry is considered in this study due to its central focus in development across the Middle East. The industry has some of the most demanding job specifications for selection and placement into the various units. Employees are required to have the requisite training with knowledge and skills that fit the job description and specifications and are expected to offer outstanding commitment to their job and the organization. On the other hand, employees have expectations from the organization. These expectations are concerns that may cover the needs for opportunities and other rewarding experiences in their career. Extent of the opportunity to address expectations constitute a factor in employees' workplace experiences. The employers and employees' expectations constitute the psychological contract.

Among the workplace experiences is burnout. Maslach and Jackson in (1981) explained employee burnout as characterized by an individual feeling drained out and used up when working under highly stressful conditions. Therefore, it becomes necessary to consider the possible influence of specific concerns of employees in examining job burnout, which is perceived as excessive workplace stress that is characterized by mental exhaustion, detached and

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The aviation industry requires continuous improvement on the management of talent to improve service delivery as a critical component that defines tourism and development. Effective utilization of talent and skills available in the industry depends on the level of adjustment and well-being of the workforce. Thus, understanding employees' concerns in the psychological contract represented as career needs, and their roles in burnout (extreme stress and mental exhaustion) that negatively impact adjustment and well-being become a necessity. While job burnout is known to influence work decision-making and performance, needs are known to be precursor to commitment and performance in the workplace (Balogun and Ekore, 2002). Therefore, the necessary questions that arise are: what are the career needs and their dimensions in the aviation industry? How would employees' career needs as core components of psychological contract possibly play role(s) in their perception of burnout as workplace excessive stress? These necessitated the study that sets to examine the influence of employees' career needs in psychological contract and perceived job burnout.

Literature Review

Career needs and employee perception

A seminal theory that investigated employee needs in organizational setting is the Alderfer's human needs in the workplace as motivators. According to Alderfer (1989), existence, relatedness, and growth needs are represented as ERG. Existence needs cover concerns as stable job and regular income on a sustainable basis, relatedness need is concerned about recognition with competence and being able to enjoy good relationship with coworkers and have a relaxing work life. Growth needs is concerned with having opportunities to develop a rewarding career through, promotions, training, and other development opportunities in the organization. Alder described the needs as fundamental and constitute the inner needs of employees in work settings. Caulton (2012) reported that the ERG is mostly applied to the study of human motivation in the workplace as a tool for increasing morale and productivity. It provides a framework for the career needs of employees being investigated alongside burnout in the present study.

The theory was investigated to explore burnout in a public university in Malaysia (Thanghai, Shafie, Yunos, Hamid, Sidik, and Azman, 2021). It found that work motivation significantly affects work burnout. Doyal and Gough (1991) in their theory of human need, argued that needs are goals which are necessary to prevent harm and promote human flourishing. The authors identified needs as the preconditions for human actions and perception. It suffices to hypothesize that career needs will influence perception of burnout among aviation workers.

Employee burnout

Burnout studies abound in occupational health literature. Each offered perspectives that stimulate the need for further research. Historically, investigation of occupational burnout began with Freudenberg (1974) who defined it as a state of fatigue or frustration resulting from professional relationships that failed expectations of reward. Later, Maslach (1978) examined the psychological factors that relate to burnout among professionals who have continuous and direct contact with patients, and welfare clients or prisoners' disengagement at work. The study found that multiple factors respond at multiple levels to consequently shape employee's burnout at work. Among several other conclusions, Maslach conceptualized burnout as persistent employee stress that can

result in emotional exhaustion (feeling of being emotionally spent), depersonalization (detachment from others), and diminished accomplishment (limited sense of efficacy at work). It consequently leads to a contemptuous perception of clients, low morale, and high job turnover. Similarly, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) found burnout as a two-factor structure of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation.

Daley (1979) reported burnout as a person's inability to handle continued stress on the job that leads to demoralization, frustration, and reduced efficiency" (p. 375). Maslach and Jackson (1981) explained it as the combined experience of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished accomplishment. According to Golembiewski et al. (1983), burnout follows a phase model. They identified depersonalization as the least potent contributor while emotional exhaustion remains the strongest antecedent. Furthermore, Leiter and Maslach (2009) found burnout to be a de-motivational experience for workers as characterized by the inability to handle continued stress on the job. Literature has largely focused on analytical studies of burnout in various industries without much on aviation, especially the possible role of employees' needs or concerns as part of their psychological contract (Seal and Kleiner (1999); Ahola, Väänänen, Koskinen, Kouvonen, and Shirom (2010); Hakanen, Bakker, and Jokisaari (2011) and Prins Dj (2018).

Irrespective of the methodology and scope, the burnout syndrome requires increased attention due to its negative effects on employees, organizations, and the economy (Kahn, Schneider, Jenkins-Henkelman, and Moyle (2006); Yavas, Babakus and Karatepe (2013). In their 2021 study, Demerouti, Bakker, Peeters, and Breevaart reported that research on burnout is still topical, and that burnout remains a contemporary problem. They attributed it to the ever persistent and environmental stressors that are challenging to employees and organizations. Based on the various studies, job burnout can be understood as the physical, psychological, and emotional stress reported by employees with low morale and high job turnover intention. In this context, it can be assumed that employees' career concerns as part of psychological contract may be significant in perception of burnout.

In the Middle East region for instance, much of the research on burnout involved the healthcare sector. Elbarazi, Loney, Yousef, and Elias (2017) examined the prevalence of, and factors associated with burnout among health care professionals in Arab countries. The study did not include contents of employees' part of psychological contract. In literature, not much exists on psychological contract that includes career concerns of employees as factors in burnout. Similarly, other researchers (Al-Aameri, 2000; Al-Fadli, 1999; Al-Meer, 1995; Al-Mishan, 1996; and Al-Shammari, Khoja, and Al-Subaie, 2001) have examined stress and burnout in Saudi and some other Arab countries at different times in different sectors, but none covered the aviation industry and career concerns. In a Saudi study of job-related burnout among emergency physicians and nurses, Alshahrani et. al (2022) found 76% prevalence of burnout. Previous studies in other regions identified occupational stress and burnout as prevalent, and how they influence job satisfaction and commitment of workers. Chang and Chiu (2009) identified flight attendants as experiencing emotional labour and exhaustion in the Taiwanese airline industry. However, the dearth of literature in the aviation sector in the Middle East is not limited to job burnout but also career concerns in psychological contract and their possible link. The reviews above indicate that the aviation industry has been rarely examined in terms of career needs and

Presently, two developmental models of the demands-resources imbalance have emerged: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) and the Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) (Hobfoll, 2001; and Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The studies identified threat or loss of resources in the conservation of resources (such as deficit in psychological contract) as a primary component of the stress process that leads to burnout. Thus, it can be assumed that employee's career needs as a loss of career expectations may potentially influence perception of burnout.

Further research to illustrate burnout from workplace experience was by Kalliath et al., (2000). It measured the psychological presence of burnout with two sub scales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and found a good association with Maslach's model, but the personal accomplishment factor correlated weakly. Other studies (Nitzsche, Pfaff, Jung, and Driller, 2013; Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch and Barber, 2010) found the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach scale as sufficient because of its strong predictive properties. However, there have been concerns on the use of emotional exhaustion subscale as a proxy for the entire Maslach scale without the context of the population. For example, Vanheule et al. (2007) in the Netherlands, observed that the two different group of staff in residential welfare institutions using the Maslach 20-point scale interpreted the item questions differently.

Increasingly, burnout research is widening. Tsutsumi et al. (2001) examined stress from risk of job loss in Japan, while Iacovides et al., (2003) identified job stress and burnout among Greek workers in their meta-analytic study of burnout. At some point, measures of engagement at work, exhaustion and workplace relationships were used by researchers to assess burnout (Shirom, 2003; Shirom & Melamed, 2006). Different scales are available. However, the version from Maslach's Model is most adopted, and has been validated by several studies in different occupational environments.

Relationship of Job Burnout with other Constructs

Ahola and Hakanen (2014) found burnout to significantly predict teams and organizational inefficiencies, and ultimately reflects in burnout's correlation with work ability. According to Shirom (2003), existing studies largely focus on the burnout process rather than prevention and factors supporting job engagement. The implication is that burnout is negatively impacting and need to be prevented and controlled in organizations (Reijseger et al., 2017). Hence the investigation of career needs of employees as factors that might help and support employees' engagement and avoid burnout.

Need for Career sustainability and Job Burnout

Baruch and Vardi (2016) and DeVos and Van der Heijden (2017) noted that theoretically and practically important as it seems, burnout is vastly underestimated in career sustainability studies. In the aviation industry which is highly dynamic, high-tech and customer orientated, addressing the need for career stability and sustainability may help to influence employees' perception of burnout. De Vos, Heijden and Akkermans (2019) emphasized personal factors and psychological climate as reflecting the significance and meaning of work environments to individuals. The environment may explain the role of career sustainability deprivation on burnout. Since need for career sustainability refers to the employability and a harmonious fit with one's skills, interests and values, the climate prepares the employee for new challenges and enhance their ability to manage job demands successfully. This implies that as a career concern, it may be a factor in burnout perception.

The global trend of fast-paced changes, high time-sensitivity, and a constantly demanding workload can have implications for the continuity and stability of careers. And it may result in career insecurity, economic concerns, and critically high rates of burnout symptoms among the working population (Baruch and Vardi, 2016). Across cultures, studies reflect high prevalence of employee burnout (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014). This has been attributed to the complex economic, organizational, and societal developments which have drastically changed the career environment for workers in different industries (Hall, Yip, and Doiron, 2018). The aviation industry which is safety-sensitive and customer service-centric may be affected by career stability for employees, which could make the work stressful (Steven et.al ,2003). In a study of the consequences of job insecurity, Probst and Ekore (2010) found a significant negative correlation between job insecurity and safety compliance, and job insecurity and organizational commitment. In this study, it is being proposed that when employees perceive their career as unstable it may influence report of high burnout.

Career Development and Burnout

Studies have identified careers as becoming less predictable, more dynamic, and fluid as organizations respond to advancements in technology and changes in government's economic policies (McDonald, 2018; Hall et al, 2010). Hence the need to increasingly examine practices to encourage career engagement and avoid burnout. Dynamic industries are aware of the importance of career development and productivity with retention of their human capital (Wilkinson, 2008). However, not much in literature that examined the psychosocial factors which constitute employees' part of psychological contract in the aviation industry.

In their study of occupational burnout, Shah, Munir, and Zaheer (2021) found a strong association between the need for training that enhance the psychological capital of health workers and protection from stress that ultimately led to burnout. The finding indicates that career development that incorporates training can be an important component of employees' needs. Psychological capital as a moderator of stress, has the dimensions of self-efficacy, resilience, and hope (Shah, et al). In examining secondary school students' academic performance in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, terrorism-related resilience was identified as a moderator of stress (Konabe, 2022). The study implies an inverse relationship between resilience and stress. Consequently, it is assumed in this study that career development needs that includes training (which sometimes incorporates resilience) would significantly influence job burnout.

Work-life Balance and Occupational Burnout

Work-life balance as an emergent topic of interest in organizational behavior, human resource management, and psychology explains the connection and balance between work and life (family, leisure, and work commitments) (Belwal and Belwal, 2014). Due to employees' workload and personal responsibilities, maintaining a balance is sometimes challenging especially as they strive for excellence to avoid negative evaluation which results in stress (Gul, et al, 2017). In their examination of the dynamics of perceived stress and coping in educational institution, Arooj et al (2024) found institutional affiliation as a factor. The aviation industry differs in several ways, including employee's part of psychological contract. Their perception of extreme stress by aviation employees may be influenced by factors not considered in the education industry. However, individuals strive to maintain a balance between life and work demands by choosing the kind of work that fosters balance as a career concern. Studies have

found work-life balance in perception of burnout as a challenge in attempts to manage professional and personal life effectively (Maslach and Leiter, 2017; Higgins, Duxbury, and Lyons, 2006). As important as it has become, not much research exists in aviation industry, especially in the Middle East (Belwal, and Belwal, 2014) and (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). Yet, the industry is not immune to the challenge of maintaining work-life balance which pilot study identified as part of career concerns.

Duncan Aviation in the US (Falter, 2005) found that the organization has fitness programs and flexible work schedules as a way of addressing concerns about burnout to gain positive outcomes. Previously, Good (1999) recommended that aviation industry should have a workforce which is flexible and compensated through flexible monthly hours and productivity rates to curtail burnout. Similarly, (McKinsey, 1998) proposed that airline management needs to leverage employee work-life balance by applying a strategy of individualization of employees, tailor pay and job content to individuals or classes of employees in the aviation industry. It was found that employees were stressed and not getting a work-life balance and hence not satisfied. Therefore, it is proposed that the need to satisfy work-life balance by employees may be a significant factor in their perception of job burnout in the present study.

METHODS

Design: The study involved assessment of employees' career concerns in psychological contract and job burnout. It was designed as a cross-sectional survey.

Participants: A sample of 1051 was obtained through purposive sampling technique across different agencies, departments, and categories at airport facilities in Riyadh. Participants showed age groups of 18-30 years as 628 (59.8%); the 31-45 was 251(23.9%); and 46 years and above was 172 (16.4%). The married participants were 580 (55.2%), while 471 (44. 8%) reported being single. The airport-based staff was 60.4%, employees of airlines had 13%, air transport authority and General aviation with ground services staff contributed 26.6%. The junior ranked employees were 466 (44.3%), intermediate level 398 (37.9%), middle management level 175 (16.7%) and top management cadre provided 12 respondents (1.1%). Personal identification was not required. Information supplied was used strictly for the research.

Research Instruments

The main instruments for data collection were questionnaires that contained the career needs and job burnout scales. The first part of each questionnaire requested information about employee's demographic characteristics. The second part had the job burnout inventory and career needs scale. The Maslach's burnout scale (1996) was adapted and used to measure employee's level of job burnout. It has 14 items that are scored on a 3-point Likert format ranging from 'never' to 'very often'. All the items loaded between 0.44 to 0.82, and yielded Cronbach α of 0.73. The needs scale was used to measure the career concerns of employees.

The career needs scale was developed from literature and standardized for the study. The 14-item scale (sub-section that covers items 15 to 28) was designed in Likert format with 3-point responses that ranged from 'Less important', 'Important', to 'Very important'. There were no negative items. A response of "less important" attracts the lowest score as against "very important" that is assigned the highest score. Item analysis showed the items loaded between 0.42 and 0.79 with a Cronbach α of 0.82. Based on the factor analysis, career needs scale loaded

significantly under four factors of career sustainability, career stability, career development, and work-life balance. The career sustainability need subscale had items 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 26, and 27. Career stability subscale had items 18 and 22, while development need had items 21 and 28. The fourth factor which was labelled work-life balance had items 24 and 25 as its measure.

Data collection was done through purposive sampling technique. It lasted six weeks and was followed by collation and analysis that involved item and factor analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics by utilizing SPSS 28. The hierarchical multiple regression statistical tool was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results

The stated hypotheses were tested, and the results are presented in the table below:

The first hypothesis stated that career concerns would significantly predict job burnout among employees in the aviation industry. It was tested with multiple regression statistics.

Table 1: A summary table of multiple regression analysis showing the joint and independent prediction of job burnout by career need factors.

DV	Career concerns	β	B	t	p	R ²	F	p
Job burnout	Sustainability need	-0.20	-0.13	-6.88	<.001	0.28	99.8	<.001
	Career stability	-0.49	-1.66	-16.57	<.001			
	Development need	0.14	0.68	4.82	<.001			
	Work-life balance	-0.02	-0.06	-0.75	ns			

Results in the table above showed that career needs components significantly predicted job burnout [$R^2 = .28$, $F(4, 1051) = 99.8$; $p < .001$]. The needs jointly accounted for 28% variance to the explanation for job burnout among the employees. The results confirmed the first hypothesis as predicted.

The second hypothesis assumed independent significant prediction of burnout by each of the components of career needs. The following results were obtained: career sustainability need ($\beta = -0.20$, $t = -6.88$, $p < .001$); career stability ($\beta = -0.49$, $t = -16.57$, $p < .001$); career development need ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 4.82$, $p < .001$); and work-life balance ($\beta = -0.02$, $t = -0.75$, ns). While career stability was the most contributor (49%), sustainability and development needs significantly contributed 20% and 14% respectively. Sustainability and career stability negatively predict burnout. It implies that the more the needs are provided for by organizations, the lower is the level of burnout. However, work-life balance contributed 2% which was not significant.

Discussion and Conclusions

Results from the analysis confirmed the hypotheses as stated. The identification of four career needs (sustainability needs, career stability needs, career development needs, and work-life balance needs) in the study is supported by the Alderfer's ERG theory. Career needs jointly contributed 28% to the prediction of burnout in the aviation industry. The findings are supported by parts of existing literature while contradicted by some. For instance, Hall, Yip, and Doiron

(2018) identified a change in the career environment and expectations of workers in different industries due to increasing economic dynamics. Steven et al. (2003) found that the aviation industry as safety-sensitive and customer service-centric may be affected by career stability for employees, which could make the work stressful. Hence the need for career support to employees. The findings are supported by literature about other service industries where management has increased the focus on career concerns as essential to meeting needs of both the individual and organization (Gardner, 1992). The career expectations in the aviation sector survey reflected significantly in employees' perception and report of burnout.

The study by Shah, Munir, and Zaheer (2021) supports association between the need for career development (including training) that enhance the psychological capital of health workers and protection from stress which predicted job burnout in the present study. Chang and Chiu (2009) emotional labor and exhaustion study of Flight attendants in the Taiwanese airline industry did not identify the influencing factors. However, their report of burnout has lent support to the study that identified employees' career needs and their influence on job burnout in aviation industry. It aligned with Wilkinson (2008) that identified the need to increase emphasis on career development and productivity of organization's human capital and retention.

Unlike Elbarazi, Loney, Yousef, and Elias (2017) that found prevalence of, and factors associated with burnout among health care professionals in Arab countries, the present study found career needs as significant predictors of burnout. These are factors that were not specifically considered in previous studies, such as Alshahrani et al (2022) on job-related burnout in Dammam. In aligning with Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory which identified resource loss as a primary component of the stress process and hence burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), the findings showed a strong link between burnout and the existence of career concerns (such as job loss or insecurity) among employees.

The prediction of job burnout by career need components supports the importance of addressing career needs to reduce mismatch in psychological contract between employees' expectations and their work demands. The finding is supported by Jackson and Maslach (1982) study of the person-environment fit theory which reported that outcomes such as stress experience do influence the fit between individuals and their work environment. In the same direction, perceived stress, and fear of negative evaluation of work by Shafique & Gul (2017), perceived stress and stress appraisal in educational setting (Gul and Arooj, 2024), and resilience and terrorism related stress by Konabe (2022) support the role of environment that may expand the level of stress to its extreme.

In this study, the significant prediction of burnout by career sustainability and stability is supported by previous findings of Baruch and Vardi (2016). They found occupational burnout to be a significant factor that is vastly underestimated in career sustainability studies. The present study found a strong predictive influence of burnout by career sustainability and stability.

Furthermore, the confirmation of the hypothesis which predicted independent influence of career stability on job burnout was in the direction of earlier study on job insecurity and its consequences by Probst and Ekore (2010). They found job insecurity (a content of career stability) to correlate positively with stress. The present study found a negative prediction by career stability, meaning that low career stability predicts higher experience of burnout. It implies that career stability is an important concern to employees in the aviation industry. And it has a link to their perception of burnout. Contrary to previous studies that associated work-life balance as a factor in extreme stress, the study did not support the literature. Moosa (2018) had reported that employees

consider work-life imbalance as a concern in organizations among flight attendants. However, it was not a significant predictor of burnout in the present study. Probably, the difference in both findings may be attributed to differences in the settings that were covered. Findings were supported by aspects of literature while contradicting others.

Conclusions

The study found that employees' career needs in psychological contract play significant role in their report of job burnout. A major conclusion is that career sustainability, career stability, career development and work-life balance needs (concern of employees in psychological contract) are important factors in employees' perception of burnout in aviation industry. However, a salient part of the conclusion is that the high emphasis on work and life balance of employees is not a significant factor in perceived burnout.

With increasing pressure on the global aviation industry for national development, the problem of burnout among the employees becomes more compelling. For instance, the Saudi Vision 2030 diversification of the economy and tourism sector activities (Vision 2030, 2016) and several other emerging economies are promoting aviation as a major driver of their development programs. The study has shown the relevance of understanding the predictive relationship between employees' career concerns in psychological contract and their report of burnout. Raising awareness from this study about individual characteristics as protective or risk factors of burnout and applying the knowledge in aviation industry to manage talent would help to recognize useful areas for intervention and improve workers well-being and retention. The outcome has implications for scholarship and talent management. Apart from providing baseline data to stimulate further research, it would serve as a reference guide for management practitioners in designing talent management interventions to promote employees' well-being and psychological adjustment in the aviation industry.

It is suggested that the scope be expanded in future research to cover more industries and regions to enable comparisons and enhance generalization of findings. For instance, work-life balance in other industries may have yielded stronger prediction of job burnout. Inclusion of factors and institutional support practices, such as availability of employee assistance programs (EAP) that were not covered in the present study may be considered in future research. It would offer a broader understanding of the interactive roles in explaining job burnout.

Nonetheless, the study has pioneered interest in expectations and perception of employees in aviation industry that had been largely under emphasized in the Middle East. Consequently, it has brought to fore the importance of identifying employees' career concerns as part of psychological contract in a region with organizational policies on career stability and sustainability that are markedly different from the West. The concerns are salient in employees' job performance. And performance is known to be impacted by job burnout which may impliedly compromise effective service delivery. As a labour-intensive industry, aviation requires a reduction in turnover to enhance retention and development of employees. Finally, the study provides opportunity to include the Saudi sample to expand the global literature on career issues in psychological contract and occupational burnout.

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