

A New Take on Employee Burnout

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All of us have felt a little stressed by our jobs. While some stress is normal, in certain cases this stress can become overwhelming, leading to employee burnout. Employees who experience burnout often feel emotionally exhausted and overextended. They may feel negatively toward, or perhaps even emotionally detached from, their colleagues, and they may experience a loss of efficiency in the workplace.

One influential model of employee burnout — the job demands–resources (JD–R) model — identifies how two main components of the workplace, job demands and job resources, can affect stress levels. Job demands include aspects of the job requiring physical and psychological costs, while job resources include physical, psychological, or social aspects of the workplace that help people accomplish their tasks.

When the demands of a job are too heavy and/or the resources provided to employees are not sufficient, employees' mental and physical health and their work-related motivation suffers, eventually leading to

burnout.

Within the JD–R model, aspects of job resources and job demands are directly linked to burnout; however, some studies have begun to hint that personal psychological resources — such as self-esteem — may mediate the relationship between job demands and job resources and burnout.

In an article published in the [European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology](#), authors Claude Fernet, Stéphanie Austin, Sarah-Geneviève Trépanier, and Marc Dussault of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières in Canada posited that the role of psychological resources in burnout might be better understood by drawing on aspects of self-determination theory (SDT).

SDT suggests that people have basic psychological needs including the need for autonomy (being in control of one's own actions), the need for competence (being able to master skills), and the need for relatedness (having a connection to others). The authors incorporate these three psychological needs into a traditional JD–R model to create a new one. In this model, employees' psychological needs mediate the relationship between job resources and job demands and characteristics of burnout.

The authors used occupational data from 356 school board employees and found that the three SDT-based psychological resources mediated the impact of job demands (role overload and ambiguity) and job resources (job control and social support) on aspects of burnout. Adding psychological resources to the model helped explain how certain job demands and resources differently predict specific aspects of burnout.

Although this model needs further validation, these findings help explain how and why certain job characteristics lead to burnout, providing a new avenue for the creation of organizational interventions to prevent burnout and its costs.

Reference

Fernet, C., Austin, S., Trépanier, S.-G., & Dussault, M. (2013). How do job characteristics contribute to burnout? Exploring the distinct mediating roles of perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22, 123–137. doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2011.632161