

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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In this paper we examined how emotional intelligence (EI) affects emotional exhaustion (burnout) resulting from emotional labor, and how emotional exhaustion influences an individual's job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Partial least squares regression analyses were conducted on data from 295 retail sales employees in South Korea. Of the 4 factors identified in the EI model developed by Schutte et al. (1998) we found that 3 (appraisals of emotions, optimism, and social skills) were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion but the fourth factor of utilization of emotion showed no significant links with emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was found to be negatively related to job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction and the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion was confirmed in the relationship between job performance and appraisals of emotions, optimism, and social skills as factors in emotional intelligence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotional exhaustion, job performance.

It has been established that the emotions an employee experiences in their organization affect his/her psychological and physical health, and also that employee's attitude towards duties, the organization, and work-related accomplishments (Grandey, 2000; Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2008; Hochschild,

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1983; Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Muchinsky, 2000). Accordingly, to heighten the understanding of the composition of organizations, researchers have emphasized the necessity for research focused on emotions of personnel within the organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Muchinsky, 2000). With this increasing interest in emotions, numerous studies have been conducted in which the role of emotional intelligence in individuals and organizational performance has been demonstrated (Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1995). However, despite the popular interest, findings about the significance of emotional intelligence and job performance in the literature have been inconclusive. This inconsistency has contributed to criticisms of the scientific status of emotional intelligence in organizational research (Becker, 2003; Landy, 2005). In an attempt to overcome the deficiencies in the literature, in this study we considered burnout (emotional exhaustion) as a variable mediating between emotional intelligence and job performance. In our study we used the words *emotional exhaustion* and *burnout* interchangeably. Burnout includes three distinct states: *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *diminished personal accomplishment* (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Among these three states, emotional exhaustion is at the core of burnout.

The current conceptualization of emotional intelligence originated with Thorndike's (1920) concept of social intelligence. The definition given by Salovey and Mayer (1990) for *emotional intelligence* (EI) was "*the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth*" (p. 10). The notion of EI has also been gaining greater recognition and acceptance rising since Goleman published *Emotional Intelligence* in 1995. Goleman defined EI as *a competency of managing yourself and your relationships with others, making effective teamwork, leading others, and forecasting the future, all of which had positive effects in terms of efficacy and job performance*. Thus, emotional intelligence is an essential requisite for employees who should manage their emotions in order to display organizationally desired emotions.

Expressing organizationally demanded emotions to customers and senior managers requires the employee to make an effort and to exert control in order to display appropriate feelings, a process that is referred as *emotional labor* (Hochschild, 1983) whereby the employee must govern and create emotions that customers expect and that positively affect the organization's productiveness. In previous studies researchers have found that emotional labor induces *emotional dissonance*, that is, a state of discrepancy between an emotional display required by the organization and an authentic experience of one's own emotion (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Based on the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals feel tension or emotional dissonance when they perceive that

they must act or express emotions that are different from their own beliefs or cognitions. Researchers have suggested that sustained emotional dissonance reduces an individual's self-identity or even promotes a strong contrary (pseudo) identity and this leads to feelings of stress, frustration, or burnout/emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009).

As with emotional exhaustion, emotional intelligence is directly linked with one's psychological state. Taylor (2001) argues that emotionally intelligent individuals cope better with life's challenges and job stresses, which leads to good psychological and physical health. Bar-On (1997) also suggests that EI helps individuals manage job stress and promotes adaptability to challenging environments so that distress or burnout are avoided. In previous literature it has been indicated that a negative correlation exists between psychological distress (i.e., burnout, job stress, depression, and ill health) and EI levels, (Bar-On, 1997; Taylor, 2001). In this study we used the four-factor model¹ of EI as developed by Schutte et al. (1998). Thus, we argued that individuals with a high level EI would be less likely to experience emotional exhaustion/burnout than would individuals with a low level of EI.

H1a: Emotional intelligence will have a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion in terms of appraisal of emotions.

H1b: Emotional intelligence will have a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion in terms of optimism/mood regulation.

H1c: Emotional intelligence will have a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion in terms of utilization of emotions.

H1d: Emotional intelligence will have a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion in terms of social skills.

Burnout/emotional exhaustion results in serious negative outcomes, such as deterioration in the quality of service, higher job turnover and absenteeism, and low morale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003). In prior studies researchers have found that burnout influences one's physiological and psychological well-being (Burke & Greenglass, 1995; Lee & Ashforth, 1993) as well as affecting job performance, in terms of increased turnover of staff and propensity to leave, negative job attitudes, and low levels of job performance in regard to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cameron, Horsburgh, & Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H2a: Emotional exhaustion will have a negative relationship with job performance in terms of organizational commitment.

¹ Despite an alpha .90 and the conclusion by Schutte and colleagues about unidimensionality, several researchers suggest four dimensions (Siu, 2009): appraisal of emotions, optimism (mood regulation), utilization of emotion, and social skills.

H2b: Emotional exhaustion will have a negative relationship with job performance in terms of job satisfaction.

Although emotional intelligence may predict job performance directly (Bar-On, 2000; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Goleman, 1995), many other researchers have suggested that there is no relationship or an inconsistent relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance (Janovics & Christiansen, 2001; Sosik & Megerian, 1999). Thus, we expected that placing emotional exhaustion as a mediator between emotional intelligence and job performance would be more reliable in explaining why emotional intelligence works through emotional exhaustion to influence job performance.

H3a: Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence (expressed as an appraisal of emotions) and job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

H3b: Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence (expressed as optimism/mood regulation) and job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

H3c: Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence (expressed as utilization of emotions) and job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

H3d: Emotional exhaustion will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence (expressed as social skills) and job performance in terms of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

METHOD

DATA COLLECTION

To collect the data for this study, retail sales employees who had worked at major department stores (Lotte, Shinsege, and Akyung) in South Korea for at least one year were selected to complete a self-administered survey. Out of 600 questionnaires that were distributed, 317 questionnaires were returned by mail. After deleting 22 questionnaires with incomplete responses there were 295 questionnaires included in the final analysis. Of the 295 individuals, 63.2% were female and the average age of the respondents was 38.4 years with a range between 25 and 51 years. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents (nearly 64.1%) had at least a high school education, and just over 33% had a college or university education. Respondents, on average, had almost three years of work experience.

MEASURES

We used 7-point Likert type scales to measure the constructs (see Table 1). Emotional intelligence was measured using 33 items adapted from Schutte et al. (1998). Emotional exhaustion was measured using four items adapted from

Maslach and Jackson (1986). The scale yielded a reliability of .76. To assess job satisfaction, four items based on the work of Brown and Peterson (1994) were used. The scale yielded a reliability of .88. Organizational commitment was measured using five items adapted from Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). The scale yielded a reliability of .90.

TABLE 1
CONSTRUCTS AND THEIR MEASUREMENT ITEMS

Construct	Measurement items	SL	α	CR	AVE
Appraisal of emotions	1. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.	.79			
	2. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.	.80	.76	.86	.67
	3. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.	.87			
Optimism	1. I expect good things to happen.	.71			
	2. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.	.87	.70	.83	.62
	3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try.	.71			
Utilization of emotions	1. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.	.89			
	2. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.	.67	.61	.78	.55
	3. Some of the major events of my life have led me to reevaluate what is important and what is not.	.65			
Social skills	1. I compliment others when they have done something well.	.73			
	2. I help other people feel better when they are down.	.78	.64	.81	.58
	3. I use positive thinking to make myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.	.78			
Emotional exhaustion	1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.	.73			
	2. I feel frustrated by my job.	.87			
	3. Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.	.69	.76	.85	.58
	4. I feel like I am at the end of my tether.	.75			
Job satisfaction	1. My job is very pleasant.	.97			
	2. My job is very worthwhile.	.87	.88	.92	.73
	3. My job is better than most.	.74			
	4. I am very content with my job.	.91			
Organizational commitment	1. If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so.	.87			
	2. The organization takes my goals and values into account.	.81			
	3. The organization would ignore any complaint from me.	.89	.90	.93	.72
	4. The organization cares about my well-being.	.79			
	5. Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.	.89			

Notes: * 7-point scale; SL = standard loading; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*.

RESULTS

The internal consistency within a construct was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 1, all constructs show a value above the threshold (.6 for both Cronbach's alpha and CR, adopted by Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). To test convergent validity, CR, factor loading, and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined. Table 1 represents individual item factor loading, CR, and AVE. All loadings for constructs exceed .6 and are shown to be significant at bootstrap *t* statistics ($\alpha = .01$), while satisfying CR and AVE criteria (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). Finally, the discriminant validity of the measures was assessed by ensuring the AVE of the underlying construct was larger than the squared intercorrelation) with other latent constructs. The results in Table 2 show that all constructs in this study fulfill discriminant validity.

TABLE 2
CORRELATIONS OF THE CONSTRUCTS AND AVE

	AE	OP	UE	SS	EE	JS	OC
AE	.67						
OP	.44	.62					
UE	.41	.60	.55				
SS	.49	.50	.49	.58			
EE	-.33	-.45	-.26	-.35	.58		
JS	.37	.47	.32	.38	-.47	.73	
OC	.30	.41	.30	.30	-.41	.61	.72

Note: The number in **bold** is the AVE.

Six paths were examined in the structural model. In H1a–H1d it was posited that emotional exhaustion is influenced by appraisal of emotion, optimism, utilization of emotion, and social skills. Consistent with our predictions in H1a, H1b, and H1d, appraisal of emotion ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$), optimism ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .01$), and social skills ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$) each exerted a significantly negative impact on emotional exhaustion. But utilization of emotion showed no significant relationship with emotional exhaustion and, therefore, H1c was not supported. We predicted direct paths from emotional exhaustion to organizational commitment (H2a) and job satisfaction (H2b). The effect of emotional exhaustion on organizational commitment ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .01$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .01$) affirms these predictions. Thus, H2a and H2b were strongly supported.

To test the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and job performance

(organizational commitment and job satisfaction), z statistics (Sobel, 1982) were applied. If the z value exceeds 1.96 ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis can be rejected. The significance of the mediation effect was assessed using the Sobel test. First, it was found that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between appraisal of emotions and organizational commitment/job satisfaction ($z = 2.18, z = 2.11$). Since z values for both organizational commitment and job satisfaction are greater than 1.96, this showed that emotional exhaustion had significant mediating effects on their relationship ($\alpha = .05$). Second, the results also confirmed that emotional exhaustion significantly mediated the relationship between optimism and organizational commitment/job satisfaction ($z = 5.12, z = 5.31$). However, emotional exhaustion did not mediate the relationship between utilization of emotion and organizational commitment/job satisfaction ($z = 1.63, z = 1.63$). Finally, the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion was significant in the relationship between social skills and organizational commitment/job satisfaction ($z = 1.96, z = 1.97$). Thus, H3a, H3b, and H3d were supported.

DISCUSSION

In this article, we advanced a model of the effect of emotional exhaustion on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance as measured by organizational commitment and job satisfaction. More specifically, in this study we found that three factors of emotional intelligence – appraisal of emotions, optimism, and social skills – were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion, which was also negatively related to job performance. Assuming that individuals with high levels of EI are more likely to cope effectively with environmental demands and pressures stemming from occupational stress, these results concur with those of Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002), who found that EI was negatively associated with job stress, burnout, and ill health. In addition, our findings confirmed that mediating effects of emotional exhaustion exist between three factors in emotional intelligence (appraisals of emotions, optimism, and social skills) and two components of job performance (organizational commitment and job satisfaction). A result that was interesting to us was that utilization of emotion is the only EI factor that is not negatively related to emotional exhaustion at a significant level. We speculate that individuals who are good at utilizing their emotions by incorporating emotion in thought, and understanding emotions by employing emotional knowledge, may be more likely to experience emotional exhaustion. Since they put more effort into making emotional facilitation in thinking, and analyzing their own and others' emotions, this process may generate a feelings of stress, frustration, or burnout/emotional exhaustion.

As mentioned previously, results gained in previous studies regarding the impact of emotional intelligence on job performance have been mixed (Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Janovics & Christiansen, 2001; Sosik & Megerian, 1999). Our findings indicate that one of the causes of inconclusive results in the literature regarding the relationship between EI and job performance may have been the omission of an intermediate variable. It could be argued that emotional intelligence alone does not directly influence job performance. One of the key issues to emanate from research into the relationship between EI and job performance is the intervening effect of the dynamics of emotional interactions between individuals in the organization, that is, emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. An individual's EI within the context of the organization always involves some degree of emotional labor, either in the form of deep acting, whereby the inner emotional state is modified by striving to sincerely feel the emotions corresponding with the expression rules in the organization, or surface acting, whereby employees focus on the response of the customer and modify the expressions visible on the surface (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Thus, the level of emotional exhaustion may be an extremely important factor that influences the relationship between EI and job performance. In summary, in this study we have extended previous research on emotional intelligence and job performance by including emotional exhaustion as an intervening variable.

Finally, the main limitation of this study is that it was vulnerable to common method bias, since predictor and criterion variables were obtained from the same source (i.e., a questionnaire). In future studies, common method bias should be controlled and detected through research design.

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