

Extroversion and Neuroticism at Work

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Definition

Extroversion and Neuroticism. Many studies have linked personality traits to the way in which workers carry out their tasks, with the aim of optimizing employee performance. Understanding this relationship is very useful for both recruiting members of staff and assigning them to positions that best fit their personality. It is generally accepted that there are five principal traits or factors that can be used to catalog the structure of each individual personality.

1. Introduction

Ensuring health at work and promoting sustainable organizations are increasingly important challenges in today's world. Within the field of health promotion, burnout is a variable that has attracted a great deal of attention over recent decades due to the changes that have occurred in work environments ^[1]. It is essential to understand what causes burnout and to determine the weight of its diverse factors in order to be able to predict it and design interventions focused on those variables that may foster its development. A better understanding of the phenomenon may also help establish satisfactory environments for both managers and employees.

Many studies have associated burnout with stress ^{[2][3]}, and indeed, burnout can be defined as a chronic occupational stress syndrome ^[4]. It has also been shown that emotional exhaustion is the key element in burnout ^[5], making it imperative to find new ways of dealing with this phenomenon. Depersonalization and low levels of personal accomplishment are the other two components of the construct ^[1].

Some recent studies ^{[6][7][8]} have found an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, although others which have explored this idea in more depth argue that it is in fact certain components of burnout, such as emotional exhaustion, which correlate closely with this variable ^[9]. Some authors have also found that the relationship between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion is moderated by contextual variables linked to the work environment ^[10], thus highlighting the importance of moderator variables, which have been studied very little to date. These limitations highlight the need to develop broader models that reflect the complexity of the work environment.

The present study aims to assess the affective consequences of the work environment, which is why it focuses on emotional exhaustion, which has been shown to be a relevant factor in organizational processes ^[11].

To fully understand modern-day organizations, it is important to develop interaction models that include both dispositional and situational factors. In this sense, job demands–resources theory ^[12] emphasizes the importance of determining not only the job resources available but also the personal resources upon which the individual can call in order to cope with the demands of their profession. Specifically, job demands refer to any physical, psychological, organizational, or social aspect which requires an effort from the worker ^[13], whereas job resources are those physical, psychological, and organizational aspects of the job which may (a) reduce the demands of the job and their associated physiological and psychological costs, (b) be decisive in ensuring work-related goals are met, or (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development ^[12].

In accordance with this theory, it has been shown that demands are generally linked to processes associated with negative health outcomes or emotional exhaustion ^[14], whereas resources are linked to processes such as satisfaction and engagement ^[15], the latter is understood as the employee's voluntary effort or commitment to the job. Moreover, demands and resources are related to job crafting that focuses on employee job redesign ^[16].

Recent research ^[17] suggests that how the individual assesses the environment is a key aspect in determining their level of emotional exhaustion. Long working hours, lack of autonomy, and high levels of interference between work and home life are all factors that may impact employees' mental health and exacerbate symptoms of emotional exhaustion.

The specific nature of each work environment, as assessed by employees, is, therefore, a key factor in determining levels of emotional exhaustion.

For this reason, some companies are introducing innovations to reduce this problem. The job crafting technique facilitates the adaptation of the worker to the development of their professional tasks [18] because it allows designing the job, adapting it to the way of working of the employee, based on their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This work system allows reducing emotional exhaustion, increasing performance and productivity.

Karasek's job demand–control model [19] explains occupational stress in terms of the balance struck between the psychological demands of the job and the level of control perceived by the employee. The model postulates the existence of a significant relationship between occupational stress and health disorders, which are the result of a combination of high psychological demands at work and a low level of control over one's job. It also posits that a high level of perceived social support reduces the effect of occupational stress, thereby mitigating its adverse consequences. Russell also found a positive correlation between autonomy and job satisfaction [20], and Juárez et al. (2014) concluded that employees' control over their task was an effective predictor of their occupational health [21]. Autonomy and satisfaction, therefore, seem to play an important role in the development of occupational stress, and jobs can be categorized in accordance with these two factors.

However, the fact that a work environment may be potentially stressful does not necessarily imply that all employees will suffer from burnout. Each person manages stress and interprets the environment in which they work in accordance with the personality factors that characterize them and their own individual life experiences. Jiménez, Hernández, and Gutiérrez (2000) found that stress and burnout arise as a result of the interaction between variables pertaining to the work environment and those pertaining to the individual's personality. Personality plays an important role in the origin and development of stress and burnout, with those who adopt adequate coping strategies being able to actively engage with their environment and modify it to their advantage [22].

Thus, situational factors may be interpreted differently by different individuals. In this study, individual personality differences are assessed using the big five personality trait model developed by McCrae and Costa (1985) [23]. According to this model, personality is made up of five large dimensions or factors: neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. In the field upon which we are focused here, several studies have reported a significant relationship between the extroversion and neuroticism factors and emotional exhaustion [24][25] and job satisfaction [9][26], while others have suggested that different relationships exist with job satisfaction, depending on each individual's specific personality traits [27]. Consequently, we believed it would be interesting to include personality variables in this study. Job satisfaction is one of the most widely studied aspects of the work environment and, to date, significant relationships have been found between it and both occupational performance and occupational health [28], making it a key variable for the development of sustainable organizations.

In light of the above, this study proposes a comprehensive model encompassing both situational and dispositional variables in order to assess their impact on the dependent variables. The main aim of this research project is, therefore, to determine the relationship which exists between autonomy at work and both burnout and job satisfaction, taking into account the moderating effect of the personality factors extroversion and neuroticism. The concepts and variables included in the study are outlined below.

Autonomy at Work. Generally, employees' control over their jobs has been measured using two different yet closely related theoretical sub-dimensions: creativity and authority to make one's own decisions, which some authors refer to as autonomy at work [29][30]. The autonomy at work variable is linked to employees' ability to influence organizational processes and make decisions.

Moreover, other studies have also highlighted how having greater control over one's own job leads to greater job satisfaction and reduced stress levels [31]. It is, therefore, interesting to explore how personality traits moderate these relationships in order to come to a deeper understanding of how employees adapt to their jobs.

Emotional Exhaustion. From the beginning, authors studying burnout have posited that an imbalance between job demands and employee resources is a key factor in understanding the impact of the work environment [1]. Since the

year 2000, the World Health Organization (WHO) has considered burnout an occupational risk factor and has even highlighted its potential to put workers' lives in jeopardy. Emotional exhaustion is one of the most important components of burnout and is characterized by loss of energy, fatigue, and the feeling of being worn out. In general, it has been defined as an inadequate means of coping with chronic stress [32]. Peiró (2005) [33] identified an absence of control by the worker as a key factor for understanding burnout, and Jiménez, Hernández, and Gutiérrez (2000) [22] found that health status was closely linked to all the dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of accomplishment), but in particular to emotional exhaustion. Individuals who scored highly for a resilient personality had lower levels of emotional exhaustion. A resilient personality, therefore, seems to play an important role in reducing the likelihood of suffering from stress and burnout.

Gil-Monte, Peiró, and Valcárcel (1996) [34] found that the dimension which most contributed to frequent feelings of burnout was emotional exhaustion. This finding is consistent with those reported by studies that, using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), found that emotional exhaustion was the dimension that most impacted burnout [35][36][37]. Similarly, Portero and Vaquero (2015) [9] concluded that emotional exhaustion was a significant variable in the development of burnout among workers.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction is understood as a positive emotional state that reflects an affective response to one's job and indicates how individuals feel in relation to the different aspects of their daily work. In short, it is an overall feeling about one's job and the degree to which one likes it [38][39]. This affective component has been found to be very important in the study of organizations and team management [40]. The factors influencing job satisfaction include income level, work relations, and the employee's level of control over the decisions that are made [41][42].

Occupational stress may affect workers' mental health, thereby reducing their levels of job satisfaction [43]. Hosseinabadi et al. (2018) [27] found a direct relationship between control over one's job and job satisfaction, with having the authority to make decisions resulting in employees performing tasks more happily.

Job satisfaction is also linked to personality variables, such as motivational orientations [43]. We can, therefore, affirm that job demands and control have an impact on affective criterion variables (emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction) in accordance with the subject's dispositional personality variables, which together determine the perspective from which the work environment is assessed [44].

Extroversion and Neuroticism. Many studies have linked personality traits to the way in which workers carry out their tasks, with the aim of optimizing employee performance [45][46][47][48][49][50][51]. Understanding this relationship is very useful for both recruiting members of staff and assigning them to positions that best fit their personality. It is generally accepted that there are five principal traits or factors that can be used to catalog the structure of each individual personality [52]. Norman (1963) labeled these five main personality factors extroversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, and a broad consensus has been reached regarding their validity in the field of personality assessment [53].

In the big five personality factor model, extroversion is the dimension that measures sociability. It is linked to positive strategies for coping with aversion, as well as to sociability, assertiveness, and activity [54]. In the world of work, it has been suggested that extroversion is a variable that predicts adjustment in jobs requiring interaction and cooperation. Several studies have explored the relationship between extroversion and burnout among employees, with Swider and Zimmerman (2010), for example, finding that those who scored lower for extroversion were more likely to experience this syndrome than those who scored highly [55]. Emotional stability is strengthened in extroverts, or those who enjoy interacting with other people, thereby boosting their resistance to burnout [56]. For their part, Meymandpour and Bagheri (2017) found that when employees worked mainly from home (teleworking), those scoring lower for extroversion were more likely to experience burnout [24].

In the big five personality factor model, neuroticism is the dimension that measures emotional instability. It is linked to anxiety, depression, irritability, worry, and insecurity and seems to be an effective predictor of performance in a wide variety of different jobs [54]. Some authors have found a close positive association between neuroticism and burnout [25], as well as an inverse relationship between neuroticism and job satisfaction [57].

It is interesting to explore the moderating role of extroversion and neuroticism in the relationship between autonomy at work, burnout, and job satisfaction since this may provide information about workers' future job performance. Thus, the main aim of this research project is to assess the relationship between autonomy at work and both burnout and job satisfaction, taking into account the moderating effect of extroversion and neuroticism (Figure 1).

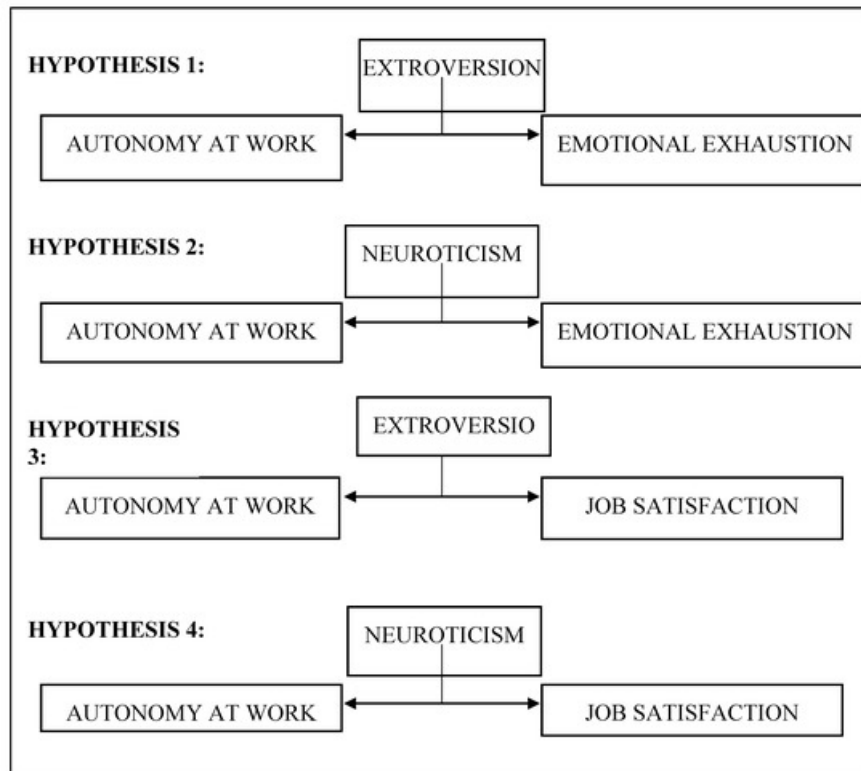


Figure 1. Study hypotheses.

The initial hypothesis on which the study is based is that interaction models that encompass both situational and dispositional variables will help researchers gain a fuller understanding of organizational dynamics. The working hypotheses proposed are as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

The negative relationship between autonomy at work and emotional exhaustion is moderated by extroversion.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

The negative relationship between autonomy at work and emotional exhaustion is moderated by neuroticism.

Hypothesis 3 (H3):

The positive relationship between autonomy at work and job satisfaction is moderated by extroversion.

Hypothesis 4 (H4):

The positive relationship between autonomy at work and job satisfaction is moderated by neuroticism.

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Keywords

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