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Workplace Stress, Negative Emotions, and Organizational Resilience: A Critical Analysis of Antecedents, Consequences, and Interventions

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Abstract

The paper will look at how negative emotions at workplaces (stress, anxiety, fear, and frustration) affect the outcome of individuals and organizations. The analysis is based on the transactional model of stress and appraisal of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) to understand the mechanisms by which organizational stressors cause negative emotional reactions that negatively affect cognitive performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and physical health. A systematic review of 12 empirical studies in the healthcare, manufacturing, finance, and education sectors shows that the three stressors that have the most harmful emotional effects are role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, and job insecurity. Findings indicate that mindfulness-based programs can decrease burnout by a mean of 34 years, and job redesign based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework can decrease turnover intention by 22 years. Results emphasize strategic significance of organizational resilience investments in the creation of adaptive workforces that can perform under pressure.

Keywords: workplace stress, negative emotions, organizational resilience, burnout, coping, mindfulness

Introduction

The workplace negative emotions are not only widespread, but they are expensive and often misjudged in terms of their effects on the organizations. According to a 2021 report by Gallup, an estimated over 300 billion U.S. dollars is spent on workplace stress every year due to absenteeism, decreased productivity, healthcare costs, and staff turnover (Gallup, 2021). In spite of this staggering number, most organizations still regard negative emotions as individual issues instead of structural issues that require structural intervention. Organizational psychology theoretical approaches offer potent frameworks to explain the emergence of negative emotions and its reasons in professional contexts, and how humans and organizations can build the strength to deal with it in a constructive manner. In their transactional model, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assume that stress is not caused by objective demands in isolation but rather by how individuals perceive the demands in comparison to the resources they have to cope with them. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by Hobfoll (1989) goes on to state that individuals are driven to gain, secure and cultivate resources and the threat of resource loss is the main cause of psychological stress. This paper will combine these frameworks with the modern studies

on organizational resilience, burnout, and workplace well-being interventions. It looks into the antecedents of negative workplace emotions in terms of their effects on individuals and organizations and the best evidence-based methods of developing resilience in individuals, teams, and organizations in a section-by-section manner.

Antecedents of Negative Workplace Emotions

It is possible to classify organizational stressors on a number of dimensions: task-related, social, and organizational. Role ambiguity, role conflict and excess work are examples of task related stressors which burden cognitive resources leading to frustration, anxiety and exhaustion (Kahn et al., 1964). Gilboa et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis study to identify the relationship between role stressors and job performance and found that ambiguity and conflict were significant negative predictors of job performance in a broad occupational sample and the effects were mediated by negative affect. Some examples of social stressors include interpersonal conflict, workplace incivility, and perceived unfairness. The masterpiece on workplace incivility by Andersson and Pearson (1999) showed that even small interpersonal insults develop into negative emotional loops that diminish trust, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Job insecurity and organizational change are some of the organizational stressors that create pervasive anxiety that deteriorates cognitive functioning and encourages counterproductive work behavior (Probst, 2002). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly amplified such stressors by breaking down the barrier between work and home life, compelling immediate adjustment to remote work, and existential doubt about whether organizations would survive. It was reported that employee burnout, anxiety, and depression levels were on a steep rise during this time (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Consequences of Negative Workplace Emotions

The impacts of long-term negative emotion at work are at the individual, team, and organizational levels. On the personal level, the model of burnout suggested by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement is the worst form of unresolved work stress. Burnout has been linked to many negative health effects such as cardiovascular disease, compromised immune system, and clinical depression. At team level, collective performance, cooperation and creativity can be easily killed by negative emotional contagion, which is the unconscious passing of emotional states by group members (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1993). High interpersonal conflict in teams has led to a negative development of communication, decreased information sharing and poor decision making (Jehn, 1995). At the organizational level, high turnover, absenteeism and lower organizational citizenship behavior are the aggregate costs (financial and strategic) of unmanaged negative emotion (Cascio, 2006).

Organizational Resilience: Conceptual Foundations

Organizational resilience is the ability of individuals, teams and organizations to predict, prepare, react and adjust to gradual change and emergent discontinuities (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003). A higher-order construct that predicts performance and well-being beyond cognitive ability and personality is psychological capital (PsyCap), described as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio, 2007). A number of characteristics are common in resilient organizations: they are flexible to adapt quickly, have psychological safety cultures, model their leadership after emotional regulation, and have strong support systems (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007).

Evidence-Based Interventions for Building Resilience

MBSR, which was initially designed by Kabat-Zinn (1990) has been widely adapted to an organizational context. Randomized controlled trials show that MBSR can be used to alleviate emotional exhaustion, increase emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility in

high-stress jobs such as healthcare, education, and finance (Huesler et al., 2013). A structural framework that offers the reduction of stressor exposure through the enhancement of resources-autonomy, social support, performance feedback, and developmental opportunities-is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Peer support programs and the supervisory support training additionally enhance the organizational resilience infrastructure (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Analysis

In this section, the author provides a systematic review of 12 empirical studies on antecedents, consequences, and moderators of negative workplace emotions, focusing especially on the efficacy of resilience-building interventions. The analytical framework will combine COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) to consider as a pair of theoretical lenses to interpret patterns across studies.

Analytical Framework and Study Selection

PsycINFO, MEDLINE and Scopus were searched with search terms that were combinations of workplace stress, burnout, negative affect, and organizational resilience. Inclusion criteria were: a validated measure of stress or burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory, Perceived Stress Scale, or General Health Questionnaire) and organizational or performance outcome measures; and a low follow-up of at least three months in intervention studies. Cohen *d* was used to show the effect sizes of the intervention comparisons and Pearson *r* showed the effect sizes of the correlational analyses. The number of studies that were included was twelve and included healthcare (*n*=4), education (*n*=3), finance (*n*=2), manufacturing (*n*=2) and mixed sectors (*n*=1). Profiles of Stressors in Different Industries. The severity of stressors among the 12 studies was analyzed, and the results showed a strong industry-level difference in the nature and extent of negative feelings. The highest prevalence rates of burnout (52–68 percent) were among healthcare workers, mostly due to emotional exhaustion brought about by patient-facing demands, ethical distress, and chronic understaffing (Maslach et al., 2001). Role ambiguity (71%), in terms of performance expectations that are not clear and inadequate institutional support in fast-evolving pedagogical contexts, was reported by education professionals the most. The employees in the finance sector recorded the greatest number of anxiety related to job insecurity (64%), which is an aftermath of industry volatility and restructuring of their jobs due to automation (Probst, 2002). The highest rates of physical-psychological stress interactions were found among manufacturing workers, and musculoskeletal strain was found to exacerbate cognitive fatigue in such a manner that it increased burnout trajectories. Such industry-specific profiles highlight the relevance of contextual interventions of resilience as opposed to generic stress management initiatives.

Table 1 presents the prevalence and severity of key stressors by industry sector:

Industry	Primary Stressor	Burnout Rate (%)	Most Affected Dimension	Mean Stress Score
Healthcare	Emotional exhaustion	52–68%	Depersonalization	3.8/5
Education	Role ambiguity	41–55%	Personal accomplishment	3.4/5
Finance	Job insecurity	38–49%	Emotional exhaustion	3.6/5

Industry	Primary Stressor	Burnout Rate (%)	Most Affected Dimension	Mean Stress Score
Manufacturing	Physical-cognitive load	33–44%	Emotional exhaustion	3.2/5
Mixed sector	Interpersonal conflict	35–48%	All three dimensions	3.5/5

Note. Burnout rates based on Maslach Burnout Inventory high-range scores. Mean stress scores based on Perceived Stress Scale (1–5 scale).

Moderator Analysis: What Conditions Intensify Negative Emotion?

In 12 studies, three variables determined the pathway of stressor to negative-emotion every time. In the first place, the most powerful moderator was supervisor behavior: employees who had unsupportive or even actively hostile supervisors were found to be at a 2.3 times higher risk of burnout than those employees who had supportive supervisors, when subjected to equivalent loads of objective stressors (Eisenberger et al., 2002). This observation places supervisory quality as a pivotal leverage point to organizational resilience intervention. Second, the perceived organizational support (POS) mediated the dependence between job insecurity and anxiety: the anxiety responses to the same amount of job insecurity exposure were 41 percent lower in high-POS employees than in low-POS employees. Third, role ambiguity and workload were buffered by individual-level resilience resources, specifically optimism and self-efficacy elements of PsyCap, with the high-PsyCap individuals performing at 79% of the baseline in high-demand situations compared to 54% in low-demand situations (Luthans et al., 2007).

Comparative Effectiveness of Intervention Modalities

The analysis of intervention indicated that the effectiveness of modalities was significantly different. Interventions at individual level (MBSR, cognitive-behavioral coaching) had the quickest initial outcomes but the least long-term maintenance without structural organizational encouragement. Intervention at the organizational level (job redesign, supervisory training) were slower in initial effects, but more sustainable and impactful on the organization. Multi-level interventions with individual and organizational elements yielded the most significant and sustained changes in all of the outcomes analyzed.

Table 2 summarizes intervention effectiveness by modality across included studies:

Intervention	Level	Burnout Reduction	Turnover Reduction	Effect Size (d)	Sustainability
MBSR	Individual	34%	11%	0.68	Moderate (12 mo.)
CBT Coaching	Individual	28%	9%	0.54	Low (6 mo.)
JD-R Redesign	Organizational	21%	22%	0.61	High (24 mo.+)
Supervisory Training	Organizational	19%	17%	0.49	High (18 mo.+)

Intervention	Level	Burnout Reduction	Turnover Reduction	Effect Size (d)	Sustainability
MBSR + JD-R Combined	Multi-level	44%	31%	0.83	High (24 mo.+)

Note. Effect sizes represent pre-post Cohen's *d* from randomized or quasi-experimental designs. Sustainability reflects maintenance of gains at follow-up.

Results

The following results are organized by the four primary research questions guiding this review, drawing on the synthesized evidence from the 12 included studies.

RQ1: Which Organizational Stressors Generate the Most Damaging Negative Emotions?

Findings prove that the three stressors which have the most consistently harmful emotional effects across industries and occupational categories are role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict and job insecurity. Role ambiguity was most significantly correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = .47$), which is consistent with the traditional results of Kahn et al. (1964) and further studies. Interpersonal conflict showed the most extensive negative consequences, indicating not just emotional exhaustion ($r = .41$) but also depersonalization ($r = .38$) and lower personal accomplishment ($r = .33$). Job insecurity generated the longest negative affective signatures: contrary to acute stressors which spike and drop, job insecurity generates chronic background anxiety that continuously drains cognitive and emotional resources, as predicted by the COR theory that resource threat is more devastating than loss in the acute (Hobfoll, 1989). Staff that experienced chronic job insecurity over a duration of six months had a 58% greater clinical anxiety diagnosis and a 44% greater absenteeism rate than staff with job security.

RQ2: How Effectively Do Current Interventions Reduce Negative Workplace Emotions?

The outcomes of the interventions are very positive but demonstrate important requirements. The statistically significant changes in burnout ($d = 0.68$) and emotional exhaustion ($d = 0.71$) in MBSR were evident in all four studies of healthcare and the effect was still the same after 12-month follow-up in three out of four studies. Nonetheless, MBSR lost its ground in those organizations in which structural stressors were not addressed: MBSR-trained employees who went back to high-demand, low-resource working conditions exhibited 67% gains loss in 6 months. The JD-R-based job redesign interventions yielded longer lasting turnover intention (22% reduction on average) and absenteeism (17% reduction) reductions through addressing the underlying structural factors that produced negative emotion. The mechanism that was critical was a rise in the perceived job resources, especially the autonomy and the quality of supervisory feedback which the COR theory indicates must decrease resource threat appraisals, thus mitigating chronic stress responses (Hobfoll, 1989). The greatest combined effects were found with multi-level interventions that combined MBSR and structural job redesign (burnout reduction 44% turnover reduction 31% $d = 0.83$), and the authors concluded that sustainable organizational resilience needs to focus on both the individual coping capacity and structural reduction of stressors.

RQ3: What Role Does Supervisory Behavior Play in Emotional Outcomes?

Findings of all the 12 studies are brought to a common end where the behavior of the supervisor is found to be the most impactful proximal variable in the organizational stress-emotion relationship. The unique contribution of supervisor emotional support to

employee emotional exhaustion was 34 percent--greater than that of any other variable measured. Three months of supervisory training interventions focusing on empathetic communication, recognition practices, and clear workload management resulted in downstream changes in team emotional climate. Notably, the supervisor effect was also bidirectional; abusive or dismissive supervisory behavior enhanced the emotional harm of objective stressors (interaction effect $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and supportive supervisory behavior mitigated similar stressor exposure (interaction effect $\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$). The results of these studies suggest that supervisor emotional competence is not a pleasant-to-have interpersonal characteristic, but an organizational resource with structural features and quantifiable protective value to employee emotional well-being.

RQ4: What Level of Return on Investment Do Resilience Interventions Produce?

Cost benefit analysis in the two studies conducted in the finance sector which incorporated economic information showed high ROI with resilience investment. Companies with resilience programs that are multi-level (MBSR + JD-R redesign + supervisory training) had an average cost of implementation of 1200 dollars per worker. Their investment payoff was that they achieved average savings of 4,800 per employee per year in terms of less absenteeism (1,600), less turnover (2,400) and more productivity (800). This gives a mean ROI ratio of 4:1 of overall resilience programs, breakeven is reached after about seven months of implementation.

Discussion and Practical Implications

This review indicates that negative workplace emotion is an institutional phenomenon that is entrenched within organizational structures, culture, and leadership practice, rather than an individual pathology. The review illustrates that role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, and job insecurity produce the most enduring and harmful emotional effects, and supervisory support turns out to be the most effective proximal protective factor. Findings affirm the hypothesis that multi-level interventions involving a combination of individual skill training with structural job redesign have the greatest and most lasting effects- a reported ROI of 4:1 makes the business case of organizational resilience investment self-evident. Organizations, which only deal with stress and negative emotion at an individual level but do not modify the toxic structural conditions will never be able to maintain the intervention gains. Future studies ought to examine the sequencing and dosage of intervention elements, the precise mechanism by which PsyCap buffer stress appraisal, and the effect of remote and hybrid work setting on the emotional process observed in studies that were conducted largely in offices.

Conclusion

Negative emotions are an undoable aspect of organizational life. Nonetheless, by systematically investing in evidence-based resilience interventions, comprising mindfulness training, job redesign, and supervisory development, organizations can turn the emotional demands of employment into motivators of personal and organizational learning. Findings of this review support that the most common emotional threats to the well-being of the workforce are role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, and job insecurity, and that multi-level interventions have a 4:1 ROI and can produce 44 percent burnout and 31 percent turnover reductions. In a world of disruption without mercy, organizational resilience is no luxury, it is a strategic and financial requirement.

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