



I know you are suffering from burnout: The moderated mediation effects of "leisure benefits" and "leisure coping" on the burnout model of flight attendants

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ABSTRACT

Is leisure the best policy in work? This study explored the moderated mediation effects of the leisure benefit systems organized by airline companies and the leisure coping strategies adopted by the flight attendants themselves on the model of "job demands—burnout—health problems." This study distributed questionnaires to 362 flight attendants and used hierarchical regression analysis and process analysis to verify its hypotheses. The results of this study reveal that the mediation model of "job demands—burnout—health problems" is obvious. The moderated mediation effect on the mediation model implies that leisure benefit systems will weaken the relationship between job demands and burnout and then improve health problems. Leisure coping strategies will ease the relationship between burnout and health problems, while indirectly weakening "job demands—burnout—health problems." Finally, this study proposed several management suggestions for airline companies to promote leisure benefit systems and leisure coping strategies for flight attendants.

1. Introduction

In light of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the passenger volume is expected to reach 4.3 billion in 2018. Although the aviation industry is booming, the speed in the recruitment and training of relevant personnel each year fails to catch up with the demands of passengers. Consequently, the existing flight attendants have to prolong their attendance hours and thus face increased job demands. Moreover, their appearance and emotional expressions must comply with the regulations of airline companies (Hochschild, 1983). Flight attendants work under high pressures because of frequent and irregular shifts and long attendance hours (Chen and Kao, 2012; Hur et al., 2013). The above working conditions cause emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and aesthetic labor (Chen and Kao, 2012) burden on flight attendants. Chen and Chen (2012) specified that flight attendants are prone to burnout due to high work demands and eventually lead to health problems. All the above evidence demonstrates that job demands for flight attendants are the obvious cause of their burnout and health impairment.

Job demands refer to the work requirements of organizations, and employees must input physical and psychological resources to meet such demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). If job demands exceed the load of employees, such demands will exert pressure on employees

(Meijman and Mulder, 1998) and cause burnout (Shirom, 2003). If such demands are accumulated in the long-term, they will impact the health and well-being of employees (Demerouti et al., 2001). Other studies indicated that this psychological process was referred to as a health impairment process (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Mayerl et al., 2016). Bakker et al. (2003) pointed out that job demands will lead to health problems through burnout. Chen and Chen (2012) confirmed that the job demands of airline companies are a factor in predicting the burnout of flight attendants, as well as the main indirect reason for health damage. Upadyaya et al. (2016) deemed that workload in the dimension of job demands is an important source of burnout, which can cause mental health problems and reduce the recovery ability of employees. Past research has indicated the apparent existence of the mediation model of "job demands—burnout—health problems" (Chen and Kao, 2012), and it is a significant topic of this study to expand the mediation model.

In contemporary times, people attach importance to leisure and consider it an essential strategy to restore strength, refresh oneself, and relieve work pressure (Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000). Some have argued that if an organization could provide strategic benefit resources to its employees, it would establish good interactions with its employees (Muse and Wadsworth, 2012). Mansour and Tremblay (2016) assumed that leisure benefit systems, as provided by an organization, are rich

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and strategic channels of benefit resources to protect employees and enhance their well-being. Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) asserted that leisure benefits are the measures taken by an organization to meet the leisure demands of its employees, such as extended vacation time, staff travel, and flexible reduction in work hours (Deery and Jago, 2009). Thus, if an organization can meet the leisure demands of its employees through leisure benefits (e.g., holiday or annual leave and relevant travel allowance, and incentive travel), it will alleviate burnout and health problems arising from job demands. In other words, the leisure benefit systems of an organization can regulate the mediation model of “job demands—burnout—health problems.” This is the first topic probed in this study.

Leisure coping strategies refer to the behavior of participating in leisure activities to regulate pressure and cope with emotion (Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000). Lu et al. (2016) also asserted that individuals will adopt different leisure strategies according to different pressures, in order to respond to pressure and maintain health. Hull and Michael (1995) deemed that when employees are under pressure, leisure activities can relieve stress, enhance positive emotions, and release negative emotions. Furthermore, leisure activities can help in maintaining physical health (Iwasaki and Mannell, 2000). Lowe and Bennett (2003) held that when individuals feel more stress, leisure will cushion the threat of stress and moderately maintain physical and mental health. It can be seen that flight attendants with better leisure and regulation ability can more appropriately cope with the burnout caused by job demands and improve their health problems. In other words, the leisure coping strategies of an individual can regulate the mediation model of “job demands—burnout—health problems.” This is the second topic probed in this study.

Past research on “job demands—burnout—health problems” mostly focused on the “work-level” resources provided by organizations, such as autonomy, job identity, and social support (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Fried and Ferris, 1987), which regulate the mediation model (Bakker et al., 2004). However, they ignored both the impact of leisure resources provided by organizations and the alleviation effect of leisure coping strategies on individuals. From the concepts of “first off (leisure) and then on (work),” this study discusses the moderated effects on the mediation model from two stages. The first stage is the moderated effect of leisure benefit systems provided by “organizations,” and the second stage is the moderated mediation effect of leisure coping strategies on “individuals.” It is of profound significance to fill the gap in past research by clarifying the moderated mediation effects on the mediation model of “job demands—burnout—health problems.”

2. Literature review

2.1. Job demands and burnout

Job demands originally come from job demands-resources theory; JD-R theory) (Demerouti et al., 2001). The major content of job demand from an organization is that employees need to input physical and spiritual resources in order to meet the organization's requirements (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The job demands may produce suitable pressure, and employees can regard it as a challenge to motivate themselves and their growth (Babakus et al., 2009). Alternatively, when the job demands from an organization exceed employees' capacities, employees may experience work burden owing to the additional efforts required to accomplish their work. (Fox et al., 1993). Job demands refer to the continuous physical or psychological (cognitive and emotional) efforts made in the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspect of a job. Thus, job demands are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs, such as the heavy workload arising from work, working environments leading to physical discomfort, and emotional demands caused by communication with customers (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Bakker et al. (2004) measured job demands from three dimensions: workload, emotional demands, and

work-home conflict. Workload refers to the whole amount of work of an employee, as required by work (Spector and Jex, 1998). Emotional demands can be defined as those aspects of the job that require sustained emotional effort because of interactions with clients (de Jonge and Dormann, 2003). Work-home conflict is a form of role conflict, meaning that the general requirements, time, and pressures of work interfere with the performance of relevant family responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Demerouti et al. (2001) believed that job demands that surpass psychological and material resources might lead to increased pressure, followed by health problems and negative organizational results.

Burnout is the sum of work-related stresses, and it was originally observed in people's work (Maslach and Jackson, 1986). Maslach (1982) pointed out that burnout is due to over-demanding work and is a syndrome consisting of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Exhaustion is a feeling of fatigue; it especially refers to the chronic fatigue caused by overload. Cynicism refers to an indifferent attitude toward work, the loss of interest in work, and the idea that work is meaningless. Reduced professional efficacy means that someone is not qualified to meet job demands or organizational requirements and may have no sense of achievement (Hakanen et al., 2006); however, some researchers believe that compared with the other two dimensions, reduced professional efficacy has a different role (see e.g., Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Leiter, 1993). Therefore, many past studies adopted exhaustion and cynicism to evaluate burnout (Green et al., 1991; Schaufeli and Buunk, 2003) and explored the causes and consequences (Bakker et al., 2004; Hakanen et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2001).

Moderate pressure arising from job demands can be regarded as a challenge by employees, which can motivate self-growth. On the contrary, excessive job demands will cause an overwhelming pressure to employees, followed by increased negative emotions, reduced work, and burnout (Babakus et al., 2009). Past studies pointed out that frequent exhaustion due to overload, in the long-term, will make employees feel that their spirit and energy are completely used up (e.g., Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Leiter, 1993; Wright and Cropanzano, 1998). Some researchers thought that job demands and burnout are highly correlated; in particular, emotional demands in job demands have the most apparent impact on burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001; Lee and Ashforth, 1996), followed by work-home conflict, as role pressure is prone to cause depression (Haines et al., 2008). Some studies held that high job demands will reflect poor job performance (Netemeyer et al., 2005) and reduced job satisfaction of employees (Bacharach et al., 1991). To sum up, this study assumes that when flight attendants face excessive job demands, especially the overload of emotional demands, in terms of contact with customers, and work-home conflict, as caused by antisocial work schedules, they are prone to have the signs of burnout, such as exhaustion and cynicism. Accordingly, this study puts forward the following hypothesis:

H1. If airline companies make higher job demands for flight attendants, the latter will have higher burnout.

2.2. Burnout and health problems

Health refers to a sound physical, mental, and social well-being, not just a disease or weakness (Callahan, 1973). Many researchers generally classify health into general and mental health (Cleary et al., 1991; Lu et al., 1999). General health refers to the state of the absence of illness and a positive self-assessment of health (Idler and Kasl, 1991). Mental health refers to the state of happiness, meaning that employees can realize their abilities and adapt to normal life (World Health Organization, 2004, p. 12). Past studies typically adopted the general and mental health to assess health problems (Chen and Kao, 2012; Ware and Sherbourne, 1992).

Stress has become one of the most serious health issues of the 21st

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