

The Role of Social Support on Job Burnout in the Apparel Firm

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Abstract

Managing the causes of job burnout has become a momentous phenomenon in career management literature. Majority of the apparel firms in Sri Lanka are experiencing job burnout as a massive dispute where it represents many work-related and non-work related issues that employees endure. In this context, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of social support on job burnout among the female worker level employees of a leading apparel firm in Sri Lanka. The study is mainly considering the primary data. Present study is using survey method to analyze the objectives. The data were collected through a self-administrated questionnaire from 142 respondents of the selected apparel firm. The correlation analysis of the study revealed that the social support has a strong negative relationship with job burnout while regression analysis identified that social support is significantly contributing to determine job burnout (51.1%). Moreover, multiple regression analysis indicated that family support has the highest impact on job burnout among the worker level employees. The findings of the study have various managerial implications for other apparel manufacturing firms and other industries in Sri Lankan social context.

Keywords: co-worker support, supervisor support, family support, society support, job burnout

1. Introduction

The continuous changes in the organization create a strain on organization and individuals as well by raising the expectations regarding employees' time, performance and energy. Job burnout is a negative psychological state people experience when they are suffered from stress for a longer period. Job burnout may arise when meeting the job demands require high effort and is therefore, associated with high cost (Aerts, 2017). Among various factors that reduce employee motivation and productivity at work, job burnout could be considered a critical concern for managers. Traditionally, burnout is encompasses into three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Lamb, 2009). Studies have also found that the chronic experience of job burnout tends to increase depression and other health related problems. Therefore, understanding the causes of job burnout in apparel industry is essential in order to prevent the issues and to perform well in the current business world.

The stress levels of worker level employees as well as the management in apparel industry have shown a tremendous growth due to lead time, competitive nature and socio cultural impacts. The results of these challenges are that an employee will have greater job demands and need a good work-related or non-work related support to overcome the bundle of strain. Social support is defined as "that subset of persons in the individual's social network upon whom he or she relies for socio-emotional aid, instrumental aid, or both" (Thoits, 1982, p. 148), at work as a key antecedent of job burnout. Therefore, the support from supervisors, co-workers, family members and society are really important to tolerate the work related stress among the employees. Also this social support is a key coping resource, which may help reduce job burnout by providing individuals with socio-emotional aid in the form of affection, understanding, or esteem and instrumental aid in the form of advice, information, and assistance with work responsibilities. The support from working environment is more highlighted by many authors as supervisors and co-workers likely to provide valuable information and feedback daily. Also the degree of family support and negative perception of society on garment

workers also directly impact on the level of stress. Hence, it is needed to focus on both work-related and non-work related social support gained by the worker level employees in apparel industry.

Managing people in the particular apparel organization has become a challenging aspect in the modern days due to its competitive nature and higher exposure to the global market. In industry, it is highlighted that the job stress significantly impact on worker compensation claims, health care costs, disabilities, absenteeism and productivity losses. It is also obvious that supervisor support may reduce job stress, burnout, and health problems related to work and similarly co-worker support could reduce the absenteeism rate, enhance the opportunities to use new skills and attitudes and enhance the job satisfaction of the employees by having a profuse relationship in the workplace. At the same time emotional and supportive hands of family members in needs and agreeable support from the society are also have a major impact on the machine operators and team leaders who work in shift basis to complete the target based work assignments. This emphasizes giving more concentration to manage social support is very important as that impact to employee job burnout in the workplace. It is also noted that the current study concepts such as social support and job burnout have not been studied much among the worker level employees so far and not especially in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. More specifically the support gains from family members and affirmative support from the society for apparel sector employees have not been revealed by many authors is a knowledge gap in the literature. Therefore, it is needed for an additional study to investigate the effect of social support on job burnout in the particular sector. In this context, the objective of the study is to investigate the effect of social support on job burnout among the worker level employees in a leading apparel firm in Sri Lanka.

In order to accomplish the objective of the present research, the study first review the literature on social support and job burnout to form a baseline for justifying the relationship and/or impact of social support on job burnout using the theoretical framework. Second, using a deductive approach, the study could accept or reject the hypotheses and the findings from 142 respondents have being analyzed using bivariate and multivariate analysis. Finally, the main findings obtained by the current study are discussed by the researcher and some recommendations are suggested to be implicated by the relevant managers.

2. Literature Review

This section explores relevant literature related to social support and job burnout. Also this review of literature allows the researchers to establish the theoretical framework and methodological focus and more specifically justifies the reason for conducting the present study.

2.1 Job Burnout

Burnout is the exhaustion of physical or mental strength as a result of inability to balance the personal and professional demand and it is due to prolonged heavy pressure on individuals. Although this concept was first coined in 1974 by Herbert Freudenberger, still now it is being studied by the researches as burnout cannot be underestimated. Recently, Angeli, Michael, Mustafa and Terk (2015, p. 70) defined burnout as “a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that result from long term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding, where the key features lies in the attribution of fatigue and exhaustion to specific domains or spheres in the person’s life”. An investigation observed the concept burnout as a state of energy depletion and loss of commitment (Peerayuth, Murad, & Sandra, 2016). Though different people can bear different levels of stress for different length of time, burnout most of the times lead a person to become completely nonfunctional. Also number of factors may influence a person to be burned out such as; demographical characteristics, lifestyle factors, attitudes in the workplace and job factors. This burnout creates many consequences to both the organization and employees. The consequences for the individual include depression, health problems, spillover into one’s private life, not to be productive, satisfied with the job and committed towards the organization which ends up with poor performance, poor quality, often absenteeism and sick leaves. Burnout should not be underestimated as many research suggested that at the moment 17% of the population have symptoms characterized by burnout (Aerts, 2017). According to Martina (2018), emotional exhaustion is characterized by feeling emotionally drained, extremely tired, with a lack of energy and the necessary emotional resources to cope with continuing demands. Excessive job requirements and endless struggle leads to a chronic state of physical and emotional deficiency. This chronic exhaustion could make the employees to distance themselves emotionally from their job, reduce their involvement with their work and might cause individuals to quite from their jobs.

The second component depersonalization is relates with negative interpersonal or callous attitudes towards others as a result of burnout at the workplace. Hence, employees in an organization may try to be isolated and disjoin with the co-workers, customers and others at the organization due to the cynical feeling. And also will

results in a negative, cynical, uncaring or usually detached response to various aspects of the job and people at work (Martina, 2018).

2.2 Social Support

The provision of social support is the best way to support an employee to tolerate the unavoidable stressors at workplace adequately. Simply it is the assistance or support one person can receive to achieve the day today tasks through his or her interaction with supervisor, co-workers, family members or society. Social support has been broadly defined as “social transactions that are perceived by the recipient or intended by the provider to facilitate coping in everyday life, especially in response to stressful situation” (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarosan, 1990). And the literature on social support that has accumulated over the past two decades suggests that high level of social support can have direct impact on better health, fewer psychological issues, and speedy recoveries from injuries, illness and better mental health.

Many studies in the occupational stress literature recognize that work support (supervisors and co-workers) and non-work support (family, friends, and people outside the organization) may be differently effective in reducing work-related stressors and burnout. Most of the studies consider the supervisor and/or co-workers to be the two major sources of support of employees. It is proposed that in dealing with stressors at workplace, organizational sources will provide more support than family and friends outside of the workplace (Ellis & Miller, 1994). The argument that work support is more effective than non-work support in protecting employees from strains has been supported in many literatures (Beehr, 1985). But with the concern of our scenario in the society, study regarding the support from family members and people around the employee outside the organization is a need to take action against the negative effects of job burnout among the selected sample. Therefore, the major intention of the current study is to investigate regarding the level of support from all work and non-work related people such as supervisors, co-workers, family and society support for the worker level employees in apparel firm.

First dimension, co-worker’s support can be defined as “the extent to which one’s co-workers are helpful, can be relied on in times of need, and are receptive to work-related problems” (Menguc & Boichuk, 2012, p. 1360). It is obvious that having conversation among the co-workers about any work-related or non-work related matters may reduce the feeling of tiredness, boringness, and other negative feelings at workplace due to high job demands.

Second dimension, Supervisor support is the most potent in reducing job related stress and strain as they set targets, give feedbacks on performance, provide social and material support, and help to solve problems. The supervisors tend to have an influence over attitudes and behaviour of employees (Liaw, Chi, & Chuang, 2010). Studies indicated that there is a lower level of emotional exhaustion with more informational, emotional, instrumental and appraisal support from supervisors (Li, Ruan, & Yuan, 2015). Further, Mansour and Tremblay (2016), explored that low wages and less support from a supervisor can lead to more strain at work and as well as family.

Third dimension, family support refers to the sense of support that an individual perceives he or she receives from his or her familial environment; it constitutes an important element of social support (Ilias, Hatzmichelakis, Souvatzoglou, Anagnostopoulou, & Tselebis, 2001). Usually this support involves empathy, understanding and assistance and in research it was also stated that partner support has a negative relationship with family-to-work conflict (Voydanoff, 2005). The apparel industry is dominated by female employees and many research shows that a working female, who is married and have children, is more prone to experiencing stress at workplace. Also employees working in shifts, who have supportive interaction with a spouse, parent or best friend have to experience fewer psychological effects while working under a vast pressure. Lack of awareness regarding the culture inside of an apparel firm, distrust about the spouse or children, change of dressing sense after joining the organization, getting newly married and dissatisfaction with the night shift work in apparel firm will not allow the family members to be supportive to the worker level employees.

Support from society or people around the employees are also an important aspect to be focused by the human resource management in apparel industry. Negative perception of the society regarding the workers working in apparel firm and the negative image created among the community about apparel industry will not encourage the employees to work with full satisfaction. Wrong way of communicating regarding the company policies and procedures by the employees who get turnover, unethical behaviour of a set of garment workers and communities’ bad thought regarding night shift creates a bitter work experience and especially women are slightly more likely to drop out of depression. At the same time, reluctance of helping employees in an emergency situation by the society will lead to higher employee absenteeism, less performance, feel of quitting the work. Thus, it is a serious issue which is studied by very few researchers and this has a major impact on employee performance which needs to be considered by the management in apparel firms.

2.3 Empirical Findings

Table 1. Empirical Evidence Related to Relationship and Impact of Social Support on Job Burnout

Investigation	Empirical Evidence
Kilfedder, Power, & Wells (2001)	The study examined the influence of social support on burnout among 510 psychiatric nurses and reported that lower levels of emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.30$) and depersonalization ($r = -0.20$) are associated with greater availability of social support.
Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayana, & Schwartz (2002)	In a study for 211 traffic enforcement agents revealed that a cluster of support (supervisor, family and co-worker) accounted for 7% variance in burnout and 12% variance with job satisfaction. And family support was more closely associated with burnout than satisfaction.
Spooner-Lane (2004)	The findings from a research for 273 Australian nurses working in public hospitals indicated moderate level of work support and moderately high levels of burnout, but there is no significant evidence to support the buffering effect of work support on burnout.
Li et al., (2015)	The study conducted for 396 ICU nurses to investigate the social support and burnout and revealed that supervisor support had a significant negative relationship with emotional exhaustion, while co-worker support had a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion.

2.4 Role of Social Support on Job Burnout

When an employee is burn out, she/he can loss focus on her/his job and make fatal errors; which needs to be handle by the organization. Employees with high social support, who were satisfied with that support, showed less emotional exhaustion, less depersonalization and greater feeling of personal accomplishment than the employees with few supports. Some studies have indicated a main or direct effect of social support, suggesting that support reduces burnout regardless of the intensity of the work stressors experienced (Beehr, 1985). In a study it was found that job autonomy has a limited negative effect on emotional exhaustion, while a lack of social support will lead to experiencing burnout (Lin, 2013). It is noted that understanding and dealing with employee issues, communicating and providing necessary information by the supervisor and the emotional support in terms of empathy and care from co- workers can significantly help employees alleviate emotional exhaustion and reduce depersonalization (Peerayuth et al., 2016). Therefore, the quality of the social support can affect the level of burnout employees experience at workplace. With the empirical evidence and own reasoning, the following hypothesis has being formulated:

H1: Social support is negatively related to job burnout.

In particular, the significance of social support on job burnout can be explained by the job demand-resource (JD-R) theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of both the positive and negative indicators of the employee’s well-being. The JD-R model is based on two main components. Job demands may exhaust a person’s resources, leading to lower levels of energy and health problems. Job resources in contrast, can enhance growth and lead to personal development (Yardley, 2012). According to the model, job demands refer to any physical, psychological, social or organizational aspect of a job that create psychological strain on employees (Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2001). Examples of job demand include role ambiguity, role overload, work-family conflict, unsafe work condition, time pressure, inadequate resources and staffing, poor management. On the other hand, job-resources refer to any physical, psychological, social or organizational factors that facilitate employees’ achievement of their job objectives (Demerouti et al., 2001). Examples of job resource include job autonomy, flexible job schedule and social support. The job demand resource model postulates that burnout tends to occur when employees lack sufficient resources to deal with job demands at work (Peerayuth et al., 2016).

Based on the literature and the Job Demands-Resources Model by Demerouti et al., (2001), in particular, this study conceptualizes the following conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

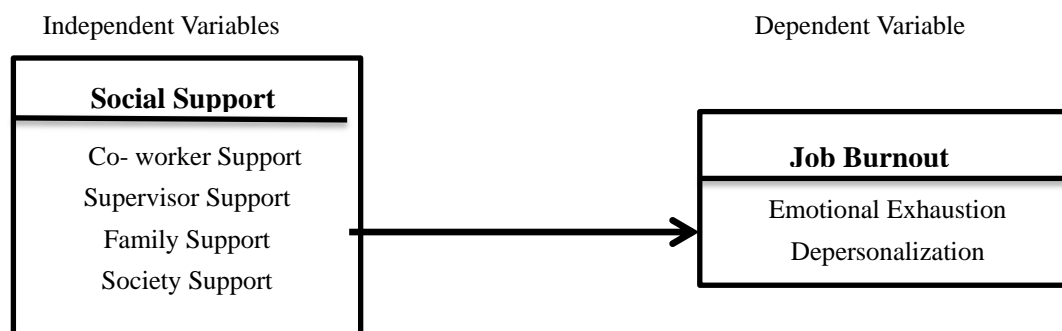


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

This section deals with the methodological steps adopted in the present study. Research methodology provides guidelines to do the research systematically.

3.1 Sample and Procedure

For the purpose of this study, 112 machine operators and 30 team leaders from a study population of 1440 workers in the selected apparel firm. In every type of research, it would be not be possible to include the whole population. Therefore, simple random sampling technique is used in some cases to conduct the study.

The study relied on survey design which is characterized by a quantitative research method where a self-administrated, structured questionnaire was used to collection of data. And this data were collected at a single point of time, which is known as cross-sectional study by previous authors.

3.2 Research Instrument

The researchers used structured questionnaire with 5 point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It consists with two separate sections. In the first section, researchers developed eight questions to get demographic information and in the second section social support and job burnout were measured using standard questionnaires. Independent variable social support measured as supervisor (4 indicators) and co-worker (3 indicators) support using psychosocial and lifestyle questionnaire 2006–2010 documentation report core section LB; the HRS psychosocial working group and the family support (4 indicators) scale and society support (4 indicators) scale constructed by authors based on self-report perceived social support questionnaire for family. And dependent variable job burnout is measured using Maslach Burnout Inventory- General Survey (1996).

3.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation is a bivariate analysis that measures the the strength, direction and indicate whether there is a statistically significant linear relationship between the two variables. Therefore, results of Pearson correlation is used to investigate the relationship between social support job and job burnout among the respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Rules of Thumb about Correlation Coefficient

Coefficient Range	Strength of Association
± 0.91 to ± 1.00	Very strong
± 0.71 to ± 0.90	High
± 0.41 to ± 0.70	Moderate
± 0.21 to ± 0.40	Small but definite relationship
± 0.00 to ± 0.20	Slight, almost negligible

(Source: Hair Jnr, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007)

3.4 Simple Regression and Multivariate Analysis

The simple regression analysis was made to determine functional relationship between independent and dependent variables to conclude whether there is an impact of social support on job burnout. Value of the B coefficient of regression analysis represents the degree to which extent the dependent variable is changed due to the changes of a certain independent variable while other independent variables are constant. Adjusted R^2 is used to compensate for the addition of variable to the model. Significant level (p -value) of B coefficient (unstandardized coefficient) is used to test the hypothesis. If $P \leq 0.05$, alternate hypothesis is supported and can be used to make predictions. If $P \geq 0.05$, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

Multiple linear regression analysis is a method of analyzing the collective impact of two or more variables on a dependent variable. For this study purpose this analysis was used to measure the impact of each dimension (namely work support and non-work support) of social support on job burnout.

4. Findings

4.1 Analysis of Reliability

The reliability of the instrument is measured using Cronbach's Alpha analysis. It measures the internal consistency of the instrument. According to this study the overall variables reliability analysis of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient value for the social support is 0.805 and job burnout is 0.712. So, it indicated that all variables are in accepted level of reliability.

4.2 Relationship between Social Support and Job Burnout

Table 3. Correlation among Social Support and Job Burnout

	Variable	Job Burnout
Social Support	Pearson Correlation	-0.715
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	Covariance	0.095
	N	142

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

(Source: Survey Data)

Table 3 specifies the results of Pearson correlation between social support and job burnout. The significance is at 0.01 levels (2-tailed) is 0.000, and Pearson Correlation (r) is -0.715. It is found as a significant and strong negative relationship between social support and job burnout. Based on the above evidence, it is concluded that the social support is negatively related to employee job burnout. So, the hypothesis of the current study was accepted.

H1: Social support is negatively related to job burnout.

4.3 Impact of Social Support on Job Burnout

The simple linear regression was used to measure the impact of social support on job burnout and the step wise regression analysis is used to measure the impact of dimensions of social support on job burnout in the current study.

Table 4. Model Summary of Simple Linear Regression for Social Support and Burnout

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	St. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
				R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
0.715	0.511	0.508	0.24336	0.059	146.428	0.000

Predictors: (Constant), Social Support

(Source: Survey Data)

Table 4 presents the R square statistics is 0.511 it means social support has 51.1% impact on employees' job burnout. Adjusted R Square statistics indicated that the 50.8% of the variation in the employees' job burnout is explained by social support. In other words, the independent variable of social support in the regression model account for 50.8% of the total variation in the job burnout.

Table 5. Coefficient of Simple Linear Regression between Social Support and Job Burnout

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% confidence interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	5.372	0.104		51.754	0.000	5.157	5.578
Social Support	-0.653	0.054	-0.715	-12.101	0.000	-0.760	-0.560

Dependent Variable: Job Burnout

(Source: Survey Data)

According to Table 5, the significance of t value is 0.000 (p<0.05). The unstandardized constant statistic is 5.372 it shows that the model would predict if all of the independent variables were zero. Regression results indicate that the b value of social support is -0.653, it means if social support increased by one point job burnout is reduced by 0.653. Significant of t value is 0.000, it is less than 0.05 and the beta value is -0.715. So, it is concluded that social support has a significant impact on job burnout of the selected apparel firm in Sri Lanka.

Table 6. Model Summary of Step Wise Multiple Linear Regression for Dimensions of Social Support and Job Burnout

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	St. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
				R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
0.604	0.365	0.360	0.27745	0.365	80.369	0.000
0.621	0.386	0.377	0.27377	0.021	4.784	0.030
0.699	0.489	0.478	0.25068	0.103	27.783	0.000
0.721	0.520	0.506	0.24385	0.031	8.846	0.003

Predictors: (Constant), Family Support

Predictors: (Constant), Family Support, Supervisor Support

Predictors: (Constant), Family Support, Supervisor Support, Society Support

Predictors: (Constant), Family Support, Supervisor Support, Society Support, Co-worker Support

(Source: Survey Data)

Table 6 shows the impact of each dimension of social support on job burnout, as it is needed to give solutions for the current research gap in the literature. R square change statistics indicated that the 36.5%, 2.1%, 10.3% and 3.1% of proportion of variance of the job burnout is explained by family, supervisor, society and co-worker support respectively.

5. Discussion

The correlation of coefficient (r) between social support and job burnout as -0.715 which was significant at 0.01 levels. There was a strong, significant and negative relationship between social support and job burnout. This supports the findings of Kilfedder, Power, & Wells (2001), that the lower levels of emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.30$) and depersonalization ($r = -0.20$) are associated with greater availability of social support. But in the current study, a higher level of burnout is associated with lower availability of social support which creates a negative relationship.

The objective of study is to determine the impact of social support on job burnout among the worker level employees of a leading apparel firm in Sri Lanka. Based on the findings it presents that, the social support has a significant impact on job burnout (51.1%) and the b value of social support (-0.653) indicates that if social support increase by one points, job burnout will reduce by 0.653 value. Then the lack social support gain by the respondents lead to feel high level of job burnout. This supports the findings of Baruch-Feldman et al., (2002) which revealed that a cluster of support (supervisor, family and co-worker) accounted for 7% variance in burnout. Also the results of the current investigation is in contrast to the findings of Spooner-Lane (2004), as their study reported there is no significant evidence to support the buffering effect of work support on burnout.

Additionally, multiple regression analysis is studied to understand the impact of each dimensions; co-worker, supervisor, family and society support on job burnout. Beehr (1985) stated that work support is more effective than non-work support in protecting employees from strains has been supported with many literatures. But consequently, the present research illustrates that the results is in contrast to previous research studies that non-work support; family support (36.5% of proportion of variance) and society support (10.3% of proportion of variance) is having a vast variance of job burnout than the variance of supervisor and co-worker support among the worker level employees of the selected apparel in Sri Lanka. However, some contradictory findings of the current research may also reveal because of the different cultural characteristics of the sample, some traditions followed by the females and the nature of the society.

The relationship between social support and job burnout is explained by many researches in different context but very few studies examine these concepts in Sri Lanka and more specifically in the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Also lack of researches related to family support and society support for the worker level employees in Sri Lankan context is a considerable gap in the previous literature. By referring to the other research studies most of the studies suggesting that work related support like supervisor support and co-worker support as the major components of social support which influence on burnout. But this arguments of the literature contrast with the findings of the current research as it concluded that family and society support are having higher impact on job burnout among the employees in the selected apparel firm. Therefore, the current study has approach each gap of the literature and revealed the impact of social support on job burnout and highlighted the most influencing source of social support in Sri Lankan apparel firm.

6. Recommendations

It is necessary to arrange some awareness programs to parents/spouse of the employees to deliver proper information regarding the facilities, nature of firm and work policies to create a positive image in the society ultimately.

Vestibule training method practicing in the selected firm should be much more effective to enhance the performance of the trainees as it creates conflicts with the other co-workers when the trainee cannot meet the expected target in the production floor.

Moreover, a special HR team could be appointed in the apparel firm to deal with negative consequences of job burnout through proper guidance and support.

Further, family-friendly policies, family get-togethers, allowing employees to get leave for family needs, not breaking the promises given to employees by the management and reducing compulsory over time work may reduce the level of burnout in the organization.

7. Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Despite the interesting findings in this study, a number of limitations should be acknowledged. First of all, data is only obtained in the selected apparel firm in Sri Lanka in a quite small sample (N=142). This study focused on Sri Lanka and nothing can be said about other cultures or countries. Another limitation is the use of cross-sectional design in the study. The data is gathered at one time point, and therefore no conclusion can be taken about causal relations. The study is based only on quantitative research approach, where the qualitative research approach will be effective to get more explanation regarding the objectives of the study.

Future studies should be done to investigate the impact of social support on each of the dimensions of job burnout separately. Further, research should take resources from all the different positions into account, different interpersonal and social relation and the level of the task of the employees in studying the relevant concepts. Also future research should incorporate the mediating effect of workplace or job characteristics, culture-specific factors and demographic characteristics will be required to address the issue.

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