

Impact of Empowering Leadership on Employee Burnout: Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

The purpose of the present research study is to determine the impact of empowering leadership on employee burnout with the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the employees of public sector organizations situated in Peshawar. The paradigm of this study is based on positivistic approach. The target population for this study was the employees of public sector organizations including autonomous organizations based in Peshawar metropolitan. The sample size was 220 participants and was picked using a convenience sampling method. Information from the participants were collected through self-administered questionnaire. The results describe that empowering leadership has impact on employee burnout. This infers that empowering leadership could be assumed as predictor of employee burnout. The association of empowering leadership and employee burnout was also moderated by emotional intelligence.

*Keywords:*empowering leadership, employee burnout, emotional intelligence

Introduction

In the present dynamic environment, human capital is considered the most valuable resource. Organizations are currently focusing on empowering their employees to increase organizational profitability and maintain a competitive advantage over opponents. As a result, interest has been growing to find out those leadership approaches that match the requirements of changing environment (Mohapatra & Sundaray, 2018; Hamed, 2010; Lee et al., 2018b). In the public sector organizations in Pakistan, the decision making is done at the top level. The present era demands advancement and innovation in management to cope with the changing external environment. To achieve this end, organizations consistently strive towards employee empowerment (Nadim et al., 2015).

No doubt that empowering leadership is a distinctive leadership style. Nevertheless, evidence likewise exists which demonstrate that empowering leadership may have negative ramifications as well. In the empowering leadership style, the increased autonomy and discretion would actuate negative emotions and feelings in the employee, ending burnout. (Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018a; Cheong et al., 2019).

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Even though empowering appears to be appealing to numerous individuals, not every worker accepts the responsibilities and obligations that accompany empowerment. It has been a common observation that management has a propensity for expecting everybody resembles them — that is envious to acquire more power. This presumption of top management is only substantial for certain individuals; others would slant towards not being bothered with additional power and autonomy. Managers constantly face employee demotivating behavior, increased distance from one's job, the emergence of negative feelings and cynicism culminating into reduced professional efficiency whenever employees are subjected to increased responsibilities and job autonomy. Managers often are not aware of how to deal with them (Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018a).

Along these lines, the present study's focus is to investigate how empowering leadership, employee burnout, and emotional intelligence impact one another in the employees of public sector organizations situated in Peshawar. Consequently, three objectives have been set for this research paper.

- 1.To measure employee burnout, emotional intelligence, and empowering leadership.
- 2.To study the impact of empowering leadership on burnout.
- 3.To explore the moderating role of emotional intelligence between empowering leadership and burnout.

Literature Review

Empowering Leadership (EL)

Empowering leadership intends to give the employee enough legitimate autonomy and discretion to exercise choices and decisions during the activity execution. At the same time, the employee is provided with the essential data, feedback and an environment where he may nurture his aptitude. These measures add to upgrade employees' intrinsic motivation and feeling of value and worthiness (Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018a; Hassan et al., 2019; Kearney et al., 2019).

Empowering leadership is a distinct leadership style from other more prevalent types of leadership processes and behavior such as participative, transformational and leader-member exchange (LMX) style. Still, EL also shares some important similarities amongst these constructs.

Burnout (EBT)

Burnout is a long-lasting response to stressors developed due to emotional and interpersonal factors in the work environment. There are three elements of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Perhaps the first description of

burnout was showed up in Freudenberger's article "Staff Burnout". He noticed that a remarkable heap of the volunteers he collaborated with encountered a gradual emotional depletion and loss of commitment and inspiration. This condition's progress did not occur immediately; rather, it took a year to encounter this condition. This condition was an aftereffect of different mental and physical side effects experienced by the person. He later signified it as burnout. According to Posig & Kickul, (2003), burnout is a psychological process brought about by unrelieved work pressure that results in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced individual achievement and accomplishment.

The first dimension of burnout, emotional exhaustion, is thought to be the main element of burnout. Exhaustion happens when emotional resources are lessened or drained. Exhaustion occurs when there exist extreme demands and insufficient resources. "Exhaustion is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work" (Dierendonck et al., 2005; Maslach et al., 1997). Many symptoms are associated with physical exhaustion; for example, encountering low energy and tiredness, recurrent headache and nausea and change in eating habits are few to delineate. The feelings of, for instance, depression, sadness, hopelessness, and helplessness are associated with emotional exhaustion. The development of a negative attitude towards work and life is associated with mental exhaustion. A mentally exhausted person might exhibit feelings of tardiness, leaving work early and not showing interest in the work. Such a person is also willing to leave the job (Aneela, 2012).

The second dimension of burnout, depersonalization, in which a person is heartless, unfeeling and uncaring against those to whom a worker is dealing. This state of depersonalization or cynicism may result from work overload or conflicting social situation within the work environment. An exhausted person may tend to distance himself from work and demonstrate an uncaring attitude towards work and customers (Aneela, 2012; Maslach et al., 2001).

The third component of burnout, the development of diminished competency and a sense of inefficiency, is the development of one's feelings that he is incapable or incompetent to accomplish a task. The reduced personal accomplishment is developed when there are increased and overwhelming demands of a job. This may lead a person to exhaustion. An exhausted person may not be able to perform effectively. This exhaustion may further switch into cynicism when such feelings are built up; the individual views his contribution as unworthy. Such feelings create the feelings of lack of self-esteem and anxiety in the individual, which further escalates the situation resulting in preventing the individual from performing at his best and utmost

potential (Hamann & Gorden, 2000; Chowdhury, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001).

Relationship between Empowering Leadership and Employee Burnout

One perspective of empowering leadership is that the more empowerment, the better it is. As examined by Kim et al., (2018), in a meta-analysis study, that empowering leadership will be negatively associated with employee burnout. However, the empirical evidence revealed that empowering leadership actually could also induce negative emotions in the employee.

According to Biemann et al. (2015) study, the differential empowerment may be construed as a double-edged sword. The leader's allocations of resources are subject to subordinate conduct and future behavior. This may create future career uncertainty and will result in low career satisfaction among subordinates. The studies of Cheong et al., (2016), pointed out that empowering leadership may culminate into two kinds of impacts, i.e positive and negative or enabling and burdening.

The cost of autonomy notion by Langfred & Moyer (2004) describes that more autonomy incites job burnout. The notion further argues that empowering leadership additionally has a demotivating mechanism. When more autonomy is given to employees without allocating enough resources and without giving any advantages, the employees may feel the supervisor's demonstration to move and shift their workload and get more from them. This ultimately surfaces negative emotions and feelings, which results in burnout.

According to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization, Burn-out is specifically relevant in the occupational context. It is continuing workplace stress. (ICD-11 - Mortality and Morbidity Statistics, n.d.). The findings of Cheong et al., (2016) suggest that empowering leaders' behavior tends to put the greater burden and additional responsibilities over their followers, thus leaving them with greater occupational stress viz burnout. Similarly, empirical evidence of the study of Laschinger et al., (2007) identified a high level of burnout in medical-surgical nurses than in critical care and maternal-child areas. This finding may be a result of increased workload and fewer human resources. According to the job demands-resources model (JD-R) by Demerouti et al. (2001), job demands require continuous physical or psychological efforts on the part of employee. Whereas job resources are factors such as autonomy, feedback and support from the organizations. Thus, if there is increased job demand this will induce exhaustion whereas, the lack of resources may culminate into disengagement. These factors, exhaustion and disengagement, end up as job burnout.

H1: Empowering leadership (EL) is positively associated with employee burnout.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

“Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, facilitate, understand and manage emotions”(Nieuwkerk, 2017). Defined by Salovey & Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence is “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions”. The four components of EI are (1) appraisal and expression of emotions in oneself. (2) appraisal and recognition of emotions in others. (3) the regulation of emotions in oneself and others. (4) the use of emotion to facilitate performance. These four components were identified by Davies et al. (1998) and later used by Salovey & Mayer, (1990) to devise an emotional intelligence model. A similar definition and explanation can be found in Whetten & Cameron (2011, p. 63). “Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to diagnose, understand and manage emotional cues”.

Relationship of Emotional Intelligence and Empowering Leadership

One of the prime aims of empowering leadership is to increase the effectiveness of task accomplishment. The managers use emotional intelligence in their interpersonal communication to foster an environment through which employees feel motivated, leading to overall job satisfaction (Udod et al., 2020). The study of Rahman & Bhattacharjee (2014) found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and empowering leadership. It is not enough to empower employees without knowing who could benefit more from it. An emotionally intelligent leader would recognize this aspect and identify the true talented employees in his organization. Erkutlu & Chafra, (2012) identified that leaders high on EI would be truly aware of their subordinate needs. In the resonant leadership style, the leader uses his emotional intelligence to resonate with his subordinates’ needs in the work environment. Such leadership truly understands the requirement of a successful organization (Heckemann et al., 2015).

The four dimensions of empowering leadership, enhancing the meaningfulness of work, fostering participation in decision-making, expressing confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy are all associated with a leader’s emotional intelligence. According to the study of Udod et al. (2020), employees feel a sense of empowerment when leaders share necessary and required information. Similarly, when managers and leaders appreciate their subordinates’ contribution, they feel motivated to improve task accomplishment. Besides, when managers and leaders entrust their subordinates to

perform their task according to their requirements, a sense of empowerment is generated in them. An emotionally intelligent leader understands all such behavior and conduct, which may help impart a sense of empowerment in the subordinates. Thus, the following two hypotheses could be derived from the above reflection:

H2: Higher Emotional intelligence (EI) scores are associated with lower employee burnout (EBT) scores and

H3: EI is negatively associated with employee burnout

Emotional Intelligence, as a Moderator

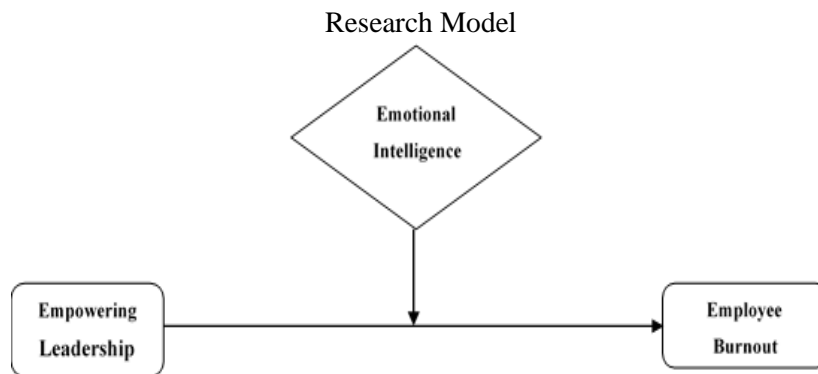
Sufficient empirical evidence is available, which demonstrates that individuals high in EI competencies may be able to deal with the troublesome work environment. As indicated by Szczygiel & Mikolajczak, (2018), emotional intelligence provides buffering from burnout. In troublesome circumstances, an emotionally intelligent worker is increasingly ready to deal with his environment well. Self-awareness, a dimension of EI, is being utilized by the workers to recognize emotions and the impact of those emotions on the work environment. A self-aware worker is ready to adapt to the changing environment. Such worker comprehends the emotions and requirements of others, particularly of supervisors and managers.

Several empirical studies suggest that developing EI competencies should be an integral part of workers training. The findings of studies of Puertas Molero et al., (2019), suggests that EI may be made part of teacher training program to improve teacher's health and personal wellbeing and education success. The study of Dolev & Leshem, (2017) indicated that EI program can be developed anytime during service and that EI training bring about favorable change in the behaviors of teachers which eventually affect teacher's outcome positively and provide them a sense of importance. Several studies can be quoted in which the emotional intelligence has been used as moderator. For example, in the study of South African nurses in the stress-burnout relationship, EI revealed to be significantly related with lower stress and burnout (Görgens-Ekermans & Brand, 2012). Similarly, the study of Augusto Landa et al., (2008), support the assumption that emotional intelligence acted as a protective element against stress. The findings of the study of Slaski & Cartwright, (2002) also acknowledged the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the stress process.

The results of the investigation of Bibi et al., (2013) demonstrated that emotional intelligence assumed a significant role to moderate the relationship among incivility and counter work behavior. In another study by Naseem, (2018), emotional intelligence moderated the association of job stress, employee happiness and life satisfaction.

Similarly, the studies of Nauman et al., (2019), demonstrated the moderating role of emotional intelligence between surface acting and emotional exhaustion such that the positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion is weaker against high levels of emotional intelligence and vice versa. Similarly, emotional intelligence moderated the negative effects of surface acting on job satisfaction such that the negative relationship between surface acting and job satisfaction is weaker with high levels of emotional intelligence and vice versa. It is therefore, presumed that employees high in emotional intelligence will realize their emotions and controls their practices in an improved manner and are less likely to fall prey of burnout syndrome and hence the following hypothesis.

H4: EI moderates the relationship between EL and EBT



Methodology

Sampling Procedure and Method of Data Collection

Due to time constraint, cost and non-availability of information about sampling frame, the convenience sampling technique was adopted for the current study. The target population of this study comprised of few public sector organizations working in Peshawar metropolitan. Three questionnaires were used for measuring the proposed variables. For measuring empowering leadership construct, the Ahearne et al., (2005), measure has been used. 16 items scale of Schaufeli & Salanova, (2007) has been used to measure employee burnout. Similarly, 16 items scale of Wong & S. Law, (2002) has been used to measure emotional intelligence. The total number of items in all the three questionnaires were 44. Five participants per item were selected for data collection. Therefore, the sample size for the current study came out to be $5 \times 44 = 220$ individuals (Kass & Tinsley, 1979).

Reliability of Questionnaires

The reliability of questions was testified through Cronbach alpha measure. According to Hair et al., (2014, p. 90), reliability with

range from 0.6 to 0.7 is considered as the lower limit of acceptability. Table 1 below depicts the reliability statistics of EL, EBT and EI.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics of EL, EBT, EI

	EL	EBT	EI
Cronbach's Alpha	.900	.722	.845
N of Items	12	16	16

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EL	220	1.00	5.00	3.5556	.67257
EBT	220	1.19	4.80	2.9081	.73807
EI	220	3.44	6.94	5.4754	.68538
Valid N (listwise)	220				

Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics of EL, EBT and EI

Table 2 above describes summary of descriptive statistics of all three variables. Statistics reveals that mean value of EL is 3.55 showing that respondents' answers were on the agreed side of the 5-point Likert scale. The mean value of EBT is 2.90 showing a response between occasionally and sometimes of the 7-point Likert scale. The mean value of EI is 5.47 showing a response mostly on agreed side of the 7-point Likert scale.

Regression Analysis

For hypotheses testing, we performed regression analysis by taking empowering leadership and emotional intelligence as independent variables and employee burnout as dependent variable.

H1: Empowering leadership (EL) is positively associated with employee burnout

The correlation analysis revealed that EL and EBT are associated positively and significantly. From table 3 below, the Pearson product moment correlation analysis between EL and EBT gave the value of .253 (significant at $p < .01$).

Table 3 Correlations

	EL	EBT	EI
EL Pearson Correlation	1	.253**	.219**

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	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001
	N	220	219	219
EBT	Pearson Correlation	.253**	1	-.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.009
	N	219	219	218
EI	Pearson Correlation	.219**	-.176**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.009	
	N	219	218	219

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

From the regression coefficient table 4, the unstandardized coefficient B for EL is .328 indicating that only 32.8% change or variance in EBT is attributed to EL with the p value less than .001. This can be inferred from the data that increasing EL will induce burnout in the employees. Thus, alternate hypothesis is accepted, and null hypothesis is confidently rejected. Hypothesis H1 is supported. H2: Higher Emotional intelligence (EI) scores are associated with

Table 4 Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF	
1 (Constant)	3.168	.416	7.623	.000	2.349	3.987			
EL	.328	.071	.303	4.622	.000	.188	.468	.952	1.050
EI	-.261	.071	-.242	-3.694	.000	-.400	-.122	.952	1.050

Dependent Variable: EBT

lower employee burnout (EBT) scores and H3: EI is negatively associated with employee burnout.

From the correlation table 3 above, the association of EI with EBT is -.176 with $p < .05$ ($p = .005$) indicating that EI and EBT are statistically significantly associated. The correlation is weak but statistically significant leading to infer to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, higher the EI score, lower will be EBT score. Thus, hypothesis H2 is also supported.

From the regression coefficient table 4, the unstandardized coefficients for EI is -.261 suggesting that for every one-unit change in EI there is corresponding negative .261 unit change in EBT keeping other variables constant. As the p value is less than .05 ($p = .000$)

therefore EI is a statistically significant predictor of reducing EBT. The result suggests that null hypothesis can be rejected and therefore hypothesis H3 is supported.

H4 EI moderates the relationship between EL and EBT.

Hayes Process Model 1 was performed to determine the relationship between EBT and EI. In table 5 below the model description shows that the R square value is .1417, suggesting an overall variance of the model is 14.17 per cent. The p value is lower than the value of .05 (p=.000) which means that this model is statistically significant.

Table 5 Moderation Model of Emotional Intelligence

Model 1	Y=EBT		X=EL		W=EI	
R	R ²	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3735	.1417	.4563	11.7795	3.0000	214.0000	.0000

From table 6, the coefficient of interaction term is .2112 with $p < .05$ ($p = .0171$) while the R square change value of interaction term (int_1) is -.0232 (table 7) suggesting that an overall 2.3% change has been brought by the introduction of EI in the value of EBT. The signs of lower and upper limit (LLCI and ULCI) are also same suggesting that EI did have some moderating effect. That is after adding EI in the relationship of EL and EBT, there was almost 2.3 percent change in relationship. Closely investigation of interaction graph at figure 1 also showed that after introducing EI as a moderator, it decreased the relationship between EL and EBT. From the graph at figure 1, it can be inferred that at high value of EL and EI the value of outcome variable EBT has decreased. From all these deliberations, it can be concluded that EI moderated (decreased) the relationship between EL and EBT. Therefore, hypothesis H4 is also supported.

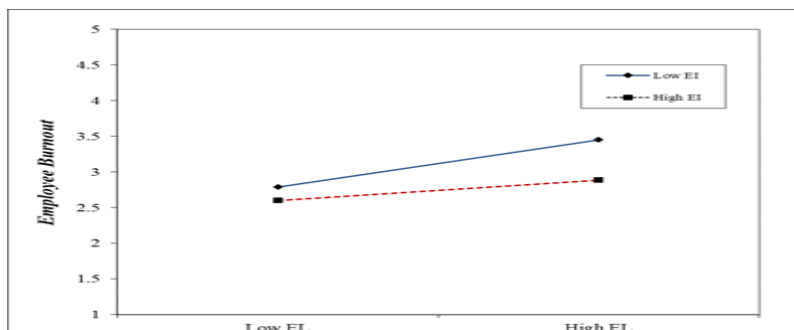


Table 6 Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.9313	.0466	62.9622	.0000	2.8395	3.0230
EL	.3542	.0710	4.9890	.0000	.2143	.4942
EI	.2801	.0703	-3.9849	.0001	-.4186	-.1415
Int_1	.2112	.0879	-2.4030	.0171	-.3844	-.0380
Int_1	ELX EI					

Table 7 Test of highest order unconditional interaction(s)

X*W	R2 Change	F	df1	df2	P
	.0232	5.7746	1.0000	214.000	.0171

Results and Discussion

The prime objective of this study was to explore the impact of empowering leadership on employee burnout with a moderating role of emotional intelligence. The analytical results described that EL is the main contributor to induce burnout in the employees of public sector organization in Peshawar metropolitan. On the other hand, EI did have significant moderation effect over the relationship between EL and EBT. Numerous contemporary research studies confirm the association of EL and EBT such that with the increase in EL there is corresponding increase in EBT. The studies of Kim et al., (2018), confirmed the positive association of EL and EBT. Empowering leadership may not always produce positive outcomes. The two facets of EL are enabling and burdening. The studies of Cheong et al., (2016), confirmed this burdening effect of EL. This burdening effect is also explained by the cost of autonomy which suggests that without allocation of enough resources and giving any significant benefits to the employees, the empowering aspect of leadership may induce negative emotions in the employees which will ultimately end up as burnout. The present study also supported the hypothesis that EI moderates the relationship of EL and EBT. Prior studies have also confirmed the moderating role of EI. With higher EI, less burnout is experienced (Görgens-Ekermans & Brand, 2012).

Limitations and Future Direction for Research

The main limitation is the cross-sectional nature of this research study. Consequently, the outcomes of this study are not generalizable. The future research might be conducted based on longitudinal studies. The nature of present research is quantitative, and data was gathered using questionnaires. It is equally plausible that answers may incorporate biasness from the respondents. Such biasness could not be eliminated. The sample size of this study was 220 and data from various public sector organizations situated in Peshawar city was collected. In any case the study could not include all public sector organizations. In few cases data from only one or two employees of an organization could be collected. By expanding sample size and including all the public sector organizations the results would be more generalized and representative of the population. Another limitation of current study is the gender response rate. Only few female public sector employees participated in the survey. Future studies may consider parity in gender response.

Conclusion

The major findings of the current study suggest that shifting responsibilities without providing resources, direction and benefits, the empowering behavior may end up into burnout. On the other hand, increasing the emotional intelligence of employees and leadership the burnout syndrome could be reduced. In this context, the current study could provide useful directions and information to the management to provide resources, direction, benefits, and trainings to the employees so that overall benefits of empowering leadership may be obtained.

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