

The Moderating Effects of Relational Civility on the Relationship Between Burnout and Turnover Intention

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Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to examine the moderating role played by two relational patterns regarding workplace relational civility (WRC) (Part A— Me towards others – WRC(A); Part B—Others towards me – WRC(B)) in the relationship between burnout and turnover intention in a sample of 159 respondents. Data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed through the SPSS statistical packet program. The findings revealed that employees who reported they were more exhausted and more cynical had more intention to leave their organization. Also, results are indicating that the WRC coming from the others to the employees are more important for the turnover intention. Therefore, the others' behaviors are rather connected to decreasing the negative organizational outcomes (such as burnout and intention to leave). Last, but not least, the findings also indicate that there is a significant moderation effect relationship between WRC and the intention to leave.*

Keywords: *workplace relational civility; burnout; cynicism; exhaustion; professional inefficacy; intention to leave; moderation effect.*

Introduction

For some people in the organizations, a recent Forbes article's title could be seen as intriguing, to say the least: "The biggest motivator at work? Love". The article, signed by Stefano Tasselli (2019) discusses this challenging and, in the same time, conflicting aspect of the title statement given by the switched focus of the individual motivation, from the paycheck to the meaning of work and, we may add, to building the strong and healthy relational behaviors.

The companies' interests should, therefore, be not only linked with employees generating performance, but also finding strategies to diminish the negative organizational outcomes, which from the perspective of materializing in costs increase, could be seen as negative.

Many of these negative organizational outcomes are linked with burnout, namely absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009; Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998), low citizenship behavior and poor job performance (Cropanzano & Byrne, 2003; Iverson, Olekalns & Erwin; 1998; Parker & Kulik, 1995), high intention to leave and low job satisfaction (Himle, Jayaratne, & Thyness, 1986; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Abubader, 2000), loss of productivity and efficiency (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Schaufeli, 2003).

With regards to individual objectives, many of the studies discuss apart from the quality of work, also about the dignity and decency at the workplace (Faioli, 2009), but also, the quality of relationships in the workplace that would lead to positive relational outcomes (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgrem, & Diamonti, 2016; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Kenny, Catraio, Bempechat, Minor, Olle, & Blustein, 2016). This leads to one of the points of conflict in today's organizations since the technology and the systems could be seen as challenging the importance of personal connections, compassion and even love at work (Tasselli, 2019), therefore the importance of building relational civility in the workplace.

One of the main constructs in the I/O Psychology literature, discussing about the relationship at work is the work relational civility (WRC). In accordance with previous studies, we expect to find significant relationships among WRC, burnout and turnover intentions. In this article, we first present the relevant literature leading to our specific research hypotheses. This is followed by the methods applied, discussions and results of this study. We conclude the article with the implications of the study with regard to existing literature and suggestions for future research.

Literature review and hypotheses

Burnout and intention to leave

Burnout is a construct that discusses the negative organizational results. As defined, starting with Freudenberger (1974) that connected it with the tendency to become exhausted by consuming the emotional and physical resources, burnout is a psychological syndrome that included, when initially conceptualized by Maslach and colleagues (1996), three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Out of those three dimensions, depersonalization's construct was, later, enlarged and named cynicism. It included, apart from the characteristics of depersonalization (detachment from people), also, the detachment from jobs' attributes, being characterized by a negative, unconcern attitude toward various aspects of the job or people (Koeske & Koeske, 1989).

For both, individuals and organizations, burnout, which is a result of a process where the person's job demands exceed the person's resources, implying a series of negative implications. From affecting physical health and positively being related to morbidity and bodily disorders (Toker, Shirom, Shapira, Berliner, & Melamed, 2005), cardiovascular disease (Appels & Schouten, 1991; Tennant, 1996) and some psychosomatic symptoms such as poor appetite, headaches and chest pains (Burke & Deszca, 1986), burnout has also been correlated significantly with the experience of psychological distress, anxiety, depression and drops in self-esteem (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

It's presence also leads to undesirable organizational outcomes such as reduced job performance, satisfaction, productivity, organizational commitment, and creativity (Freundenberg, 1974; Maslach et al. 2001; Lee & Shin, 2005; Shirom, 2003; Hackman & Oldman, 1975). Last, but not least, burnout was confirmed by many types of research as one of the most significant variables that could predict intention to leave (Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Knudsen, Ducharme, & Roman, 2008; Lingard, 2003; Jung & Kim, 2012).

As Carmeli and Weisberg (2006) pointed out, the employee which has the intention to leave his or her present job or organization, as it was initially defined by Meyer & Allen (1984), starts not only to think about leaving an organization, but also finding another alternative, and finally having turnover intent. In case of the employees who stay on the job because of a lack of an alternative or their sacrifices would be far greater if they would leave comparing with the situation in which they stay, burnout leads to lower productivity and effectiveness at work (Maslach et al., 2001), comparing with the employees that develop affective commitment, case in which they rather choose to stay in the company (Țânculescu, 2017). Consistent with the previous researches it is hypothesized:

H1: Burnout will be positively related to turnover intention.

Burnout, WRC and Intention to leave

Ducharme, Knudsen and Roman (2008) agreed that the strongest variable that could predict the employees' intention was burnout. Still, organizations invest several type of efforts to decrease the employees' intention to leave, since this behavior lead to serious losses, not only in the knowledge, skills, and abilities remaining in the company, therefore in the organizational effectiveness, but also in tangible and intangible costs (Özbağ, Ceyhunb, & Çekmecelioğlu, 2014). These costs could be seen in the critical organizational competencies often

are embedded in human resources, which include individuals' non-codified body of expertise and skills accumulated through experience, and so are highly rare and difficult for competitors to imitate (Wei & Lou, 2005).

We found the current literature to show a rather high interest in studying the incivility as a behavior rather than on the civility.

Lim, Cortina, and Magley (2008) found significant relationships between incivility and employee health as well as turnover intentions. Also, Dion (2006) found that perceptions of workplace incivility were significantly related to feeling supported by their supervisor and positively related to feelings of occupational stress and turnover intentions.

In a study examining the influence of empowering work conditions and workplace incivility on nurses' experiences of burnout and important nurse retention, Laschinger, Leiter, Day and Gilin (2009) showed that emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and supervisor incivility most strongly predicted turnover intentions. Also, there are studies that show that the more employees report the presence of civil norms at work, the less they report turnover intentions and absences (Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Gilin-Oore, 2011; Walsh, Magley, Reeves, Davies-Schriels, Marmet, & Gallus, 2012; Patterson, 2016).

In their article, Andersson and Pearson (1999) introduce the workplace incivility as a construct and vaguely mention the civility dimension, defining it as "behavior involving politeness and regard for others in the workplace, within workplace norms for respect" (p.454). Recently, civility was defined as "behaviors characterized by a show of concern and regard for others" (McGonagle, Walsh, Kath, & Morrow, 2014).

In the current study, we refer to WRC, a positive construct with implications from both sides (from the individual to the others and from the others to the individual). As DiFabio and Gori (2016) did in their article dedicated to introducing a new measure for understanding the WRC, we like to go beyond studying of incivility at work and to focus rather on the utility of models that include positivity and early interventions as forms of prevention (Hage, Romano, Conyne, Kenny, Matthews, Schwartz, & Waldo, 2007; Kenny & Hage, 2009). The authors defined the concept of relational civility as "a form of relational style characterized by respect and concern for the self and others, interpersonal sensitivity, personal education, and kindness toward others" (DiFabio & Gori, 2016).

The connection between WRC, burnout and intention to leave is mainly based on studies that show that when incivility comes from a supervisor, it can result in employees who are less committed to the organization and report higher turnover intentions (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Leiter, Nicholson, Patterson and Laschinger (2012) found experienced incivility was related to higher levels of exhaustion and cynicism (two components of burnout).

Still, as little research has focused on reducing incivility and improving employee outcomes (Leiter et al., 2011) and not extensive research were conducted to study the relationship between the three variables: burnout, WRC and intention to leave, in the light of the current studies, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: WRC will be negatively related to turnover intention in both cases when H2(a) WRC is generated from the person to the others and when H2(b) WRC is generated from the others to the person.

H3: WRC will moderate the relationship between burnout and turnover intention in such a way that the relationship is weaker for employees H3(a) exerting high levels of WRC (A) towards others and perceiving high levels of WRC (B).

Methodology

Research goal

The goal of this study is to investigate the moderating effect of WRC on the relationship between burnout and turnover intention.

Participants

The study sample was formed of 159 respondents, of which 37 (23.3%) were men, and 122 (76.7%) were women. In total, 128 (72.7%) did not hold a management position and ranged in age from 21 to 65 years, with an average of $M = 40.65$, $S.D. = 8.64$. The majority of the participants 152 (95.6%) have a permanent, full-time, job contract.

Measures

For measuring WRC, we used an instrument with the homonym name (Workplace Relational Civility, DiFabio, & Gori, 2016). This measure refers to people's interpersonal relationships at work. In the first part (A), the respondents are asked to describe how they acted or behaved toward others (colleagues and/or superiors) over the past 3 months. In the second part (B), the respondents are asked to describe how they perceived others (colleagues and superiors) acted or behaved toward them (in the past 3 months). Each of these two sections (A and B) includes three sub-scales: relational decency (RD; I respected the opinions of others / Others respected my opinions), relational culture (RCu; I made comments that valorized others / Others made comments that valorized me), relational readiness (RR; I easily recognized the feelings of others / Others easily recognized my feelings). The answers were collected on a five-point Likert-type scale, from (1) Not at all to (5) A great deal.

We measured organizational burnout using Maslach Burnout Inventory, MBI-General Survey (MBI-GS, Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). It comprises three sub-scales assessing emotional exhaustion (EXH; I feel emotionally drained from my work), cynicism (CYN; I have become less interested in my work since I started this job) and personal accomplishment (INEFF; At work, I feel confident that I am effective at getting things done). The response value for each of the personal accomplishment items are reversed before moving on, generating in a personal inefficiency sub-scale. High scores are indicative of burnout.

Finally, intention to leave (ITL) was measured by the three-item scale of Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth (1978). Both MBI-GS and ITL items were ranked on a five-point Likert-type scale where (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Data analysis and results

To test the reliability of the scales used in the study, Cronbach Alpha scores were calculated for each scale. The Cronbach Alpha scores for each scale were good with overall Alpha reported of .76 - .95.

Also, we calculated means and standard deviations for each variable and the correlation matrix of all variables. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations among all scales used in the analyses are shown in Table 1.

Negative highly significant correlations have resulted in the relation between burnout and its components and the WRC seen as generated from the others towards the respondents. That means that, if one perceives the others behaved in a certain positive manner, they are more prone to have the level of exhaustion ($r = -.35$), cynicism ($r = -.46$) and professional inefficacy ($r = -.30$) correlated as presented in the brackets, with a level of $p < .001$. On the other hand, it is seen that the correlation between the same burnout and WRC is seen as behaviors generated from the respondent to the others is very low in intensity and, as well, non-significant, with correlation coefficients ranging from $-.09$ to $.01$.

With regards to burnout components and WRC as coming from the respondents to the others, there are negative, significant, but low correlations in relation to exhaustion ($r=-.16$, $p < .05$) and cynicism ($r=-.19$, $p < .05$) and highly significant negative correlations with professional inefficacy ($r=-.32$, $p < .001$). When referring to burnout components and WRC as behaviors coming from the others to the respondents, there are, negative significant ($p < .001$) high correlations in relation to all three burnout components: exhaustion ($r=-.35$), cynicism ($r=-.46$), professional inefficacy ($r=-.30$).

The same trend could be observed in the correlation between WRC as coming from the respondents to the others with intention to leave has a lower value ($r=-.21$, $p < .001$) rather than when correlating WRC coming from the others to the respondents to intention to leave returns a more robust negative score ($r=-.52$, $p < .001$). In this manner, our second hypothesis is validated. These elevated scores related to Part B WRC are indicating that the others' behaviors are rather connected to decreasing the negative organizational outcomes (such as burnout and intention to leave).

To test this assumption, a linear regression analysis was run, with the WRC, Part A and Part B, as predictors and the burnout, on one hand, and intention to leave, on the other hand, as the criterion variables. To eliminate as much as possible, the eventual biases in creating and testing the determined models, we analyzed the residual values, we verified the database to identify the outlier values.

The results showed that the WRC, Part A, did not predict burnout ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .552$), whereas the WRC, Part B explains 9.4% from burnout, with $\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$. This second model was highly significant, $F(1, 157) = 16.29$, $p < .001$. Also, when predicting intention to leave, the WRC, Part A explained a low 4.5%, with a $\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$, model significant $F(1,157) = 7.32$, $p < .01$, whereas the WRC, Part B explains explaining 27.2% from the intention to leave, with $\beta = -.52$, $p < .001$. This model was highly significant $F(1, 157) = 58.64$, $p < .001$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic, correlations and Alpha reliabilities of the measures (in the parenthesis)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Relational Decency (Part A)	(.79)												
2. Relational Culture (Part A)	.61**	(.77)											
3. Relational Readiness (Part A)	.46**	.61**	(.87)										
4. WRC (A)	.80**	.85**	.87**	(.90)									
5. Relational Decency (Part B)	.46**	.32**	.33**	.44**	(.82)								
6. Relational Culture (Part B)	.48**	.43**	.37**	.50**	.79**	(.89)							
7. Relational Readiness (Part B)	.36**	.34**	.45**	.47**	.71**	.76**	(.95)						
8. WRC (B)	.46**	.39**	.43**	.51**	.89**	.91**	.94**	(.95)					
9. Exhaustion	-.16*	-.12	-.12	-.16*	-.30**	-.29**	-.34**	-.35**	(.89)				
10. Cynicism	-.18*	-.10	-.19*	-.19*	-.40**	-.43**	-.42**	-.46**	.73**	(.76)			
11. Personal /Professional Inefficacy	-.21**	-.28**	-.30**	-.32**	-.18*	-.32**	-.29**	-.30**	.19*	.36**	(.82)		
12. Burnout	-.09	.01	-.03	-.05	-.30**	-.25**	-.29**	-.31**	.88**	.78**	.61**	(.77)	
13. Intention to leave	-.20*	-.13	-.19*	-.21**	-.47**	-.47**	-.48**	-.52**	.48**	.57**	.19*	.50**	(.90)

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

Model testing results

To test the hypothesis that the intention to leave are a function of multiple factors, and more specifically whether WRC moderates the relationship between burnout levels and employees' intention to leave, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The same analysis was run for both parts of WRC, namely for the A part (where the respondent discussed their behaviors towards others) and for the B part (where the respondents discussed others' behaviors towards themselves).

In the first step, we entered the control variables of gender, age and managerial position. Gender, age and managerial position were not significantly related to turnover intentions even if, in previous studies, the importance of demographic factors in explaining employee burnout and turnover intention (Jackson, 1993; Somers, 1996; Brewer & Shapard, 2004; Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009). Still, there were studies that showed an insignificant correlation between gender, age and intention to leave (e.g. Özbağ, Ceyhumb, & Çekmecelioğlu, 2014).

In the second step, we investigated the impact of burnout on employee turnover intentions. The results revealed that burnout ($\beta=.544$) have a positive significant effect on employee turnover intentions. In the third step, the impact of WRC on turnover intentions was investigated, in the first hierarchical moderated regression analysis performed, for WRC, part A and for WRC, part B, in the second moderated regression performed. The results revealed that WRC (A) was not significantly related to turnover intentions ($\beta=-.059$), whereas, in the second regression analysis performed, WRC (B) was significantly related to turnover intentions ($\beta= -.339$). In the last step, we entered a two-way interaction term between burnout and WRC (A), in the first analysis performed and WRC (B) and found that the relationship between burnout and turnover intention was moderated by both WRC (A) and WRC (B).

To avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term, the variables were centered and this two-way interaction term between burnout level and WRC, for both Part A and Part B was created (Aiken & West, 1991). By adding the interaction term between burnout level and WRC was added to the regression model, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in intention to leave, $\Delta R^2 = .10$, $\Delta F(1, 159) = 25.38$, $p < .001$, for WRC (A) and, also, accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in intention to leave, $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F(1, 152) = 6.61$, $p = .011$, for WRC (B).

Table 2. Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses (for WRC, Part A)

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Step 1: Control Variables				
Gender	.016	-.001	.011	.024
Age	-.031	.067	.056	.074
Managerial Position	-.108	-.065	-.061	-.048
Step 2: Burnout – Intention to leave		.544**	.526**	.556**
Step 3: WRC (A) – Intention to leave			-.059	-.084
Step 4: Moderating Effect Burnout * WRC (A)				.320**
R	.115	.546	.549	.633
R ²	.013	.298	.301	.401
ΔR^2	.013	.285	.003	.100

Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses (for WRC, Part B)

1	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Step 1: Control Variables				
Gender	.016	-.001	.009	.024
Age	-.031	.067	.024	.074
Managerial Position	-.108	-.065	-.044	-.048
Step 2: Burnout – Intention to leave		.544**	.380**	.427**
Step 3: WRC (B) – Intention to leave			-.339**	-.346**
Step 4: Moderating Effect				.168**
Burnout * WRC (B)				
R	.115	.546	.621	.642
R ²	.013	.298	.386	.412
ΔR ²	.013	.285	.088	.026

Note: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01

Conclusions and implications

The results of this study show that employees who reported mainly that they were more exhausted and more cynical had more intention to leave their organization. Also, the employees that feel less professional efficacy are prone to quit their job, even if not with the same level of determination as to when exhausted and /or cynical. This finding supports our first hypothesis and previous researches (Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Knudsen & Roman, 2008; Harrington et al., 2001; Lingard, 2003; Jung & Kim, 2012).

Across a wide range of studies, turnover intentions were reported to be highly correlated with the behavior of leaving the organization (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Parasuraman, 1982; Mobley, 1977). These findings confirm that measures to prevent burnout could also help to reduce turnover and its associated monetary and nonmonetary costs.

Therefore, to prevent burnout, favorable, considerate, polite, ready to be lived, healthy relationships in the workplace, support from supervisor and colleagues should be provided since these factors have been shown to correlate negatively with turnover intention (Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

Especially, this research shows that the others' manifestation of relational civility in the workplace is rather more important than the individual's behavior. Somehow, the employee tends to expect the others to care for them rather than themselves for the others, as a possible manner to see the others' respect and consideration for their own professional and personal contribution.

The second hypothesis was validated, namely, WRC is shown to be negatively related to turnover intention in both cases, even if WRC is generated from the person to the others the correlation quotient was lower ($r=-.21$, $p < .001$), still, significant comparing with WRC when generated from the others to the person ($r=-.52$, $p < .001$).

Also, results show that the WRC significantly moderates the relationship between burnout and turnover intention in such a way that the relationship is weaker for employees perceiving high levels of WRC, rather than for the employees exerting high levels of WRC towards others. The moderating effect was confirmed in both cases, validating the third hypothesis of the study.

Companies should be aware of the costs associated with burnout, for some authors, having a fatal impact on the organizational performance and life, in general, since the human resource management cannot afford to

ignore its employees who are depressed and would probably not care about excellent quality, creativity, innovation, profitability and the competitiveness (Özbağ, Ceyhünb & Çekmecelioğlu, 2014).

As main limitations to this study, we mention its' cross-sectional nature that precludes powerful claims of causal effects and a rather limited number of participants, which inhibits the generalizability of our results.

Further steps could include a longitudinal study to examine changes over time, as well as more diverse studies in connection with the civility, in general, and WRC in particular.

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