

# Empirical Research on the Relationship among Sense of Control, Control Demand and Job Burnout

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## Abstract

Based on the literature research, the paper proposes a relational model of sense of control, control demand and job burnout. A questionnaire survey is conducted on the enterprise employees, and 362 valid questionnaires are collected, finally using the SPSS19.0 software to analyze the collected data. The results show that 1) sense of control and control demand are correlated; 2) sense of control has a significant negative impact on the three dimensions of job burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy); 3) control demand has significant effects on job burnout.

## Keywords

Sense of Control, Control Demand, Job Burnout

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## 1. Introduction

“Job burnout” was first proposed by USA clinical psychologist Frudenberger [1] in 1974. This word is used to describe the negative psychological symptoms of individual experience in the service industry and medical field. Job burnout phenomenon not only exists in the field of emotional work such as medical service, but also becomes a universal social phenomenon. With the development of society and economy, people’s life and work pressure are increasing, when employees lack of organizational support, and can’t be timely distracted from their own negative emotions, job burnout may occur.

Maslach & Jackson definite the job burnout as a physiological, psychological multi dimension comprehensive symptom, which is composed of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy [2]. The three dimensions of job burnout have interaction relationship: inefficacy is the pre-influence factor of cynicism and exhaustion, and the cynicism

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and exhaustion influence each other (Zhang Yongwang [3], 2012). Burnout has a negative influence on the employee's work efficiency, interpersonal relationship and health of body.

There are many factors leading to job burnout. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) proposed job matching theory that employees matched the lower degree of mismatch between the person and six domains (workload, control, remuneration, social activities, fairness and values), the more easily they prone to job burnout [4]. The existing researches mainly focus on the following aspects: workload, remuneration, social activities, fairness and values; however, there are a few researches on the relationship between control and job burnout.

Job control is the ability of staff to better handle the work environment. Research shows that sense of control is higher, the environment is more beneficial for employees (Ngo [5], 2005). At the same time, control demand also affects employees' perceptions of job control, and the extent of employees' control demand is different. This paper is based on an empirical research to explore the relationship among sense of control, control demand and job burnout.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

Schaubroeck (1997) argues that job control refers to a job can give their employees the degree of sufficient autonomy, let employees feel the work under their control [6]. The sense of control as an important psychological resource to maintain a balanced state of mind, its strength decides whether the individual can actively improve their situation (Manne & Glassman [7], 1998). Research shows that, lack of autonomy and loss of control sense will make the job pressure increase, especially in collectivistic culture, low sense of control and high sense of pressure are particularly obvious. Furthermore, overwhelming job pressure will lead to job burnout and even turnover. Siu & Cooper (1998) also find that when the job control falls, the employees will get lower job satisfaction, and show a higher turnover intention, also prone to anxiety, depression and other psychological symptoms [8]. Schaubroeck finds that in high demand environment, lack of control sense is especially harmful to the high self-efficacy people, because of uncontrollable situation may change the individual agent cognitive [6]. Jia Tao (2007) investigates the clinical nurses find that, when job control sense is in the low level, the nurse's job satisfaction is low neither, and it isn't beneficial to the realization of high quality of nursing service [9]. Liu Li-quan's (2007) research on the teachers' burnout shows that job control is psychological intermediary variable between teachers' work pressure sources and job burnout, high work pressure and low job control are the psychological mechanism of job burnout [10].

Based on the analysis above, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

- H1. Sense of control has a negative correlation with job burnout;
- H1a. Sense of control has a negative correlation with exhaustion;
- H1b. Sense of control has a negative correlation with cynicism;
- H1c. Sense of control has a negative correlation with inefficacy.

Maslow defines that demand is the person's feeling of some basic survival state be denied [11]. And control demand is the psychological desire and psychological tendency on controlling external things development. Karasek's (1979) "job demand-control model" points out that working scene demand and the decision freedom of facing these demand have directly effect on staffs' body tension [12]. Deci *et al.* (1989) study the influence factors of employees' psychological needs, and find that employees self-psychological needs significantly affected by managers' leadership style, the support worker autonomy style of leadership is conducive to enhance the employees' intrinsic motivation, and make employees produce lasting performance and good mental state, on the contrary, the employees' autonomy demand can't be met, their work motivation and work enthusiasm will be significantly reduced, and there's a negative impact on employee work efficiency sense [13]. Klaus & Helmut (2007) research on the relationship of self-control demand, cognitive control disorders and burnout, and discover that cognitive control disorders act as a regulatory role in the relationship between self-control demand and burnout, at the same time, self-control demand and cognitive control disorders have significant correlation with exhaustion and cynicism [14].

Based on the analysis above, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

- H2. Control demand has a correlation with job burnout;
- H2a. Control demand has a correlation with exhaustion;
- H2b. Control demand has a correlation with cynicism;
- H2c. Control demand has a correlation with inefficacy.

Current researches about control focus on the sense of control, but pay a little attention to control demand in

the process. Liu Liquan (2007) researches on teachers' job burnout and finds that teachers describe their sense of control related of their control demand in the initial interview. Then sense of control and control demand are the two dimensions of the job control experience [10]. Ma Jianhong and Zhang Tingwen (1999) define the job control experience as the process of influencing and deciding the external things development in the work, the psychological cognition and evaluation process on the control requirement of working environment and individual behaviors, and their own conditions either meet the control demand [15]. Employee control demand influences on sense of control degree, and on the other hand, the sense of control degree will boost the control demand extent. Since the lack of research on the control demand, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis and will prove it by empirical research:

H3. Sense of control has a significant correlation with control demand.

Through the above analysis, this paper puts forward the theoretical model, as shown in **Figure 1**.

### 3. Research Methodologies

#### 3.1. Research Sample

This research data mainly acquired through two ways: the mail and on-site questionnaire. In this survey, 450 questionnaires are distributed, 395 are recovered, and the recovery rate is 87.8%. Remove the duplicate and incomplete questionnaire, there are 362 valid questionnaires, and effective rate is 91.7%. The survey sample comes from different industry employee, including education, consulting, manufacturing, computer, financial industry and so on. The staff level distribution is as follows, 279 general staff, accounting for 77.1%, 47 first-line managers, accounting for 13%, 29 middle managers, accounting for 8%, and top managers is 7, accounting for 1.9%. The ratio of male and female is 163:199. The sample education contains high school diploma and below 156, college diploma 38, bachelor degree 114, master degree or above 54.

#### 3.2. Measurement Tools

In this study, the job burnout scale used is revised by Li Chao according to MBI-GS scale, the scale includes 3 subscales, namely exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy, respectively contain 5, 4 and 6 items, job burnout with 7 grade Likert scale, 1 represents never, 2 represents several times a year or less, 3 represents one time a month or less, 4 represents several times a month, 5 represents one time a week, 6 represents several times a week, 7 represents everyday. Sense of control and control demand questionnaire use control experience scale which compiled by Ma Jianhong, with 5 levels Likert scale: 1 totally inconsistent to 5 fully consistent.

Job burnout and control experience scale's reliability and validity in the existing studies are validated. In this paper, after using z-score standardization method to handle the collected data, the internal consistency coefficient of job burnout scale is 0.847 and internal consistency coefficients of each dimension (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy) are 0.860, 0.880 and 0.906. The internal consistency coefficient of control experience scale is 0.874, sense of control and control demand's internal consistency coefficient respectively are 0.852 and 0.744. The reliability of each scale is larger than 0.7, which means that the research data obtained has good reliability.

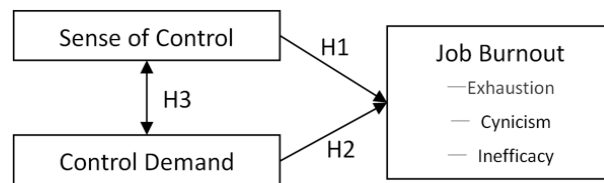
#### 3.3. Procedure

This paper tests the reliability of the questionnaire through reliability analysis, and uses correlation analysis method to analyze the correlation between sense of control, control demand and job burnout, finally explores the linear relationship between variables by linear regression analysis.

### 4. Data Analysis and Results

#### 4.1. Correlation Analysis of Variables

Using SPSS19.0 to analyze the correlation, as **Table 1** shows, we can see that the correlation coefficient between sense of control and three dimensions of job burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy) are  $-0.256$ ,  $-0.278$  and  $-0.447$ , namely there are a significantly negative correlation in  $P < 0.01$  level. Likewise, control demand has a significantly negative correlation with three dimensions of job burnout at the level of  $P < 0.01$ , the correlation coefficient respectively are  $-0.135$ ,  $-0.152$ ,  $-0.332$ . Sense of control and control demand exist a significantly positive correlation in the level of  $P < 0.01$ , and the correlation coefficients  $0.598$ .



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model.

**Table 1.** Correlations.

	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Inefficacy	Sense of control	Control demand
Exhaustion	1				
Cynicism	0.627**	1			
Inefficacy	−0.023	0.090	1		
Sense of control	−0.256**	−0.278**	−0.447**	1	
Control demand	−0.135**	−0.152**	−0.332**	0.598**	1

\*\* $P < 0.01$ .

## 4.2. Regression Analysis

In order to better explore the effect of control experience on job burnout, so this study investigates the main effect of control sense and control demand on job burnout by linear regression. In regression analysis, respectively using the three dimensions of job burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy) as the dependent variable, the two dimension control experience (sense of control and control demand) as independent variables. From **Table 2**, we know that sense of control and three dimensions of job burnout both exist significant negative correlation in  $P < 0.01$  level, and the regression coefficients are  $-0.312$ ,  $-0.357$  and  $-0.456$ . Namely the sense of control is higher, the exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy are lower, therefore assume that H1a, H1b and H1c set up. However, the results of regression analysis between control demand and three dimensions of burnout are not significant, and indicate that the control demand has no significant linear relationship with exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

### 5.1. Conclusion

Through empirical research, this paper examines the relationship among sense of control, control demand and job burnout. And we get the following main conclusions. First, sense of control has a negative correlation with three dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy) of job burnout, and shows that when the employees have higher sense of control, they are less prone to work fatigue. Second, control demand significantly correlates with exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy, but there's no significant linear relationship among them; then it suggests that there's no direct relationship between the control demand and job burnout. Probably it has indirect effects on job burnout through other factors. Third, there is a significant relationship between sense of control and control demand, namely the employees' perception degree of control affected by their control demand.

### 5.2. Suggestion

In order to prevent and reduce enterprise employees' job burnout, the enterprises need to provide a good working environment for staffs, and give them the appropriate work autonomy. When employees' sense of control is in a high level, they will feel the work more meaningful, and the perception of pressure is smaller, so as to enhance the employees' sense of self-efficacy and efficiency. Therefore, the organization authorization is necessary to prevent employee burnout and achievement decline, and improve the efficiency of the staff and organization.

**Table 2.** Regression analysis result.

Model	Exhaustion		Cynicism		Inefficacy	
	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig
Sense of control	-0.312	0.000	-0.357	0.000	-0.456	0.000
Control demand	0.031	0.665	0.027	0.772	-0.118	0.086

On the other hand, enterprises should pay more attention to the work needs of staff, and timely provide the necessary work information and resources support. More support staff achieve, their sense of belonging to the organization is stronger, and more willing to contribute to the organization, so as to enhance their sense of personal achievement. The study of Li Jinbo, Xu Baihua and Zuo Wuheng finds that the organizational support has a significant effect on job burnout, and organizational support influences on employees' mental health through influencing their mood. Occupation, social and personal factors are relative stability, and organizational support may reduce employee's burnout sense in the short term [16]. Therefore, giving employees necessary organizational support is the effective way to increase employees' sense of control.

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