

# **AN EXPLORATION OF HOPE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Because of its potential links to psychosocial well-being, since the early 1990s, hope as a psychological trait has attracted increasing attention from researchers. In this study, we demonstrate that hope moderates the relationships between stress, exhaustion and frontline hotel employees' turnover intentions and present the implications of our finding. Avenues for future research are offered.

## **BACKGROUND**

This study examines the role of hope as a moderator between stress, exhaustion and turnover intentions by using a sample of frontline hotel employees in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a case in point. In our study we contend that hope as an inner psychological resource [10] can moderate the effects of stress and exhaustion on employees' turnover intentions. Specifically, we reason that while a variety of techniques are available to intervene with stress and exhaustion (e.g., attempting to alter the sources of stress at work and/or reduce the severity of stress symptoms before they lead to serious problems, employee assistance/training programs) [7], ultimately individual's own ability, personality and inner psychological resources can overcome stress and exhaustion and their negative consequences.

Hope, in its everyday understanding, is an expectation of good in the future. One of the best elaborated and investigated theories of hope was developed by [9] who conceptualized it as a trait-like cognitive construct encompassing affirmative beliefs about one's ability to accomplish personal goals. According to this conceptualization, hope is a cognitive set determined by the reciprocal interplay of two components, pathways and agency [5]. The pathways component refers to an individual's perceived means or routes available to achieve goals. People with high pathways beliefs have the ability to generate possible means of attaining desired goals, can easily identify multiple viable routes to reach their goals, and find alternative routes when their initial strategies fail. Agency component refers to the belief in one's ability to succeed in using pathways to realize desired aims. High agency is characterized by determination, motivation and energy directed toward meeting one's goals.

## **METHOD**

Data for the study were collected from 183 frontline hotel employees (e.g., food servers, front desk agents, concierges, and bartenders) of several hotels located throughout the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Little over half (53%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-27, 36% between the ages of 28-37 and the rest were older than 37. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the respondents were male. About 36% cent of the respondents had secondary and high school degrees. Approximately

30% had graduated from two-year colleges and about 18% from four-year colleges. Almost all the respondents (94%) had tenures of five years or less and the rest had been with their hotel for six or more years.

The study constructs were operationalized via multi-item scales. Exhaustion (8 items) was measured via items taken from [3]. Responses to these items were elicited on four-point scales ranging from 4 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). Challenge stressors (6 items) and hindrance stressors (5 items) were measured via items taken from [1]. Responses to these items were obtained on five-point scales ranging from 1 (*produces no stress*) to 5 (*produces a great deal of stress*). Hope was operationalized via twelve items taken from [9]. Respondents recorded their answers to these items on four-point scales ranging from 4 (*definitely true*) to 1 (*definitely false*). Turnover intentions were measured with three items from [8]. Responses to these items were elicited on 5-point scales ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*). All the study items were valenced in such a way that higher scores consistently indicated higher levels of each construct (e.g., exhaustion, hope, turnover intentions). The internal consistency reliabilities (coefficient alphas) of the study measures, with the exception of exhaustion, were well above the commonly accepted threshold of .70.

## RESULTS

To examine the relationships between stressors, exhaustion and turnover intentions, a regression model was run by using two types of stressors (challenge and hindrance) and exhaustion as the independent, and turnover intentions as the dependent variables. The variance inflation factor test [2] showed lack of collinearity among the independent variables (i.e., VIFs < 2). The model proved to be viable. The independent variables collectively explained 34% of the variance in turnover intentions. An examination of the results also showed that hindrance stressors and exhaustion were the significant predictors in the model.

To examine the role of hope as a moderator of the relationship between stressors, exhaustion and turnover intentions, we used the sub-group analysis as it depicts the pattern of results more clearly [6]. Specifically, we repeated ordinary least squares regression analysis in sub-groups reflecting low and high scores on the moderator variable, hope. The Chow test [4] was then performed to establish the significance of the difference in the form (intercept and slope) of the regression model across the two sub-groups. The Chow tests of the individual regression estimates for high and low hope groups were statistically significant ( $F=58.46$ ;  $p<.0001$ ) suggesting that hope is a moderator. Furthermore, an independent samples t-test we performed revealed that the turnover intentions of employees with low hope were significantly higher than their high hope counterparts (means of 10.05 vs. 5.79;  $t=7.88$ ;  $p<.0001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the moderating role of hope in the relationships between stress, exhaustion and frontline hotel employees' turnover intentions. Results of the study revealed that hope is a moderator in that context. An immediate implication of our results is that managers should consider the hope levels of the candidates during employee selection and hiring. Candidates high in hope should be given priority in hiring since such employees can better cope with stress and exhaustion. Management should also consider devising proactive strategies to keep employees high in hope in the organization. Retention of employees with high hope can potentially pay dividends in two ways. First, employees with higher levels of hope can help create a positive work environment, may serve as role models to their

colleagues and generate a demonstration effect among existing employees with lower levels of hope. Second, they may be instrumental in attracting other employees with positive attitudes to the organization.

Although this study expands the knowledge base, it has limitations that future research can address. First, the study focuses on a single service sector in a single country. Replications of the study in the same sector in the same locality as well as other service sectors and countries would expand the data base for generalizations and show if the proposition tested here is viable in other contexts. Second, in this study, we showed that hope can serve as a buffer against the effects of stress and exhaustion on employees' turnover intentions. Investigation of the possible roles of other personality variables (e.g., self-efficacy, locus of control, agreeableness) as antidotes to the detrimental effects of stress and exhaustion not only turnover intentions but also on other organizationally valued job outcomes such as job performance and job satisfaction would enrich our understanding. Thus, we culminate with a call for additional research on these intriguing issues.

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