



## Burnout As Predictor Towards Employee Turnover Intention: The Moderating Roles Of Emotional Intelligence

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### Abstract.

Employees are vital stakeholders in any business. Employee turnover intention has become one of the most pressing issues in most organizations and turnover intention has garnered more attention than retention. Turnover rate has a significant influence on organizations due to the costs involved with hiring and retraining employees and can have a negative impact on an organization's performance. The purpose of this study was to examine if employee burnout (exhaustion & disengagement) predicted employee turnover intention, and to investigate the moderating roles of emotional intelligence towards the relationship between burnout and turnover intention among employees in Malaysia. This study was based on a quantitative research method and the data were collected using online questionnaires. Since the place of employment is not a limitation of the study, respondents in this research can be anywhere in Malaysia due to the nature of snowball sampling technique. Descriptive, correlational, multiple regression and hierarchical regression analyses were employed to analyze the data obtained and to answer the research questions.

Eighty-six employees responded to the questionnaire. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (86.4%), single (67.4%) and fairly young about 20-30 years old (38.4%). The findings of this study also revealed that there was a relationship between burnout and turnover intention among employees in Malaysia ( $r=0.609$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Through multiple regression analysis, it was found that disengagement was the most influential component of burnout towards the turnover intention ( $\beta=0.620$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In addition, hierarchical regression analysis discovered that emotional intelligence (intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, general mood) burnout did not moderate the turnover intention among employees. For future research, it is recommended that an explicit sample size should be adopted so that the findings can be generalized to other similar population.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Turnover Intention, Emotional Intelligence

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## 1. Introduction

Unhealthy working conditions can have negative consequences for employees such as having both emotional and physical exhaustion, thus, depleting their psychological resources. As such, work and professional environments must be properly organized and managed. If the working environment or conditions are not favorable to the employee comfort, then, productivity will likely drop and turnover will be unavoidable. In fact, employee turnover has become one of the most critical problems in most businesses, with turnover receiving more attention than retention. Employee turnover is broadly defined as the sum of a company's voluntary and involuntary terminations (Hom & Griffeth, 1995) and that the emotionally demanding nature of mental health could increase the risk of burnout, which is linked to higher rates of turnover intention (Salyers, 2015).

## 2. Problem Statement

Employee turnover is a passive but extremely expensive cost in organizations. However, the high monetary value cannot be directly calculated or itemized because the fee of recruiting and training employees, as well as other costs of turnover, represent only a portion of the expense of turnover to businesses (Davidson, Timo & Wang, 2010). In the first half of 2019, the voluntary turnover attrition rate was 6.5 percent across industries (Birruntha, 2019), but the highest voluntary turnover rate as reported by Kadirseran et al., was 8.4% in Malaysia alone.

The possibility of turnover intention and actual turnover is of great concern because turnover has long been a problem especially in the federal service (Ertas, 2015). If employee turnover is not properly managed, it may result in worker retirements occurring sooner than expected. Thus, questions about how turnover intention and actual turnover have changed over time are directly relevant to the government's interest in cultivating and maintaining a high-skill workforce given the top-heavy age demographics within its ranks (Goodman, French & Battaglio, 2015). Burnout, as one of the indicators towards turnover, is a known fact that employers must be aware of. In fact, burnout and turnover intention are positively correlated according to Acker (2012).

Many studies have revealed that work burnout is highly related to intention to leave (Gharakhani & Zaferanchi, 2019). Burnout has been identified as an occupational injury in a variety of people-oriented professions, including human services, education and health care. The therapeutic or service relationships that these providers form with

their clients necessitate an ongoing and intense level of personal, emotional contact. Such relationships can be both rewarding and engaging; but they can also be quite stressful (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Renfrow (2020) conducted a burnout study and discovered that over 53% reported a significant increase in emotional exhaustion and work-related stress or frustration, and nearly 66% reported stress from meeting emotional and mental health needs.

## 3. Research Questions

Two research questions were formulated for this study:

- 1) To what extent does burnout (exhaustion & disengagement) predict turnover intention among employees?
- 2) To what extent does emotional intelligence moderate turnover intention among employees?

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Burnout

Burnout results from chronic work-related stress. Burned-out employees are emotionally drained and feel negative and detached from their jobs, which leads to decreased performance, inhibited creativity and innovation, prone to workplace accidents, having higher absenteeism rate, and experiencing both physical and mental illnesses (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli (2006) defined burnout as a distinct type of job stress faced by an individual working in the field of community services as a result of emotional exhaustion when engaging with consumers. For example, according to Tanner (2017), burnout has forced some priests to resign from the ministry. Millennial identity influences workplace practises, which affects job burnout and turnover rates (Lu & Gursoy, 2016). According to Montero-Marin (2016), burnout syndrome is an individual's response to chronic work stress that emerges gradually and can eventually prolong causing health changes. It may have a personal component, but it is more commonly associated with extrinsic factors related to work organisation and risk management (Bouza et al., 2020).

### 4.1.1 Exhaustion

Exhaustion is defined by Kosan, Calikoglu and Guraksin (2018) as leaving the essential purpose of a job after losing interest. According to Aljami (2019), chronic exhaustion can be caused by mental stress, which is linked to burnout. Feelings of being emotionally depleted and drained can result from one's academic work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The most common cause of exhaustion according to

Boujut et al., (2017) is the one caused by work-related interactions and tasks. On the other hand, Maslach & Leiter, 2016 reported that primarily, exhaustion is caused by inconsistencies in workload and job control as a result of excessive demands. When a job requires an individual to express emotion that is not authentic, it can be especially difficult and lead to emotional exhaustion (Benson, 2022). Workload discrepancy has a direct impact on the exhaustion component of burnout (McFadden, Mallett & Leiter, 2018).

#### **4.1.2 Disengagement**

Disengagement is linked to concepts such as job burnout, workaholism and over-engagement (Myers, 2018). Employees who are disengaged become indifferent to, distance themselves from and withdraw from their jobs (Batra, 2017). Disengagement is defined by Reis, Xanthopoulou and Tsaousis (2015) as becoming disengaged with the recipients of one's work and the surrounding contents/contexts of one's work. According to Rastogi et al., (2018), workplace disengagement is showing to be a source of continuous dilemma for business organizations, with recent forecasts indicating that more than 70% of the workforce is disengaged, subjecting organizations to tremendous economic sufferings. When disengaged employees become defensive, their true identity, as well as their true feelings and thoughts, are concealed (Kahn, 1990). Employees who are disengaged from their jobs or organisations exhibit risk-aversion behaviours and are anxious (Keating & Heslin, 2015).

#### **4.2 Turnover Intention**

Turnover intention refers to employees' intent to leave their current job (Lu and Gursoy, 2016). In the admissions office for example, Hoover (2014) reported that turnover is a significant issue with more than half of admissions counsellors who responded to a career survey stating that they planned to seek a new opportunity within two to three years and many unsure if they would stay in the field. On the other hand, Hoover (2016) later added that in admissions, burnout is constant and turnover is high. This turnover also has an impact on the diversity and demographics of the admissions workforce, which is especially concerning when assessing admissions leadership responsibilities. According to Vuong and Giao (2020), turnover intention is one of the most important predictors of actual employee withdrawal.

#### **4.3 Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) entails a set of traits

that describe how people perceive, express, comprehend and deal with their own feelings as well as the emotions of others (Petrides, 2017). Cherniss, Roche and Barbarasch (2016) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions. The greater understanding that cognitive ability accounts for only a significant subset of the variability found in important life outcomes has fueled interest in EI and its related concepts. Collins (2018) clarified that emotional intelligence as the awareness and perception of other people's feelings, including one's own, and the ability to apply this awareness to effectively engage in social interactions in a variety of circumstances and scenarios. Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence achieve greater success, have a massive group of colleagues, are more respected and can negotiate better solutions to problems.

##### **4.3.1 Intrapersonal**

Intrapersonal skill refers to the ability to recognise and comprehend one's own emotions, feelings and thoughts. It is divided into the following categories: self-esteem, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, interdependence and self-actualization (Ojizua, 2014). Intrapersonal can be characterised by an emotional self-awareness element, which is the ability to identify, label and understand someone's emotional states as well as identify what influenced the feelings (Wood, Parker & Keefer, 2009).

##### **4.3.2 Interpersonal**

Interpersonal refers to the ability to identify and grasp the emotions, feelings and ideas of others or things. It is divided into three categories: empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships (Ojizua, 2014). The interpersonal structure encompasses the skills and characteristics of social interactions as well as the emotions of others (Wood et al., 2009). People who possess this trait are likely to exhibit higher emotional intelligence.

##### **4.3.4 Adaptability**

According to Ojizua (2014), adaptability is the ability to change our feelings depending on the situation. It consists of three components: self-testing, flexibility and problem-solving. It places a greater emphasis on the ability to use emotions effectively in facilitating an individual's thinking and reasoning (Wood et al., 2009). Hassan, Sumardi & Aziz (2019) agreed that reality testing, flexibility and problem solving are three components of adaptability. It refers to our ability to change our feelings depending on the circumstances.

#### 4.3.5 Stress Management

Ojizua (2014) defined stress management as the ability to cope with stress and emotions. It is made up of two parts: stress tolerance and impulse control. According to Nelson and Low (2011), one component of emotional intelligence is the ability to choose and exercise healthy control over anger and anxiety. Internal and external stressors and emotions must be managed and coped with by professionals (Kjellander, 2021).

#### 4.3.6 General Mood

According to Ojizua (2014), general mood refers to

the ability to feel and express positive emotions, as well as to be optimistic. It was full of hope and happiness. According to Wood et al. (2009), general mood reflects one's level of satisfaction with life and an optimistic perspective on the future.

#### 4.4 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework for the relationship between burnout, turnover intention and emotional intelligence is given in Figure 1.

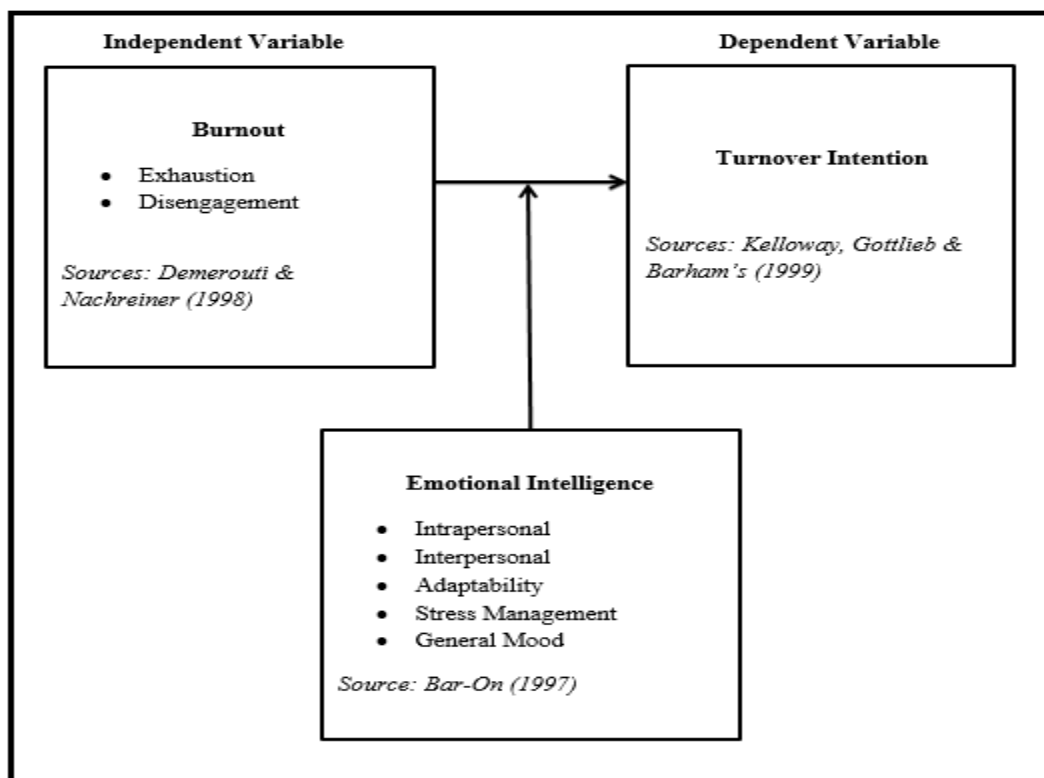


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 5. Methodology

The study was quantitative in approach and was based on a correlational research study design. Respondents in this research come from anywhere in Malaysia due to the nature of snowball sampling technique. Since the place of employment is not a limitation of the study, this method shall give additional advantage to the researchers to further examine if geographical location of employees can be another factor not under investigation that may be the predictor towards turnover intention. Online questionnaires conveniently disseminated to employees using a snowball sampling technique. It contains questions pertaining to burnout experience, emotional intelligence and turnover intention. With this method, researchers asked

respondents to give referrals to other possible respondents.

The questionnaire was divided into 4 sections which were sections A, B, C and D. Responses were measured based on the six-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A correlational research used to investigate the relationship as well as the predictors of the antecedents of burnout towards the turnover intention of employees in Malaysia. The data were analyzed using SPSS 27 where descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple and hierarchical regression analyses were applied in finding answers to the research questions.

## 6. Results and Discussion

**Table 6.1:** Demographic Profiles of Respondents

Respondents' Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	29	13.6
<b>Female</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>86.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
<b>20 – 30 years' old</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38.4</b>
31 – 40 years' old	21	24.4
41 – 50 years' old	21	24.4
51-60 years' old	11	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Single</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>67.4</b>
Married	27	31.4
Others	1	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Experience</b>		
<b>Less than 5 years</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31.4</b>
6 -10 years	17	19.8
11-15 years	12	14.0
16-20 years	12	14.0
More than 20 years	18	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>

The demographic findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (n=57, 86.4%), fairly young (n=33, aged between 20-30 years old), single (n= 58, 67.4%) with less than 5 years of working experience (n=27, 31.4%).

Table 6.1 describes the demographic profiles of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were female (n=57, 86.4%), young (n=33, 38.4%),

single (n=58, 67.4%) and fairly inexperienced employees with less than 5 years of experience (n=27, 31.4%). It is of utmost importance for the managers to acknowledge the young workforce who shall lead the future direction of the firms. As such, massive trainings are needed to groom the young inquisitive minds to steer the direction that the company wishes to pursue.

**Table 6.2:** Reliability Analysis

Variable(s)	Dimension(s)	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Independent</b>	Burnout	16	.606
<b>Dependent</b>	Turnover Intentions	15	.853
<b>Moderating</b>	Emotional Intelligence	62	.920

When evaluating the instrument's reliability, the lowest alpha value was 0.606 and the highest was 0.920. An alpha value of 0.6-0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability, and 0.8 or greater indicates a very good level. However, values greater than 0.95 are not always desirable because they may indicate redundancy (Hulin, Netemeyer and Cudeck, 2001). In general, the instrument used had alpha values that ranged from acceptable to very good.

### Correlation Analysis

In defining the relationship between employee burnout towards employee turnover intention among employees in Malaysia, the researchers used guidelines from Hair et al., (2010) to interpret the values between the variables. It was discovered that there was a large, positive and significant relationship ( $r=.609^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The result is shown in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3:** Correlations Coefficient between Respondent’s’ Employee Burnout and Employee Turnover Intention

No.	Variable(s)	1	2
1	Burnout	-	.609**
2	Turnover Intention	.609**	-

The findings revealed that there existed a strong association between burnout and turnover intention. Employees who feel that they are overworked, stressed or simply burnout are likely to leave an organizations. Rajendran, Watt and Richardson (2020) reported that workload was positively associated with emotional exhaustion which is the core dimension of burnout. Similarly, Deepak (2013) also found that excessive workload could result in negative emotion and cause burnout

and subsequent to that, would influence turnover intention.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

Findings from the regression analysis between burnout (exhaustion and disengagement) towards turnover intention among employees are tabulated in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4:** Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Exhaustion	.176	2.133	.000
Disengagement	.620	7.508	.036
R Square	.437		
F	65.302		
Sig. F Value	.000		
Durbin Watson	1.635		

From the regression analyses, it was found that R<sup>2</sup> was .437, in which all of the independent variables which were exhaustion and disengagement explained 43.7% of the variance (R square) towards turnover intention, with significant of F value of .000. In addition, the Durbin Watson value was 1.635, which indicated a positive autocorrelation, in line with one of the assumptions for bivariate and multivariate correlation analysis. The analysis revealed disengagement was the most influential component of burnout towards the turnover intention ( $\beta=0.620, p<.000$ ). Exhaustion ( $\beta=0.176, p<.05$ ) was found to be the second predictor towards turnover intention. Therefore, it can be concluded that based on this analysis, it was found that exhaustion and disengagement significantly

contributed to predicting employee turnover intention. This study reinforces previous research findings that found burnout to be positively associated with intention to leave (Peters, Zvonkovic & Bowman, 2008). Furthermore, Russel (2017) also found that significant path coefficients reflected direct positive effects between burnout and turnover intention.

**Hierarchical Analysis**

Table 6.5 demonstrates the moderating effects of emotional intelligence (intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, general mood) towards turnover intention among employees. Table 6.5 showed the findings of the hierarchical regression analysis.

**Table 6.5:** Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Independent variables			
Exhaustion	.176	.262	-1.042
Disengagement	.620	.620	.649
Moderator			
Emotional Intelligence		-.211	-.1.083
Interaction Terms Burnout and Emotional Intelligence (EI)			
Exhaustion*Emotional Intelligence			1.884
Disengagement*Emotional Intelligence			-.082
R Square	.467	.504	.521

R Square Change	.454	.486	.491
F Change	36.306	6.165	1.386
Sig. of F Change	.000	.015	.256
Durbin Watson			1.879

\*significant with the p-value < .05

Table 6.5 shows the findings of hierarchical regression analysis, investigating the moderating effects of emotional intelligence on the relationships between the burnout and turnover intention among employees. Model 1 explained 46.7 per cent of the variance in turnover intention ( $F(36.306, p < .05)$ ) while Model 2 explained 50.4 per cent of the variance ( $F(6.165, p < .05)$ ). Meanwhile, Model 3 yielding 52.1 per cent in the total variance explained ( $F(1.386, p < .05)$ ). It was found that exhaustion and disengagement, the components of burnout were not significant moderator for all three models.

The findings of moderation analysis showed that exhaustion and disengagement were not the main moderators for turnover intention. This finding is in contrast to finding from Their (2019), in which, according to the findings, as emotional intelligence and servant leadership expanded, turnover intention would drop. Further in that study, the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intention was significantly moderated by emotional intelligence.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

In multinational corporations, employee turnover rate has been a major ongoing issue across Malaysia. With regards to burnout and turnover intention, the government should step forward to address the employee turnover issue, as it is a major concern especially in the human resources development. Cutting the turnover rate has become the industry's primary concern. Turnover among employees has created a challenge for organizations because they have always expressed priority about providing excellent service to their customers (Ahmad, Barakbah & Majdi, 2021). As long as an employee is happy with their job and the work-pressure in their company, no employee will pursue to leave because they are always seeking a more ideal work-life balance. The study implied that all the organization should be more readily and prepare for the consequences of upsurge of turnover intention when recurrent exposure to stressful situations at work. This study identified some areas connected to both positive and negative outcomes. Future research should look into specific categories of work to ascertain if the types of jobs

may or may not predict turnover intention among employees in the private sector.

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