

Organisational tenure and job burnout of new generation of employees: Considering the mediating effect of psychological contract breach and the moderating effect of past breach experience

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Abstract: Based on social exchange theory, resource conservation theory, this paper collects data from 353 questionnaires by collecting new generation employees from representative enterprises in Yunnan, China. The empirical results show that (1) organisational tenure has a positive effect on job burnout of new generation of employees; (2) psychological contract breach plays a partial mediating role in organisational tenure and job burnout; (3) past breach experience positively moderates the relationship between psychological contract breach and job burnout of new generation of employees. The study provides some suggestions for exploring the mental health of new generation employees and enriches the research on the impact of organisational tenure on employee behaviour at the employee level.

Keywords: Job burnout, Organisational tenure, Psychological contract breach, Past breach experience

1. Introduction

The new generation of employees is gradually becoming the mainstay of China's labour market^[1]. However, the face of Practical managerial experience with this new type of employees with greater need for benefits^[2] and sensitivity to psychological constructs^[3] remains weak and the rift between the new generation of employees and their organisations is growing. It is novel and interesting for academics and practitioners interested in management in China and wider Asia-Pacific countries to study the impact of organisational tenure on individuals and organisations in the Chinese business environment, as collectivist societies value loyalty and thus motivate employees to stay employed in the same organisation for a long period of time. Different organisational tenure may lead to different stereotypical perceptions from the outside, such as constructing different associations between organisational tenure and employees' motivation to be creative, etc. Liu analyses longitudinal data from a representative sample of two countries and reports a negative relationship between organisational tenure and job satisfaction^[4]. Most scholars agree that organisational tenure affects the behavioural motivation of new generation employees.

As employees' interests tend to become more diverse, the number of situations where the employee-organisation relationship is fractured increases, and employees experience psychological contract breach - the perception that the organisation is failing to fulfil its obligations within the psychological contract - more and more frequently^[5]. As the psychological contract is the psychic link between organisations and employees, this paper explores the relationship between organisational tenure and job burnout by using psychological contract breach as a mediating variable.

Employees' experiences of psychological contract breakdown tend to accumulate over time^[6]. Employees who do not have experiences of psychological contract breakdown are more inclined to trust the organisation and thus show greater loyalty to the organisation, conversely employees who have experiences of psychological contract breakdown will be more likely to feel uneasy and uncertain

[7] and will therefore reduce their commitment to their job [8] and increase their willingness to leave [9] to protect themselves. Therefore, this paper explores the extent to which heart contract rupture affects job burnout by using past breach experiences as a moderating variable.

2. Literature review and hypothesis

2.1 Organisational tenure and job burnout

Job Burnout, also known as occupational burnout and occupational exhaustion, is a common negative variable in work situations, and is used to describe the feeling of being physically and mentally exhausted by one's work in the face of stress. Burnout is an excessive emotion caused by an individual's long-term excessive demand for emotional resources, including Maslach proposed a three-dimensional conceptualisation of burnout as a symptom of a disorder caused by the transition from work stress due to long working hours^[10]. In this paper, we adopt Maslach and Leither's viewpoint and job burnout into three dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. Nowadays, the new generation of employees in the 80's and 90's have gradually become the main force in the workplace, facing work pressures such as rapid work pace and frequent overtime work, which makes the phenomenon of job burnout more and more common among the new generation groups.

Organisational tenure has been studied from various perspectives and it can be considered as the length of time in the position, the length of employment in the organisation and the overall work experience of the occupation^[11]. In connection with the job requirement-resource model, there are both positive and negative factors in the job, with job resources being positive factors that support the performance of the job, while job requirements such as work overload and role conflict are negative factors that may damage an individual's physical and mental health or even lead to burnout.

The relationship between organisational tenure and job burnout has become more significant. There are many factors that affect the profitability of a firm, among which employees are one of the most important resources of a firm. Employees don't always maintain high energy and strong motivation to implement innovations at different stages throughout their careers, especially when employees are at the end of their careers, their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to their work, their organisations, and their careers decreases dramatically, and the longer their organisational tenure, the higher the level of burnout increases. So the effect of organisational tenure on job burnout may grow over time.

Hypothesis 1: Organisational tenure has a positive effect on job burnout of new generation employees.

2.2 Mediating effects of psychological contract breach

Psychological contract breach refers to an individual's cognitive appraisal of an organisation's failure to fulfil its responsibilities under the psychological contract^[12]. As an implicit agreement between an individual and an organisation, the psychological contract reflects an employee's internal beliefs about the organisation's ability to meet their underlying psychological needs^[12]. Psychological contract breach occurs when employees feel that the organisation is failing to meet its commitments^[13]. Employees' experiences of psychological contract breach tend to accumulate over time^[6]. As the organisational tenure of new generation employees grows, they experience more negative attitudes and retaliatory behaviours towards organisational behaviours when they perceive that their organisations are failing to deliver on their promises as a contract^[8], which can result in job burnout.

The possible theoretical relationship between psychological contract breach and job burnout of new generation employees will be explained in detail as follows. According to the principle of negative reciprocity, once employees realise that they are being treated negatively by the organisation (which means that the organisation is not delivering on its promises), they will react through negative reciprocity behaviours such as reduced trust and loyalty^[14] and increased silent psychological behaviours^[15], which will ultimately affect their job performance. Based on resource conservation theory, individuals tend to protect existing psychological resources to avoid psychological harm. Considering the strong self-consciousness and pursuit of short-term benefits of new generation employees, perceived organisational defaults will minimise their work inputs, thus preventing the loss of their resources^[16]. If an organisation breaks the psychological contract between itself and the new generation of employees, the new generation of employees may retaliate by engaging in negative

reciprocal behaviours to avoid the loss of affective resources, reduce organisational investment and performance, and consequently, create job burnout.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological contract breach mediates the effect of organisational tenure on job burnout

2.3 Moderating effects of past breach experiences

Employees who have experienced a psychological contract breakdown are more inclined to feel uneasy and uncertain^[14], and will therefore reduce their commitment to their job^[8] and increase their willingness to leave^[9], increasing the level of burnout in order to protect their own interests. For the new generation of employees in China today, they show more obvious characteristics such as utilitarian orientation, innovation orientation, long-term development, internal preferences and interpersonal harmony^[1], which will make them not only more concerned with financial rewards, but also more focused on facilitating the generation and implementation of ideas. Social exchange theory suggests that when employees perceive an unequal psychological contractual exchange relationship with the organisation, they adjust their behaviour so as to return to the equilibrium of the exchange relationship again. Employees who have experienced a breach of contract tend to be more non-reciprocal than those who have not^[13]. According to self-validation theory, people are very concerned about how others perceive them and expect others to perceive them in their own way, which suggests that people are always concerned about the dynamics of the psychological contract. Once employees realise that the organisation is not committed, they deny themselves and devalue their importance in the organization^[15]. The characteristics of the new generation of employees, such as higher demands for remuneration and greater self-awareness, make them more likely to experience psychological contract breach. If this happens, they will not be focused on generating performance for the organisation and their sense of behaviour will be harmed. In the long run, their sense of self-protection will increase and they will be more likely to have aggressive thoughts or retaliatory behaviours^[8], which will ultimately be reflected in their performance burnout at work. Therefore, when new generation employees experience psychological contract breach again, those who have experienced it will display stronger and more sensitive behaviours and attitudes than other employees.

Hypothesis 3: Past breach experience positively moderates the relationship between psychological contract breach and job burnout of new generation employees.

3. Research design

3.1 Sample selection and data collection

Table 1: Description of the distribution of sample characteristics

variant	options	frequency	(%)
Gender	male	169	48
	women	184	52
Age	20-25	148	42
	26-30	93	26
	31-35	49	14
	36-40	33	9
	41 and over	30	9
Enterprise nature	state-owned	176	50
	privately operated	106	30
	Joint Venture or Wholly Foreign Owned	22	6
	other	49	14
Work nature	technical staff	274	78
	administrative staff	79	22
Work level	General staff	279	79
	Primary Manager	53	15
	Middle managers	15	4
	senior management	6	2
Education	Undergraduate or below	222	63
	Undergraduate	120	34
	Master's degree or above	11	3

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study, this study uses more mature scales that

have been widely validated in the related fields, and the mature questionnaire items are revised according to the special purpose of this study. For example, we changed the order of the items and set some reverse questions to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaire was preliminarily tested offline with 45 MBA students from Yunnan universities.

Considering the different contributions and importance of different industries to economic growth, five industries in China, such as transport, tourism, education, medical care and computer, were selected as specific research objects. Considering the convenience and representativeness of data collection, ten enterprises from these five industries with more than 30% of new generation employees were selected as sample enterprises in this paper. A total of 368 online questionnaires were distributed to the 10 sample enterprises and 368 were collected. After excluding 27 questionnaires that did not fit the theme, incomplete answers, and inconsistent answers to reverse questions, 353 valid questionnaires were obtained, with a validity rate of 92%. Table 1 shows the descriptive information of the survey sample.

3.2 Measuring tools

The questionnaire items in this study were based on the Likert-5 scale (where 1 ~ 5 means: very non-compliant, non-compliant, fair, compliant and very compliant, respectively).

Job Burnout(JB): The Maslach scale adapted by Liu and Li was used, with three dimensions and 10 items.

Organisational Tenure(OT): This paper divides organisational tenure by the division method of 1 = less than 2 years, 2 = 2-5 years, 3 = 5-8 years, and 4 = more than 8 years.

Psychological Contract Breach(PCB): the scale developed by Rousseau was used, with five questions.

Past Breach Experience(PBE): Referring to Robinson and Morrison.

Control Variables:Based on the control variables of Marchand et al. [17] research work, four control variables have been selected for this study i.e., Age, Gender, Enterprise Nature(EN), Work Nature(WN), Work Level(WL), and Education .

4. Empirical testing

Table 2: Tests of results

variant	JB	JB	PCB	JB	JB
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	0.11	0.073	-0.021	0.111	0.110
Education	0.136	0.103	-0.178***	0.139	0.141
Age	-0.204	-0.354**	0.201	-0.206**	-0.203***
EN	-0.064	-0.02	-0.027	-0.063	-0.060
WN	-0.044	-0.057	0.049	-0.045	-0.045
WL	0.107	0.076	0.146	0.105	0.108
OT		0.308***	-0.161**		
PCB				0.017**	0.017
PBE					0.020
PCB*PBE					0.030**
R2		0.118	0.078	0.053	0.119
F-value		7.741	5.258	3.794	2.950

Table 2 shows the model of the relationship between the variables. Model 1 is the relationship model between control variables and job burnout. Model 2 adds the independent variable organisational tenure to model 1, and it was tested that organisational tenure has a significant positive effect on job burnout ($r=0.308$, $p<0.001$). Models 3 and 4 tested for mediating effects. Firstly model 3, psychological contract breakdown as the dependent variable, tested organisational tenure as a significant negative effect on heart contract breakdown ($r=-0.161$, $p<0.01$). Model 4, with job burnout as the dependent variable, tested that heart contract rupture had a significant positive effect on job burnout ($r=0.017$, $p<0.01$). This shows that heart contract rupture plays a partially mediating role between organisational tenure and job burnout. Model 5 was a moderated effects test. Setting the interaction term between heart contract rupture and past rupture experience, Table 2 shows that past rupture experience positively moderates the relationship between heart contract rupture and job burnout ($r=-0.074$,

$p < 0.01$).

5. Conclusion

First, organisational tenure has a significant positive effect on job burnout. This means that the longer the organisational tenure, the more likely it is that new generation employees will lose their enthusiasm for work, have no self-confidence in the work explained by their leaders, and gradually form an unhealthy working atmosphere. Secondly, psychological contract breach has a mediating role in organisational tenure and job burnout. It suggests that organisational tenure through psychological contract breach affects job burnout among new generation employees. Third, past breach experiences negatively moderated the relationship between organisational tenure and job burnout of new generation employees. The presence of past breach experiences can exacerbate job burnout, which is detrimental to employees' psychological well-being and job performance.

This study enriches the research on organisational tenure of new generation employees. It is suggested that companies can evaluate their employees on a regular basis and provide incentives to those who make progress. And this study expands the perspective of the relationship between organisational tenure and job burnout, and expands the theoretical basis of psychological contract breach. Contemporary business managers should pay special attention to the psychological contract with their employees.

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