

The Linkage of Proactive Personality, Emotional Exhaustion and Creativity

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ABSTRACT --When emotional exhaustion (a feeling of burn-out and drained) is highly possible to be experienced by employees, its relationship with proactive personality and employee creativity have been ignored to investigate. Using 186 employees working in education institutions, this study found negative relationships between proactive personality and emotional exhaustion and between emotional exhaustion and creativity. Proactive personality of respondents could moderate the effect of emotional exhaustion on creativity. Both theoretical and practical contributions are described. Limitations and directions for future research are also addressed.

Keywords-- Proactive Personality, Emotional Exhaustion, Creativity

I. INTRODUCTION

Creativity becomes one of the most interesting topics to study for decades (Chusmir & Koberg, 1986; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Shih & Wijaya, 2017; Zhou & George, 2003). Those researchers sought to find factors promoting individual creativity, because it can support organizational performance (Zhou, 2003). Although every employee can experience emotional exhaustion, which refers to feelings of being emotionally drained burned out experienced by one in a work context (e.g., Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Tourigny, Baba, Han, & Wang, 2012), its association with employee creativity has been ignored to explore. Also, emotional exhaustion as a psychological reaction of employees toward their workplace has found to be influenced by some personal attributes. Thus far, proactive personality has become an important personal attribute that has been found to contribute to team and organizational effectiveness (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010; Thompson, 2005). Since, proactive personalities can handle various workplace situations (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009; Wijaya, 2019a), it is necessary to assess the association between proactive personality and emotional exhaustion. In addition, this study also proposes to examine the moderating role of proactive personality on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity. Drawing on the burnout literature (Maslach, 1993; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1983, 2013), and the proactive personality literature (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 1995), this study proposes to examine the relationships. Some benefits of this study for theory and managerial practice are also discussed.

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II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Proactive Personality and Emotional Exhaustion

Proactive personality characterizes a personal trait measuring the levels of one can make influence people and situation in which he/she lives in (Crant, 1995, 1996). Proactive individuals therefore can put themselves for proactively changing their environments (Crant, 1995). As such, proactive employees can cope with any undesirable work situations (Wijaya, 2019a), take more benefits from them (Thompson, 2005), and perform better than less proactive employees (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Thompson, 2005; Wijaya, 2019b). For example, in dissatisfied work environment, proactive employees are better to remain learning and producing creative ideas (Wijaya, 2019a). Some works have established the association of this personality with one's leadership and managerial attributes (e.g., Crant & Bateman, 2000; Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2010). Therefore, it can be expected that a situation resulting a high emotional exhaustion, proactive employees with high self-leadership and self-management skills may be better to handle the situation and are able to find approaches to solve their work problems (Crant, 2000). It is likely that proactive personalities are more able to handle an unfavorable work situation resulting negative psychological states such as emotional exhaustion. The higher proactive personality score, the lower the emotional exhaustion. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed: Hypothesis 1: There is a negative association between proactive personality and emotional exhaustion.

Emotional Exhaustion and Creativity

Componential theory of creativity suggests the social and psychological components promoting individual creativity (Amabile, 1983, 2013). It is said that conducive psychological states seem to promote individual creativity (Amabile, 1983). She proposed the importance of intrinsic motivation for creativity, namely intrinsically motivated employees will be more willing to involve in creative tasks. Similar with this notion, Ford (1996) argues that a positive emotion will supply energy in producing more creativity. Emotional exhaustion describes feelings of drained, frustrated, severe stress as a result from unfavorable working situations (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). When an employee experiences emotional exhaustion, his/her intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm to promote creativity tend to decrease (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Ford, 1996). In conclusion, working environment pressure resulting a feeling of emotional exhaustion (Amabile et al., 1996; Maslach, 1993; Maslach & Jackson, 1981) will attenuate the eagerness of employees to perform in creative tasks. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative association between emotional exhaustion and employee creativity.

Proactive Personality as a Moderator

Proactive employees are believed to better adapt with any situations faced in workplace (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). For example, a work has demonstrated how this personality can buffer perceived job dissatisfaction (Wijaya, 2019a). It is not surprising employees with higher proactive personality also reported higher job satisfaction (Chan, 2006; Li et al., 2010). With various positive attributes owned by high proactive employees such as self-leadership, self-management, network building, taking initiative, flexibility, and learning motivation (Crant

& Bateman, 2000; Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Parker et al., 2006; Thompson, 2005; Williams et al., 2010), they can cope emotional exhaustion incidents better than less proactive employees. It is expected that proactive personality can moderate the effect of emotional exhaustion on creativity. It is likely that the joint effect of proactive personality and emotional exhaustion on creativity is likely to be weak. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed:

Hypothesis 2: Proactive personality moderates the association between emotional exhaustion and employee creativity, i.e., proactive personality can diminish the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on employee creativity.

III. METHODS

Respondents and Procedure

Respondents in this study were employees working in educational institutions in Indonesia. The respondents were employees working in 5 universities located in 5 cities in Indonesia. They were working as professors, lecturer, or administrators within the universities. All items were carefully translated into Indonesian, due to it was preassumed that our respondents were not all very familiar with English which might resulted data bias. Four experts related to organizational behavior who held master or doctoral degree were involved to the translation process. The questionnaire passed through 3 rounds of evaluations to confirm that all items were equivalent with the original items and possibly understood by the targeted respondents. A total of 250 online-based surveys were distributed and have resulted 186 usable samples (valid and no missing data).

Measurements

All measurement items were taken from pre-validated scales and have been used in other works. All items were administered using a Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Emotional Exhaustion. The 9-item emotional exhaustion scale was originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) and has been modified as a 5-item scale (Barnett, Brennan, & Gareis, 2007). This shorter version was considered equivalent with the original one and used in this study. A sample item is "I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job. The Cronbach's coefficient was .87.

Creativity. A 9-item scale of creative work involvement from Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007) was used to measure employee creativity. A sample question is "I solved problems that had caused other difficulty." The Cronbach's coefficient was .92.

Proactive Personality. Employee proactive personality was measured using Seibert, et al.'s 10-item scale (1999). A sample item is "Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality." The Cronbach's coefficient was .92.

Control Variables. Some control variables were included to control for the effect of independent variable(s) on the dependent variable. They were age (20 - <30 = 1, 30 - <40 = 2, 40 - <50, 50 or more = 4), gender (male = 1, female = 2) and education (high school = 1, associate degree = 2, undergraduate = 3, master's = 4, doctoral = 5, others = 6) (see Shih & Wijaya, 2017 for a review).

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the included variables.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	2.88	1.11						
2. Gender	1.43	.51	.16*					
3. Education	2.39	1.29	.09	.27*				
4. Emotional Exhaustion	2.11	.68	-.05	-.04	.09			
5. Creativity	3.57	.60	-.04	.14	.20*	-.22*		
6. Proactive Personality (Moderator)	3.69	.58	-.13	.10	.14	-.13	.82*	
7. Emotional Exhaustion x Proactive Personality	7.72	2.74	-.10	.02	-.04	.89**	.15*	.31*

Note: N = 186, ** p < .01, * p < .05

The Direct Relationships Testing Results

Hypothesis 1 proposes that proactive personality is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. As presented in Table 2, the regression coefficient of the proactive personality-emotional exhaustion link is -.16 (p < .05), therefore, H1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 proposes that emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with creativity. As presented, the regression coefficient of the emotional exhaustion-creativity is -.23 (p < 0.01). H2 was supported.

Table 2: Testing Results of the Effects of Proactive Personality and Emotional Exhaustion

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (t-value and Significance)	
	DV = Emotional Exhaustion (H1)	DV = Creativity (H2)
Age	-.09 (-1.19, ns)	-.09 (-1.19, ns)
Gender	-.04 (-.51, ns)	.09 (1.23, ns)
Education	.13 (1.71 [†])	.21 (2.86**)
Emotional Exhaustion	-	-.23 (-3.31**)
Proactive Personality	-.16 (-2.11*)	-

Note: N = 186; * p < .05, ** p < .01, ns = not significant

The Moderating Relationship Testing Results

Hypothesis 3 proposes that proactive personality can diminish the negative effect of emotional exhaustion on creativity. To evaluate this hypothesis, an interaction variables was made (emotional exhaustion x proactive

personality). As presented in Table 3, the regression coefficient of the interaction variable on creativity is negative, but insignificant, therefore the effect was diminished. H3 was also supported.

Table 3: Testing Results of Moderating Effect of Proactive Personality

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (t-value and Significance)
	DV = Creativity (H3)
Age	.05 (1.28, ns)
Gender	.02 (.55, ns)
Education	.09 (2.1*)
Emotional Exhaustion	.05 (.19, ns)
Proactive Personality	.88 (7.17****)
Emotional Exhaustion x Proactive Personality	-.17 (-.65, ns)

Note: N = 186; * p < .05, ** p < .01, ns = not significant

V. DISCUSSION

This study links proactive personality, emotional exhaustion, and employee creativity. The findings demonstrate the proactive personality-emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion-creativity links. Also, the findings suggest the moderating effect of proactive personality. That is, proactive personality attenuates the effect of emotional exhaustion on employee creativity.

This study contributes to theory. First, since extant literature has discovered the importance of proactive personality in work context (e.g., Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009), this study offers a new understanding on how this personality can eliminate the perceived emotional exhaustion. It confirms that proactive employees can adapt with their environment, not be influenced by their circumstances (Crant, 1996). Second, a new evidence is also offered, namely emotional exhaustion can diminish the willingness for being creative. Third, proactive personality can be expected to lessen the effect of emotional exhaustion on individual creativity (see Wijaya, 2019a for a review). This evidence is interesting, because proactive personality not only can promote creativity (Gong, Cheung, Wang, & Huang, 2012), but also can attenuate the unfavorable events for creativity. For practice, this study also contributes to some insights. First, HR managers can continue to include the proactivity traits in selection process and advise the line managers to consider the traits when forming teams or assigned employees in possibly raising exhausting situations. Second, since emotional exhaustion may decrease individual creativity, managers may more be cautious when the work environment in high possibility to promote emotional exhaustion, because it may decrease employee creative behavior. In this situation, managers should handle by taking some acts for example, promoting the roles of leadership, social interaction, and communication.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study proposes to explore the associations among proactive personality, emotional exhaustion, and creativity. All proposed hypotheses were supported. It was found that (1) proactive personality was negatively related to emotional exhaustion and (2) emotional exhaustion was negatively related to creativity. Also, it was found that proactive personality moderated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and creativity.

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