

SALESPERSON BURNOUT: EXPLORING THE LINK WITH THE MANAGER SUPPORT

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Abstract

Job burnout represents a serious contemporary problem. Social support from the supervisor may have the potential to attenuate the effects of burnout. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of the sales manager support on the perceived level of all facets of burnout. The study findings suggest that positive manager support negatively influences the perceived levels of emotional exhaustion and personal non-accomplishment and has no influence on the depersonalization components of burnout. The highlighted relationships can help sales managers in their attempts to reduce burnout among their salespeople by providing them more social support. The results may also encourage organizations and policy makers to provide resources and take actions focused on enhancing manager supportive skills in order to reduce the negative burnout effects.

Keywords: Salesperson burnout, Manager support, Sales managers

1 INTRODUCTION

Stress and burnout are salient problems of the today's society. Negative effects of burnout affect the employees' physical and mental health, organizational cost and performance, and consequently the societal health expenditure. According to the Fifth European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2012)¹, 22% of European workers reported poor health and 20% of them reported poor mental well-being. Furthermore, 43% of European workers reported work absence due to health problems for at least one day during the last 12 months before the survey. These facts point out the comprehensiveness of the mentioned contemporary problem and highlight the negative effects linked to workers' health.

¹ The Survey was conducted in 2010 and 44,000 workers in total, coming from 34 European countries (27 from the EU, plus Norway, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo) were interviewed on their working and employment conditions.

Burnout arises from chronic work stress and involves emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Lewin and Sager, 2008).

It was suggested that occupations with frequent interpersonal contact and interaction (Jaramillo, Mulki and Boles, 2011) that are client-centered (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993) are prone to higher burnout. The sales profession fits well to all of the mentioned characteristics. Accordingly, personal selling might be considered as an occupation with higher risk of burnout (Cicala, 2014). Salespeople span the gap between the organization and its buyers (Sand and Myazaki, 2000), striving to meet both client and organization's needs (Yoo, 2013) and experiencing stress on a regular basis (Hollet-Haudeberet, Mulki and Fournier, 2011).

Despite these facts, most of the research on job burnout has been related to helping profession (Snyder and Cistulli, 2011), and there has been little extant research in marketing and sales literature (Rutheford et. al., 2011; Lewin and Sager, 2008; Shepherd, Taschian, and Ridnour, 2011; Snyder and Cistulli, 2011; Lewin and Sager, 2007). In addition, most of the research in the sales field has been conducted in the U.S.A. (Hollet-Haudeberet, Mulki and Fournier, 2011). The importance of the sales field research is additionally highlighted by the fact that salespeople meet different tasks and are influenced by different stressor than helping professional (Lewin and Sager 2007).

Moreover, despite the multidimensionality of the burnout concept, only one component (i.e. emotional exhaustion) has been the topic of most of the research work (Hollet-Haudeberet, Mulki and Fournier, 2011).

Given the vast negative effects of burnout, theorists have to deepen the understanding of all specific antecedents that have the potential to mitigate its negative effects. Social support, as one of the antecedents of burnout, implies physical and emotional support given to an individual (Salami, 2010) and may have the above mentioned potential. The empirical evidences of the buffering effect of social support on burnout were mixed (Salami, 2010).

Sales managers, as one of the source of social support, should fully understand the burnout process and especially their role in buffering the effects of burnout among their employees. The results of the managerial effort depend on the managers' awareness and knowledge of the relations between the antecedents and the burnout construct itself. In addition, salespeople are frequently away from direct managerial supervision (it is especially true for B2B salespeople) (Cicala, 2014), which implies that sales managers have to be more effective in the time they spend with their employees.

Furthermore, from the organization's standpoint too, it is important to investigate the influence of some antecedents manageable by organizations, such as the manager support. Organizations have a great impact on the management of resources on which the success of the intraorganizational efforts depends. Policy makers, at least, through relevant ministries and their bodies, should be interested in the topic. Their interest should arise from their responsibility toward people. In addition, the health expenditure is directly positively affected (e.g. reduced) by reducing the negative burnout effects.

A joint action of all the stakeholders on a vast scale would produce positive results for salespeople, organizations and the society.

The main aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of the sales manager support on the perceived level of all the burnout components among salespeople.

The conducted research will enhance our knowledge of the link between the manager support and all three burnout facets in the personal selling context. In addition, it will allow the policy makers, sales organizations, and especially sales managers to better allocate their efforts aimed at reducing burnout among employees.

After the introduction, Section 2 provides the theoretical background through the literature review and hypotheses development. Section 3 presents the methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical data and analysis, the measurement model and the structural model. Section 5 discusses the empirical results. Finally, Section 6 provides the concluding remarks.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Job-related burnout is a multi-component construct and consists of three interrelated dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal non-accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Lewin and Sager, 2007). Emotional exhaustion is seen as the core component of burnout construct (Lewin and Sager,

2008). It occurs as a response to excessive job-related demand stressors placed on employees (Lewin and Sager, 2007; Lewin and Sager, 2008). That feeling of being used up (Shepherd, Taschian and Ridnour, 2011; Maslach and Jackson, 1981) was associated with increased absenteeism, dread of returning to work, and, withdrawal from the profession (Rutherford et. al., 2011; Lewin and Sager, 2008; Lewin and Sager, 2007). The second component of burnout, depersonalization (cynicism, disengagement), represents unfeeling and callous response towards clients, coworkers or managers (Shepherd, Taschian and Ridnour, 2011). Reduced sense of personal accomplishment, as the third component of burnout, refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regard to one's work with clients (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). It is accepted in the literature that emotional exhaustion is the first step in the burnout process, followed by depersonalization, which leads to a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Shepherd, Taschian and Ridnour, 2011).

The syndrom arises as a reaction to prolonged exposure to chronic stress and is experienced by professionals who work with people (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Lewin and Sager 2007). Salespeople as boundary spanners work with people on a daily basis. They are exposed to multiple and often demanding requests from customers (Hollet-Haudeberet, Mulki and Fournier, 2011; Cordes and Dougherty, 1993) as well as coworkers (Lewin and Sager, 2008). Salespeople often face the challenges to meet the needs of external parties and the interests of the organization (Sand and Myazaki, 2000). These needs and interests are often conflicting. The above facts, combined with the today's competitive marketplace, make salespeople particularly susceptible to burnout.

The impact of the burnout problem and the importance of further research are of great relevance when the consequences are known. Throughout the burnout literature, a number of negative consequences have been indicated such as increased turnover and absenteeism, decrease of job satisfaction, performance (Shepherd, Taschian and Ridnour, 2011), and productivity (Sand and Miyazaki, 2000), withdrawal from client, job and organization, diminished self-esteem, depression, insomnia, increase of substance abuse (Lewin and Sager, 2008), frustration, anger, feeling of ineffectiveness (Soler et. al., 2008), and increased organizational cost associated with turnover (Snyder and Cistulli, 2011).

Likewise, as with the consequences, job burnout as a state of physical and mental exhaustion (Hollet-Haudeberet, Mulki and Fournier, 2011) has been related to a number of antecedents. Cordes and Dougherty (1993) identified three main categories; (1) job and role characteristics, (2) organizational characteristics, and (3) personal characteristics. Social support is one of the personal characteristic components. It is considered a coping resource, a social fund from which people may draw when handling stressors (Thoits, 1995). It consists of instrumental (actions or resources), informational (advice, feedback, information) and/or emotional (recognition, encouragement, approval, esteem, empathy, belonging) assistance provided from individual or significant others (such as managers) (Thoits, 1995). Social support can be obtained from work-related sources, such as supervisor or coworkers, and from non work-related sources (Yurur and Sarikaya, 2012), such as family, religious affiliation, etc. (Sand and Myazaki, 2000). Moreover, humans as social beings are significantly influenced by interpersonal relationships (Jaramillo, Mulki and Boles, 2011). This fact further highlights the importance of the sales managers' role in an organizational environment.

The influence of the supervisor support on the perceived level of job burnout has received limited investigation in the literature (Lewin and Sager, 2008). Cordes, Dougherty (1993) and Rutherford et al. (2011) highlighted the need for additional research concerning the correlation among antecedents of burnout and the burnout itself. Researchers (Sand and Miyazaki, 2000; Lewin and Sager, 2008) indicated that social support may have the potential to attenuate the effects of stress and it was also identified as a buffer between job-related stress and stress-related effects.

In the light of the above, an important question arises i.e. whether social support provided by the sales manager might influence the level of perceived burnout among salespeople. In addition to that, there is the question whether positive manager support can attenuate the negative effects of burnout; and finally, what the impacts are of positive manager support on each of the three burnout components.

Therefore the object of this research is the influence of positive manager support on each of the three burnout dimensions in the sales environment.

It was suggested that sales managers have a great impact on different aspects of job-related responses of sales personnel (Dubinsky et al. 1995). Employees highlight that good supervision that included regularity,

discussion and support, is of extrem importance for their wellbeing (Chiller and Crisp, 2012). In their study on the sample of bank employees and teachers, Houkes et al. (2003) found out that emotional exhaustion is primarily predicted by a high workload and a lack of social support. Lewin and Sager's (2008) study findings indicated that positive sales manager support has a significant and direct negative effect on salesperson emotional exhaustion. The salesperson sample in the said study was taken from a single industry, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Sand and Myazaki (2000) highlighted that support within and outside the organization is associated with lower levels of burnout. Previous researches (Khan et al., 2011) showed the negative relationship between perceived stress and supervisor-assessed job performance for an individual with low commitments.

Chen (2012) pointed out that supervisory support may play an important role in moderating the effects of emotional labor on burnout. Kumar et al. (2012) suggested that a good manager–employee relationship will allow for the prediction of employee burnout. Chiller and Crisp (2012) highlighted that, due to positive effects of professional supervision, organizations have to allocate sufficient resources in order to allow that effective supervision. Marc and Osvat's (2013) research among social workers showed that one of the main factors determining burnout is the lack of support from supervisor and colleagues. Sochos, Bowers and Kinman (2011) studied the relationships between social support received from four sources - family, consultant, coworker and top management - and burnout among junior doctors. The results showed that top management support was indirectly linked to burnout, while consultant support was linked directly to lower burnout.

Yurur and Sarikaya (2012) research among social workers indicated the direct positive influence of social support from supervisor on the feeling of burnout among their subordinates. In addition, the study highlighted that the perceived manager support had reduced the level of emotional exhaustion and increased the level of personal accomplishment, but no significant linkage was found between manager support and the depersonalization component of burnout. Jamal's (2014) study among health employees highlighted that social support in addition with specific behaviour had significantly moderated the relationships between stress and three variables i.e. burnout, job satisfaction and health problems.

Eurofound's (2012) survey on the working conditions showed that having a *good manager* affects health positively. According to the same survey, sales workers are much less positive about their work sustainability in comparison to some other professions. In addition, social support from coworkers and managers plays an important role in shaping a positive attitude towards the sustainability of work. Salami's study (2010) revealed that teachers with higher level of social support were less burned out. Furthermore, the empirical evidence from his research suggested that workplace social support in form of high-lead-member exchange and mentoring minimize the emotional exhaustion facet of burnout. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) suggested that social support and autonomy were the most important predictors of extra-role performance through their relationship with the depersonalization dimension of burnout.

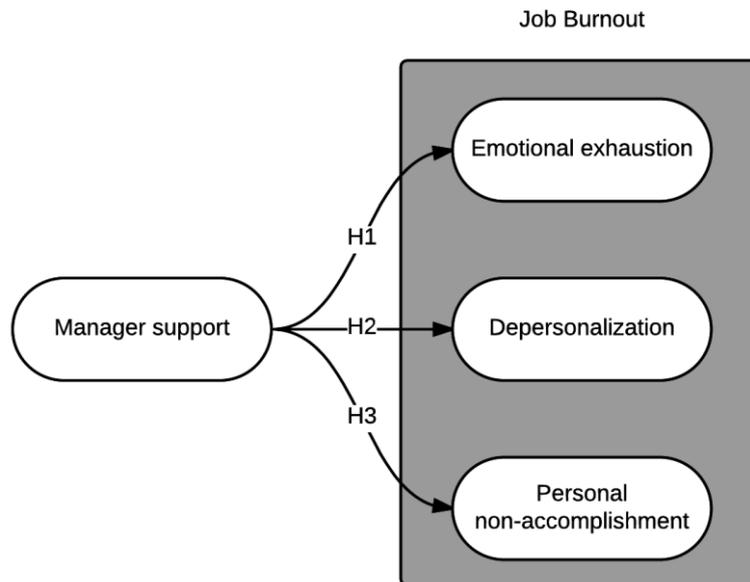
Based on the above mentioned considerations and with the goal to advance the field's knowledge on this issue, the authors tested the following model (Fig. 1) and the connected hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Positive sales managers support negatively influences the perceived level of emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2: Positive sales managers support negatively influences the perceived level of depersonalization.

Hypothesis 3: Positive sales managers support negatively influences the perceived level of personal non-accomplishment.

Fig. 1 The research framework of the relationships among sales managers support and the three burnout facets



3 METHODOLOGY

The authors have conducted the research with the goal of examining the relationships between manager support and the individual burnout components (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) among salespeople. Burnout was measured using a reduced version of Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach and Jackson, 1981) suitably modified to be relevant to salespeople. According to the research by Rutherford et al. (2011), the authors used the 10-item reduced scale to measure burnout in sales researches. The abbreviated questionnaire included all three facets of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment).

Manager support was measured using the designed six-item scale proposed by Lewin and Sager (2008). The questionnaire was aimed at salespeople on all levels within organizations. Every statement in the survey instrument was associated with the Likert scale with seven levels of intensity (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The sample included 480 business enterprises. The single enterprises in the sample were chosen by random selection. The authors prepared tables containing the lists of business enterprises that had submitted the Annual financial report for 2011 in the Republic of Croatia (universe = 103.000 business enterprises) and subsequently got random numbers by using computer programs. The questionnaire was designed in electronic format and distributed via e-mail. The research was conducted through October and December 2012. The questionnaire was properly filled in by 154 survey respondents.

Major industry categories for respondents included trade (50.65%), manufacturing (18.83%), accommodation and food (7.14%), information and communications (3.90%), construction (3.25%), transportation and warehousing (2.60%).

4 EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed by applying the PLS (Partial Least Square) method. The PLS method enables a simultaneous analysis of interrelations between theoretical constructs and is more flexible in relation to CB-SEM (Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling), because it has no special requirements regarding the distribution of variables. Moreover, it enables the analysis of structural equations on smaller samples (less than 250 as suggested by Reinartz, Haenlein and Hensler, 2009) and it is more appropriate in situations where emphasis is more on prediction than explanation (Hair et al., 2010). SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende and Will, 2009) M3 software was used for analyzing the collected data. These were analyzed in two stages. First, the measurement model was analyzed by checking the psychometric features of the applied measurement scales. After that, a structural model was determined to test the

hypotheses. This procedure ensures the validity and reliability of the measurement scales before testing the hypotheses.

4.1. Measurement Model

One-dimensionality, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the applied measurement scales were tested by using the said measurement model. Before checking the measurement model, the exploratory factor analysis was conducted in order to eventually purify the measurement scales and rationalize the number of indicator variables (Table 1). Based on the exploratory factor analysis, all the manifest variables were retained. All the manifest variables have high factors loadings on the corresponding factor (higher than 0,7) and lower factors loadings on other factors. Apart from EFA, Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated for the measurement scales and it also points out the possibility of retaining all the manifest variables (in conformity with Hair et al., 2010). Cronbach alpha coefficient was more than 0,7 for all measurement scales. Accordingly, all measurement scales show a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability.

Table 1: Results of the exploratory factor analysis and value of Cronbach alpha²

	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal non-accomplishment	Manager support
EE1	0.816368	0.295584	0.318373	-0.236244
EE2	0.780708	0.379017	0.361526	-0.247895
EE3	0.856833	0.378126	0.281695	-0.256081
EE4	0.873108	0.397637	0.512257	-0.372005
DP1	0.303560	0.615367	0.442869	-0.020107
DP2	0.355619	0.864965	0.298323	-0.165249
DP3	0.372774	0.793421	0.406134	-0.135345
PNA1	0.332579	0.374799	0.791954	-0.164358
PNA2	0.462671	0.305959	0.732122	-0.172902
PNA3	0.317356	0.350069	0.852865	-0.224368
MSUP1	-0.350657	-0.174172	-0.316207	0.870013
MSUP2	-0.350657	-0.129176	-0.163965	0.899092
MSUP3	-0.323993	-0.110732	-0.143265	0.847976
MSUP4	-0.226316	-0.165867	-0.163966	0.867427
MSUP5	-0.222125	-0.151883	-0.155330	0.803558
MSUP6	-0.260879	-0.169726	-0.244910	0.872314
Cronbach alpha	0.85	0.70	0.71	0.93

Source: Authors' calculations.

After cleaning the measurement scales, the measurement model was analyzed. The results of the measurement model checking and the selected indicators of psychometric characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of the analysis of the measurement model

Construct	Item	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Error (STERR)	t-value	C.R.	AVE
Emotional exhaustion	EE1	0.816*	0.808	0.044	18.51	0.90	0.69
	EE2	0.781*	0.778	0.057	13.81		
	EE3	0.857*	0.850	0.044	19.42		
	EE4	0.873*	0.878	0.023	38.65		
Depersona-	DP1	0.615*	0.569	0.276	2.23		

² The personal accomplishment variables were recorded in order to obtain the personal non-accomplishment facet of burnout and in order to correspond to the posted hypotheses.

lization	DP2	0.865*	0.768	0.259	3.34	0,81	0,59
	DP3	0.793*	0.678	0.260	3.06		
Personal non-accomplishment	PA1	0.792*	0.748	0.186	4.26	0.84	0.63
	PA2	0.732*	0.695	0.190	3.85		
	PA3	0.853*	0.832	0.128	6.68		
Manager support	MSUP1	0.870*	0.867	0.022	39.28	0.94	0.74
	MSUP2	0.899*	0.897	0.022	40.72		
	MSUP3	0.848*	0.847	0.032	26.05		
	MSUP4	0.867*	0.866	0.028	30.73		
	MSUP5	0.804*	0.800	0.048	16.83		
	MSUP6	0.872*	0.872	0.029	29.87		

Source: Authors' calculations, * $p < 0.05$.

According to the results in Table 2, it can be concluded that the scales used in this research are one-dimensional and reliable. Composite reliability (C.R.) indicators for the analyzed scales range from 0.83 to 0.94 and exceed the recommended 0.7 level. Besides that, the measurement scales show a satisfactory level of convergent validity. All the factor loadings of the variables of indicators of the corresponding factor exceed 0.7 and they are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), while AVE indicators range from 0.62 to 0.75 and exceed the recommended 0.5 level (as recommended by Hair et al., 2010).

Discriminant validity was checked on the basis of comparison of AVE indicators with squared correlation coefficients between certain constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results of the checked discriminant validity are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Latent Variable Correlation Matrix and AVE Indicators

Construct	AVE	DP	EE	PNA
DP	0.83			
EE	0.77	0.44		
PNA	0.79	0.46	0.46	
MSUP	0.86	-0.18	-0.35	-0.24

Source: Authors' calculations.

According to Table 3, all square roots of AVE indicators exceed the correlation coefficients of the constructs, so it can be concluded that there is an appropriate level of discriminant validity in the measurement scales. In addition, the satisfactory level of discriminant validity is further confirmed by the results of the exploratory factor analysis (see Table 1).

4.2. Structural Model

After checking the one-dimensionality, the convergent and the discriminant validity of the scales, the structural model was tested i.e. relationships between different constructs. The bootstrapping resampling technique with 500 subsamples was used to determine the statistical significance of certain relations. The results of the structural model analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of the structural model

	Hypothesis	Original sample – standardized coefficient (β)	Arit. mean (M)	Standard error (STERR)	t – values ($ \beta / STERR $)	R2	Accepted hypothesis
H1	MSUP -> EE	-0.345	-0.355	0.080	4.33*	0.12	accepted
H2	MSUP->	-0.175	-0.186	0.131	1.33	0.03	not

	DP						accepted	
H3	MSUP PNA	->	-0.239	-0.264	0.090	2.63*	0.06	accepted

Source: Authors' calculations, $p < 0.05$.

According to the results based on the structural model analysis, the accepted hypotheses are H1 and H3. Therefore, manager support has a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) negative effect on the emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.345$) and the personal non-accomplishment ($\beta = -0.239$) dimensions of job burnout. The hypothesis H2 was not accepted. The manager support did not have a statistically significant effect on the depersonalization component of job burnout ($\beta = -0.175$; $t = 1.33$).

In total, 3% of variances regarding the depersonalization dimension, 12% of variances regarding the emotional exhaustion dimension, and 6% of the personal accomplishment dimension of job burnout were explained with the construct of manager support, so we can deduce that manager support poorly explains the individual job burnout dimensions. The model has a satisfactory level of predictive relevance - Q^2 values are greater than 0 (in conformity with Hair et al., 2010: 178) and for the endogenous latent variables (EE, DP and PNA), they amount to 0,078, 0,015 and 0,033 respectively).

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the conducted research highlighted the influence of positive sales manager support on each of the three burnout components. The study provides results specific for the sales profession and extends the investigation on all burnout dimensions.

The importance of a deep understanding of burnout syndrome arises from its multiple negative effects. These negative outcomes, as mentioned earlier, affect the individual, the organization and the society, and include health problems, performance problems and cost problems. Adequate management of stress drivers and the burnout phenomenon will enhance human lives and save costs on a wide scale. All the above highlights the need for action to be taken by managers and sales organizations, but also the policy makers.

Personal selling, like other professions, has its own characteristics that make it specific. Taking into account the number of employees in the retail/wholesale sector³, in addition to the above-mentioned, makes the evidence from this research yet more valuable. As mentioned earlier, salespeople are concerned about their work sustainability, but at the same time they point out that having a good manager positively affects their health. According to the results of the research, a good/supportive manager will positively affect salespeople's health by reducing perceived stress i.e. by influencing at least two burnout dimensions. Namely, the research suggests that positive support from sales managers can influence the level of the emotional exhaustion (the heart of the phenomenon) and the reduced personal accomplishment facets of burnout. If social support from manager influences two thirds of the burnout problem, the theorists and the practitioners are heading the right way in solving this issue. The first in their research work, because further research is required, and the latter are responsible for the application of the evidence in their working environment. In order to do this, managers have to be informed and educated. Such collaboration will produce positive effects (in terms of quality of life, performance improvement and health cost savings) for all stakeholders. Moreover, the Fifth European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2012) highlighted the trend of declining social support from colleagues from a level of 15% in 2005 to 10% in 2010, as well as from managers - from 24% in 2005 to 19% in 2010. It denotes an alarming trend, especially in the light of the current study results.

As mentioned earlier, this study will be very useful for managers, especially sales managers, as it provides evidence on the impact of their support on the individual components of burnout. The research highlighted the importance of the supervisor's role in reducing burnout among salespeople. Greater positive support leads to less burnout. This implies that managers should provide support to their subordinates. The highlighted relationships can help sales managers in their attempts to reduce burnout among their salespeople by providing them more social support (such as instrumental, informational and/or emotional

³ According to Eurostat (2013) data, there were 10.4 million strong workforce in the EU-27's wholesale trade sector in 2010 and 3.6 million retail trade enterprises in the EU-27 in 2010 and they employed 18.6 million persons.

assistance). In order to be effective in providing social support, organizations should design programmes to help sales managers to improve their supportive skills. Additionally, organizations that are aware of the importance of social support can invest in the training of their sales managers in order to develop their social skills, thus turning them into effective mentors. Allocating sufficient resources to create effective mentors and effective supervisors will be returned by increased income and decreased costs. Further actions could also include sensibilizing and awakening managers in relation to the influence of supportive behavior on the psychological condition of their subordinates. Moreover, professional stress management trainings both for managers and employees will be helpful in fighting burnout.

This study provides evidence that organizations have a powerful tool in their hands and that professional development, both of their managers and employees, underlies some of the strategies to reduce burnout. Designing such programs, procedures and strategies could be considered part of the social responsibility of organizations.

6 CONCLUSION

We hypothesized that positive manager support negatively influences the three burnout components (i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment). The hypotheses concerning the influence of manager support on the emotional exhaustion and the depersonalization facets were accepted. The influence of manager support on the depersonalization component was not evidenced and the hypothesis was not accepted.

Notwithstanding the fact that salespeople are prone to burnout because of the nature of their work, the study of burnout in the marketing and sales field receives poor attention. In addition, most researches took place in the U.S.A. and were based on the emotional exhaustion component of burnout. A major contribution of such researches to literature is the providing of additional evidence regarding the linkage of the burnout syndrome with some drivers (e.g. the manager support) in the sales context and outside the U.S.A. Furthermore, this study expands the knowledge on the insufficiently studied components of burnout (i.e. depersonalization and personal accomplishment).

The research results suggest that positive manager support can contribute to reduce job burnout. As mentioned, social support provided by managers has negative effects both on the emotional exhaustion and the personal non-accomplishment dimensions of burnout. Manager support did not have any effect on the depersonalization dimension of burnout. The study took into account mixed evidence and it partly strengthens the results of former researches conducted among social workers (Yurur, 2012) in relation to the influence of the supervisor support on the burnout facets.

Given the sensitivity of the burnout topic and the fact that the questionnaire was sent to organizations and intended for all salespersons within such organizations, firstly, there might have been a dose of caution among the respondents and, secondly, it is possible that the questionnaire, which was anonymous, was predominantly filled in by salespersons from one or few larger firms. The limitations of this study include the fact that the sample was not divided into two subsamples (B2B and retail salespeople) and the obtained values represent self-reported perceptions that can distort the correlation among the constructs. A larger sample to be contacted directly via e-mail, and a sample structured more proportionally with regard to the number of salespersons from an individual firm, might reinforce the reported findings.

Although the negative effect of manager support on the two components of burnout was indeed proven, its impact is poor. Hence, the obtained results may be a basis for further research aimed at better understanding and facilitating the management of the burnout construct by managers. It would therefore be useful to investigate the said influence of other antecedents of burnout (such as job and role characteristics, organizational characteristics and the remaining personal characteristics) on the level of perceived burnout. Moreover, it would be advisable to investigate the relationships between job-related burnout and its consequences (such as physical, emotional, interpersonal, attitudinal and behavioral consequences) in order to obtain more evidence regarding this multidimensional construct in the sales context, thus making the organizations aware of the importance of combating job burnout and allowing them to be more effective in reducing this phenomenon among their employees.

The present findings in conjunction with the literature on burnout and on social support may represent the basis for the design of the interventions to combat burnout. As mentioned, concrete action can be taken by an individual himself (e.g. sales manager) or by organizations on a larger scale and with major resources.

Based on the research results, further steps may also be taken by policy makers in order to encourage organizations to introduce measures directed to prevent or reduce burnout among employees. The general effects of such interventions will positively affect the health system, the organizations' outcomes, and the individual wellbeing. Some actions may include training subsidies to improve social skills of sales managers.

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