

BEWARE THE WEARY BOSS? EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF SUPERVISOR
EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION ON EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department
of Psychology
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Benjamin A. Farmer
December, 2013

EXHAUSTED AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

I investigated the hypothesis that a supervisor's emotional exhaustion has a strong, positive relationship with his or her employees' emotional exhaustion. Using crossover theory and the JD-R model, I theorized that employees with exhausted supervisors become emotionally exhausted through emotional contagion and inadequate supervisor support and that emotional stability moderates the indirect effect of supervisor emotional exhaustion on employee emotional exhaustion through perceptions of supervisor support. Data collected from 242 public sector workers revealed that supervisors' emotional exhaustion had no relationship with the support they provided to employees, nor did their exhaustion relate directly or indirectly (through support) to employee emotional exhaustion. However, both supervisor support and employee emotional stability were negatively related to employee emotional exhaustion. These findings sustain the notion that support from supervisors provides a meaningful benefit to employee well-being and suggests that supervisors provide support despite their own emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the interaction between supervisor support and employee emotional stability predicted employee emotional exhaustion; however, contrary to theory, the supervisor support-emotional stability relationship was stronger among employees higher than lower in emotional stability.

Keyword: Emotional exhaustion, supervisor support, emotional stability, crossover

Beware the Weary Boss? Exploring the Effect of
Supervisor Emotional Exhaustion on Employee Emotional Exhaustion

“I've always found that the speed of the boss is the speed of the team.”

-Lee Iacocca

Many employees have dealt with an unsupportive boss. One needs not travel far to find an employee willing to share his or her exasperation at working with a supervisor who neither values his or her hard work nor cares about his or her well-being. How many employees have had a supervisor provide him or her with a task that had a tight deadline, only to find out that his or her supervisor knew of the project weeks in advance? Similarly, when asked for help, how many employees have had a supervisor say that he or she had neither the time nor the resources to assist them? The 2011 United States Office of Personnel conducted a survey of over 265,000 government employees and found that more than 24% of them were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the information they received from management about their work, and over 10% of employees felt their supervisor neither listened to them nor supported their development as an employee (United States Office of Personnel, 2011). Similarly, the US Army found that 20% of civilian nonsupervisory personnel considered their direct supervisor to be unsupportive (Snyder, 2011). These surveys indicate that the number of employees who suffer from a lack of supervisor support is not trivial. Consider employees who after working late (likely on that project), pack up to leave and observe their boss, exasperated and drained from what looks to be another all-nighter. How would they feel? I argue that the emotional exhaustion of a supervisor influences the emotional exhaustion of employees.

Burnout and emotional exhaustion are infectious (Pavett, 1986; Westman & Etzion, 1999), crossing over between co-workers and spouses (Rook, Dooley, Catalano, 1991; Westman

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& Etzion, 1995). With this thesis, I aim to extend the literature by testing the notion that emotional exhaustion transfers from supervisor to employee. Integrating the job demands resource model (JDR; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, Schaufeli, 2001), conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), and trickledown/crossover theory (Masterson, 2001; Westman, 2001), I propose that a partial moderated mediation model, also called a conditional process model or total effects model (Hayes, 2012a), best describes the psychological process in which supervisor emotional exhaustion influences subordinate emotional exhaustion. That is, I hypothesize that an exhausted supervisor makes employees more exhausted by being unsupportive, and exposure to the supervisor's exhaustion itself yields emotional exhaustion among employees. Following work on personality and emotional exhaustion (Perry, Witt, Penney, & Atwater, 2010), I argue that subordinate emotional stability influences this transfer process. I theorize that a high level of emotional stability encourages resource-maintaining behaviors, such as positive coping in response to stress and work place conflict. In the sections that follow, I first describe the constructs, the theoretical basis for their relationships, and the processes by which this model operates.

Emotional Exhaustion

Maslach and Pines (1977) introduced the concept of emotional exhaustion as a sub-facet of burnout. Burnout is a condition in which employees become both physically and emotionally exhausted with their work, leading to a state of employee cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach and Pines (1977) originally hypothesized that emotional exhaustion or the "lack of positive feelings, sympathy or respect for clients or patients" (p. 101) was the first step in burnout, acting as a stepping-stone to both employee cynicism and inefficacy. Anyone who works in a job with menial tasks, such as an assembly line worker or introduction to

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psychology test grader, knows that burnout can act more like a chisel than a sledgehammer. Even the most rewarding jobs, when done repeatedly, will likely chip away at personal resources. Over time, employees' self-esteem and energy may whittle down, until some employees become exhausted, cynical, and finally feel no sense of accomplishment from their work.

The initial 'stepping stone' theory does not fully explain certain findings, such as why some jobs are prone to some facets of burnout but not others (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Leiter, 2008). Researchers now favor a component rather than a stage model of burnout. Shirom (1989) went so far as to suggest that cynicism and inefficacy are unnecessary components of the burnout model, claiming that emotional exhaustion is the only important factor. Although Maslach, Schaufeli, and Lieter (2001) disagreed with Shirom, they agreed that each component of burnout is unique in its own right. In particular, research shows that emotional exhaustion predicts myriad of workplace outcomes and is the strongest and most reliable predictor of health-related outcomes among the three sub-facets (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2008).

Emotionally exhausted employees are drained, chiseled away by being overloaded by their work (Maslach et al., 2001), having unsupportive or even abusive bosses (Wu & Hu, 2009), having unsupportive co-workers or spouses (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003), and/or by holding jobs which deal with aggressive and abusive customers (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). Emotional exhaustion researchers have utilized the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and job demands resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) to suggest that a depletion of resources, brought on by job demands that exceed employee resources, causes emotional exhaustion. When employees do not have adequate resources, such as time, energy, and self-esteem, both work quality and employee health may suffer.

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Because emotionally exhausted employees lack these resources, they are less able to perform their job well and suffer decreased performance, as reflected in both subjective (e.g., supervisor ratings; Cropanzano, Rupp, & Bryne, 2003) and objective (e.g., number of mistakes made by surgeons; Shanafelt et al., 2009) measures. Moreover, they have higher turnover intentions (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Bryne, 2003), fewer instances of organizational citizenship behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2003), lower job satisfaction (Tetrick, Slack, Silva, & Sinclair, 2000), and lower commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2003) than their non-exhausted counterparts.

In addition to workplace outcomes, researchers have found that emotional exhaustion is more predictive of alcohol and substance abuse than cynicism or self-efficacy (Cunradi, Greiner, Ragland, & Fisher, 2003). Emotional exhaustion is also the only burnout dimension thus far to predict somatization or physical symptoms from psychological stress, such as chest pain (Greenglass, Burke, & Fiskensbaum, 2001). Maslach et al.'s review (2001) suggested that a common assumption in emotional exhaustion literature is that burnout causes mental dysfunctions, such as anxiety, and depression primarily through the predictor of emotional exhaustion. This area of research may benefit from further exploration as some studies have found support for this hypothesis. For example, Peterson et al. (2007) found significant relationships between burnout and anxiety, depression, and sleep impairment.

Though emotional exhaustion has received a considerable amount of attention in the literature, there are still issues to investigate. Two studies examined the effects of supervisor emotional exhaustion on employee emotional exhaustion (Lam Huang & Janssen, 2010; Westman & Etzion, 1999), Lam Huang and Janssen (2010) found that supervisor emotional exhaustion and service climate acted as moderators between employee emotional exhaustion and

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employee display of positive emotions at work. However, they hypothesized neither a direct nor a mediated relationship between supervisor and employee emotional exhaustion.

This unexplored area in the literature points to an opportunity to examine how a supervisor's emotional exhaustion affects their leadership behaviors (trickle-down), such as being less able to provide support to employees or becoming more abusive to employees. Additionally, the potential crossover (direct crossover; Westman, 2001) of emotional exhaustion from supervisor to employee through exposure or "contagion" (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Westman, 2001) has yet to be explored. In the following pages, I explore the nature of cross-over and contagion.

Crossover and Trickle-down

Crossover is the transmission from one person to another of emotions or states, such as work-family conflict, engagement, depression, or burnout (Westman & Etzion, 1999; Westman, 2001). Researchers often study crossover theory with regard to transfer of emotions from one setting to another, such as from a spouse at work to a spouse at home (Westman, 2001). The mechanism of "trickle-down" is slightly different in that it implies a transfer from a higher to lower level, such as from employee to customer (Tepper & Taylor, 2003) or supervisor to employee (Westman, 2001). Because of the top down nature of this study, supervisors to employees, crossover and trickle-down theory are interchangeable. However, in the future, researchers might note the specific top-down nature of trickle-down theory when compared to the multidirectional nature of crossover theory. Whereas many studies have looked at the crossover of stress from spouse to spouse (Jones & Fletcher, 1993; Long & Voges, 1987; Westman, 2001), fewer studies have specifically investigated the crossover of burnout (Bakker, 2009; Pavett, 1986; Rook, Dooley, & Catalano, 1991). Additionally, a handful of studies

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investigated the crossover of emotional exhaustion, finding that crossover may occur between coworkers in workgroups (Thompson, Kirk, & Brown, 2005; Westman, Bakker, Roziner, & Sonnentag, 2010) and in one study from supervisor to employee (Westman & Etzion, 1999).

Emotional contagion is a form of direct crossover from one person to another. According to contagion theory, persons exposed to the positive or negative emotional states of others may have these emotions transferred to them by 'catching' these feelings or states (Hatfield et al., 1993). For example, consider the opportunity for emotional contagion in Disney World, where the excitement and joy a child feels when meeting Mickey is infectious fun for their parents and other patrons. Conversely, emotional transfer may take on a more somber tone when employees assume the emotions of an angry, recently laid off former co-worker, or a close friend suffering the loss of a family member. Direct and repeated exposure to an emotionally exhausted supervisor may cause employees to mimic or harmonize with their supervisor, leaving them similarly emotionally exhausted. Researchers in this area have investigated this theory and found that emotional contagion relates not to a shared experience but a shared emotional state. One does not need to have the same experiences to feel the same feelings of exhaustion or elation if one is susceptible to emotional contagion or easily empathize and take on the emotions of others (Seibert, Seibert & Taylor-McLaughlin, 2007).

To date, only Westman and Etzion (1999) have examined the crossover of emotional exhaustion from supervisors to employees. Surprisingly, in their study of school employee crossover, they found no crossover of burnout from principals to teachers. Although they found evidence for other types of crossover, such as strain, their study suffered from notable limitations. They utilized a unidimensional burnout scale, ignoring the potential for differing effects. Even though using a unidimensional burnout scale is common (Maslach et al., 2001),

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Westman and Etzion's scale combined physical exhaustion, cognitive exhaustion, mental exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion. Typical burnout scales combine emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, as originally conceptualized by Maslach (Maslach & Pines, 1977). Westman and Etzion's alternative interpretation of burnout did not differentiate between sub-facets and reported no individual tests for unique crossover of physical, cognitive, mental, or emotional exhaustion. There is a possibility that portions of their scale, such as physical or mental exhaustion, do not crossover, whereas emotional exhaustion does. Moreover, there may be differences in positive and negative crossover that may cancel each other out when not accounted for. If this is the case, then combining these constructs into a single scale may cause the suppression of one part of the scale on another, producing non-significant results when testing crossover. In line with Masterson's theory of a trickle-down model and crossover theory, I argue that supervisors' emotional exhaustion leads to employees' emotional exhaustion both directly and indirectly through supervisor support.

Supervisors and their employees share many of the same job demands (Demerouti & Bakker, 2001), such as workload, time constraints, and lack of equipment and resources, but supervisors also have to cope with the stress of managing others (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Like their employees, some supervisors have more demands than resources and become emotionally exhausted. ~~Both COR and the JD-R model make no reservations for supervisors.~~ When supervisors have too many demands placed on them, they are no less likely to become exhausted than are their own employees. When supervisors are unable to cope with job demands and become emotionally exhausted, they create an opportunity to transfer their emotional exhaustion on to their employees. Crossover theory states that there can be both a direct and an indirect

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crossover. With this study, I propose a model that accounts for both of these types of crossover and introduce my first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Supervisor's emotional exhaustion has a direct effect on employee emotional exhaustion.

Beyond direct transfer through contagion, emotionally exhausted supervisors may also focus their attention on coping with their own problems and alter their behavior by showing less concern for their employees' well-being and less appreciation for their employees' work. In this study, I operationalize this concern for employees work and well-being by utilizing the construct of perceived supervisor support (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988)

Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS)

Charles Schwab told Dale Carnegie, "The way to develop the best that is in a man is by appreciation and encouragement" (Carnegie, 2009, p. 34). Like Schwab, when a supervisor encourages and supports his or her employees, the supervisor is not just validating the employees' work; he or she is also validating them as people. Supportive supervisors are telling their workers implicitly, and perhaps explicitly, that they know they are important and not simply dispensable automatons. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) supported this view when they developed perceived organizational support (POS), a construct reflecting the feeling employees have that their organization both cares about their well-being and values their contribution. Kottke and Sharafinski (1988) developed perceived supervisor support (PSS) shortly thereafter. Similar to POS, PSS refers to the extent to which employees feel that their supervisor both values their contributions and cares about their well-being. In the following section, I argue that PSS plays an important role as both an outcome of supervisor emotional exhaustion and as an antecedent of employee emotional exhaustion.

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PSS is reflective of both the leadership style and the effectiveness of a supervisor. Yukl (1989) found that there are nearly as many definitions of leadership as researchers in the field (p. 252):

“Leadership has been defined in terms of individual traits, leader behavior, interaction patterns, role relationships, follower perceptions, influence over followers, influence on task goals, and influence on organizational culture. Most definitions of leadership involve an influence process...”

In many ways, PSS is similar to other leadership constructs, as it is concerned with the influence of supervisors on employees and the way in which their support leads to workplace outcomes. Though not as widely studied as some other leadership theories, such as LMX (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) or the Ohio LBDQ work on consideration and initiating structure (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004), PSS has been important for both theory and practice due to its links with numerous workplace outcomes. Since its development, researchers found that PSS predicts job satisfaction (Babin & Boles, 1996), performance (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), POS (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), turnover (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007), role conflict (Babin & Boles, 1996), and role ambiguity (Babin & Boles, 1996). Although PSS has garnered modest attention for its workplace outcomes, its antecedents have received less consideration.

Of all of the studies found which utilized PSS, only two of which I am aware have examined its antecedents. The two studies found that PSS is predicted by interpersonal and informational justice (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009) and by supervisor POS (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2007). Despite previous literature on leader traits and behaviors (Judge, Bono, Ilies,

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& Gerhardt, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), we know little about what influences employee perceptions of support.

Supervisors have a responsibility to provide employees with the support and resources they need to do their job in addition to their other responsibilities, such as core work tasks, managing employees, and managing their own workload. The range of responsibilities that many supervisors must contend with on a daily basis may at times be numerous and diverse. As discussed earlier concerning employees, the JD-R model suggests that supervisors are in a constant struggle to gain and maintain resources, always working to ensure that their resources outmatch the demands of the supervisor's job (Demerouti et al., 2001). To be supportive, supervisors need to take time to listen to their employees' concerns and show them that they have their best interests in mind. This may involve extra work, taking longer shifts, spending their personal money, and even coming into conflict with superiors when defending subordinates. Even though the benefits of being a supportive supervisor include increased employee performance, OCBs, and decreased employee turnover, many supervisors are not considered to be supportive by employees.

Emotionally exhausted employees lack positive feelings, sympathy, and respect for others (Maslach, 2001; Maslach, 2003). Researchers suggest that supervisors who suffer from emotional exhaustion suffer the same issues (Lee & Ashforth, 1993). Drained of their energy, emotional, and cognitive resources, I suggest that emotionally exhausted supervisors experience a weakened capacity to show concern for their employees due to their already drained personal resources. Consequently, employees are likely to report lower levels of supervisor support.

By investigating the proposed relationships among supervisor emotional exhaustion, PSS, and employee emotional exhaustion, I intend to provide increased understanding regarding how

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employee perceptions of supervisor support affect emotional exhaustion. I aim to build upon earlier studies by both Jacobs and Dodd (2003) and Maslach et al. (2001), which provided evidence that support from others, including supervisors, can have a significant effect on decreasing or preventing emotional exhaustion. I theorize that PSS plays a significant role as an outcome of supervisor's emotional exhaustion and as an antecedent of employee emotional exhaustion, mediating the relationship between the two constructs. Consequently, I hypothesize that supervisor support partially mediates the transfer of emotional exhaustion from supervisor to employee through an indirect crossover. In other words, I argue the effect of supervisor's emotional exhaustion influences employee emotional exhaustion through supervisor support indirectly so that change in employee emotional exhaustion is in part due to change in supervisor emotional exhaustion. I present the conceptual model in Figure 1 and propose:

Hypothesis 2a. Supervisor emotional exhaustion has a negative direct relationship with perceived supervisor support.

Hypothesis 2b. Perceived supervisor support has a negative direct relationship with employee emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2c. Supervisor emotional exhaustion has a positive indirect effect on employee emotional exhaustion through PSS.

Emotional Stability of the Employee

Think back to the earlier example in which employees found their supervisor working consecutive all nighters due to a recent heavy workload. Many workers might not attribute the recent lack of support they received to any personal bias or vendetta. If never exposed to this display, the employees may interpret their supervisor's recent lack of support differently, possibly as a lack of caring or faith in their work. Would they shrug it off and go on with their

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duties, or storm out, *knowing* that they are unappreciated and undervalued? As research shows that such environmental factors as workload and social support play an important role in emotional exhaustion, how employees interpret their interactions with others in the workplace is an important factor in their emotional well-being. Of the Big Five personality traits, emotional stability is of particular interest with regard to emotional exhaustion because it ties into the positive and negative coping strategies utilized by employees and the emotional interpretations they make about workplace events and people (Heppner, Cook, Wright, & Johnson, 1995).

At the high end, emotional stability is a personality trait characterized by high self-esteem and low levels of social anxiety; it is one of the leading predictors of all facets of burnout (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006; Goddard, Patton, & Creed, 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Zellers & Perrewé, 2001). Some researchers argue that emotional stability plays a large role in predicting emotional exhaustion in particular because persons who are low in emotional stability generate more emotions that are negative and interpret situations more negatively than those who are not (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Zellers & Perrewé, 2001). Low levels of emotional stability yield ineffective coping strategies, such as “wishful thinking” or “self-criticism” rather than problem-solving or proactive behaviors (Heppner et al., 1995). Employees who are low in emotional stability also have strong emotional reactions to stressful situations (Bakker et al., 2006; Widiger & Trull, 1992)..

Burnout is caused by a lack of personal resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Halbesleben, 2006). Proponents of the JD-R model go beyond the COR (Hobfoll, 1989) model and claim that employees not only have a finite amount of resources but are constantly playing a balancing act by trying to meet their demands while maintaining these resources. When demands overtake resources, negative workplace outcomes occur, such as

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emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben, 2006). The JD-R model does not fully explain why persons who have the same or equivalent external resources experience different levels of emotional exhaustion, however. I propose that individual differences in emotional stability help account for this unexplained variance due to emotional stability's link to internal resources, such as positive coping mechanisms and general well-being. Positive coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving or proactive behaviors (Heppner et al., 1995), employed by workers high in emotional stability may help minimize the drain on both cognitive and emotional resources that occur due to job demands. I argue that high emotional stability acts as a buffer between low levels of supervisor support and employee emotional exhaustion. Additionally, I theorize that high emotional stability is such an effective buffer that the benefits of supervisor support diminish due to lack of necessity. When employee emotional stability is low, I theorize that this exacerbates the effect of low supervisor support on emotional exhaustion and leads to the highest levels of emotional exhaustion. Therefore, I propose that emotional stability moderates the second stage of the mediation (path b in Figure 1):

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between employee perceptions of supervisor support and employee emotional exhaustion is moderated by employee emotional stability, such that the relationship is stronger among employees low than high in emotional stability.

Method

Participants and Procedure

As part of a larger study, I collected data from 242 of 298 (82%) workers and 42 (100%) supervisors employed in a small division of a municipal government organization in the USA. Employees were primarily unskilled laborers who worked outside, whereas supervisors worked primarily at a central office and traveled to various work sites. During normal work hours, I

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distributed pen-and-pencil surveys on-site in meeting rooms. Supervisors filled out surveys separately, returning the surveys upon completion. Employees voluntarily and anonymously completed the surveys. Employees placed surveys into containers marked with the name of their supervisor; however, no identifying information was collected and any groups with fewer than 10 employees (0) were not utilized due to concerns of attempts by supervisors to identify feedback sources. Supervisor surveys were not anonymous; however, supervisor information was coded to protect all participants' identities. At the request of the organization, I did not collect demographic information.

Measures

PSS. The 8-item (e.g., "My supervisor considers my goals and values") Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) perceived supervisory support scale assessed PSS. Employees were asked to rate the items using a 5-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). High scores indicate high levels of PSS.

Emotional Exhaustion. The 5-item (e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work") Maslach and Jackson (Maslach Burnout Inventory; 1986) shortened version of the emotional exhaustion scale assessed emotional exhaustion. Employees and supervisors were asked to rate the items using a 5-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). High scores indicate high levels of Emotional Exhaustion.

Emotional Stability. The 8-item (e.g. "temperamental," "cold") emotional stability scale of the big five personality mini markers (Saucier, 1994) were used to assess emotional stability. Employees were asked to rate the items using a 9-point scale reflecting how much they felt each word described them (1 = "Extremely Inaccurate" to 9 = "Extremely Accurate"). High scores indicate high levels of emotional stability (with some markers reverse coded), respectively.

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Analysis

I tested hypotheses using a mediated moderation approach to reveal conditional direct, conditional indirect, and total effects. Edwards and Lambert (2007) showed that when combining a moderation and mediation approach, a single path is not created; rather, moderated mediation “instead produces a set of models that each portray direct, indirect, and total effects at a particular level of the moderator variable” (p. 6). The more recent procedure, developed in parallel by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), utilizes bootstrapping in order to test a “total effect moderation model” (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Bootstrapping finds the upper and lower limits of a 95% confidence interval in a model when testing mediation and moderation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Three other methods were common in the past when testing this type of model: the piecemeal approach, the subgroup approach, and the moderated causal steps approach. However, all earlier methods suffer from several methodological issues.

Two of the major criticisms of earlier techniques are that the methods often break models into smaller sub-groups, losing power, and failing to reveal which paths are varying due to the proposed moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Hayes, 2009). Beyond the weaker form of analyses used with earlier methods, researchers frequently provide results that are often difficult or impossible to understand due to a failure to report proper statistics. The Edwards and Lambert (2007) total effects method utilizes reduced form equations and is able to test total effects models without using a multi-step approach, or sacrificing power by separating participants into sub groups. I anticipate that utilizing the total effects method positions me to show where and to what extent emotional stability moderates the mediation of supervisor emotional exhaustion to employee emotional exhaustion through PSS, including and beyond the hypothesized relationships.

Results

I present the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelation matrix in Table 1. I used the SAS PROC CORR and PROC FACTOR procedures to conduct exploratory factor analysis. Observation of scree plots, Eigen values (each scale having a single factor with a value ≥ 1), and alpha levels (all greater than .83) indicated that the 4 scales each loaded onto a unique factor. I present the reliability estimates (Cronbach's α) in brackets listed diagonally in Table 1.

I used the Edwards and Lambert (2007) total effects moderated mediation method. Utilizing the Hayes PROCESS (model #59) macro (Hayes, 2012) in SAS (SAS Institute, 2012), I tested the total effects moderated mediation model and present the results in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 predicted that supervisor's emotional exhaustion has a positive direct relationship with employee emotional exhaustion. As shown in Table 2, the data revealed no significant direct effect (path c in Figure 1; Edwards & Lambert, 2007)

Hypotheses 2a-2c predicted the direct effect of supervisors' emotional exhaustion on supervisor support (2a), of supervisor support on employee emotional exhaustion (2b), and of the indirect effect of supervisor emotional exhaustion on employee emotional exhaustion through supervisor support (2c). Inconsistent with Hypotheses 2a and 2c and as shown in Table 2, emotional exhaustion of the supervisor was unrelated to supervisor support. Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, perceived supervisor support was related to employee emotional exhaustion ($b = -.14, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that employee emotional stability moderates the relationship between supervisory support and employee emotional exhaustion. As reflected in Table 2, the interaction between PSS and employee emotional stability was significant ($b = -.21, p < .01$). However, contrary to Hypothesis 3 and as reflected in Table 2 and Figure 3, the supervisor

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support-emotional exhaustion relationship was stronger among employees higher rather than lower in emotional stability.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the direct (via contagion) and indirect (through supervisor support) effects of supervisors' emotional exhaustion on employees' emotional exhaustion. Based on crossover research and the job demands/resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Westman, 2001), I anticipated that supervisors with higher levels of emotional exhaustion would be drained of their personal resources and be less able to support their employees. I hypothesized that, due to emotional contagion, exposure to an emotionally exhausted supervisor would cause employees' emotional exhaustion to be elevated (H1). I also predicted that the emotional stability of employees would interact with supervisor support (H3), such that employees who are less emotionally stable receive more benefit from supervisor support with regard to warding off emotional exhaustion than those who are more emotionally stable.

The results revealed that a supervisor's emotional exhaustion had no direct effect (H1) on their employees' emotional exhaustion. The anticipated positive relationship between the emotional exhaustion of employees and supervisors would have been consistent with both crossover and emotional contagion theories; however, non-significant findings indicate that my argument that employees may catch their supervisor's exhaustion was not supported by this study.

I found no evidence for my hypothesis (H2a) that supervisors are less able to provide support because of their own emotional exhaustion. This finding runs counter to conservation of resources theory and the JD-R model (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001), which state that all persons have a finite amount of personal resources to allocate to various internal (i.e., coping

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with stress) and external (i.e., job tasks and interactions with employees) personal demands. Researchers argue that persons high in emotional exhaustion have a low level or depletion of resources (Maslach et al. 2001). One may expect that exhausted supervisors would reallocate resources away from support in order to meet their basic core task goals first; however, unless supervisors view employee support as a core task goal, this appears not to be the case. One possible reason for this finding may be that supervisors in this organization are able to work through their emotional exhaustion in a manner that allows them to continue to provide support to their employees. If this is the case, then discovering what personal characteristics allow for this continued support, such as personality or motivation, could be of great benefit to incumbents in high stress occupations that often face threat of resources. Future researchers may consider investigating if certain supervisors are better able to continue to provide support even when exhausted in order to assist in selection for high demand positions, especially those in which the safety of others is a major concern.

PSS did not mediate the relationship between supervisors' emotional exhaustion and employee emotional exhaustion, failing to support hypotheses 2c. PSS was a significant predictor of employee emotional exhaustion, supporting hypotheses 2b as well as prior theory and research on the benefits of support in preventing or minimizing employee stress (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). Although the interaction of PSS and employee emotional stability was statistically significant (H3), visual representation seen in Figure 3 and interpretation of the data in Table 2 reveal that PSS is more meaningful for persons who are high rather than low in emotional stability- a finding counter to my hypothesis. This finding may suggest that support and personality have a more complex relationship with emotional exhaustion than may be explained by the JD-R model and conservation of resources theory alone.

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Implications for Research

The findings of this study paint a picture that is unexpected and interesting. Researchers investigating conservation of resources and the JD-R model (Hobfoll, 1989; Demerouti et al., 2001) have often emphasized that employees who contend with excessive stressors suffer numerous negative effects. These negative effects have ranged from physical ailments (Lee, Lovell, & Brotheridge, 2010) to decreased performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003) and decreased job satisfaction (Tetrick et al., 2000). Despite the diverse outcomes of emotional exhaustion, researchers typically hypothesize that emotional exhaustion is the result of a deficiency of personal resources (time, energy, self-esteem, etc.) relative to the demands of one's job (Maslach et al., 2001). Because providing support for employees is a potential drain on a supervisor's resources, requiring time, energy, and in some cases financial burden, my finding that supervisor emotional exhaustion has no relationship to PSS is surprising.

The finding that PSS does not mediate the relationship between supervisors' emotional exhaustion and employee emotional exhaustion is also surprising. The support a supervisor provides to their employees is one of the primary characteristics that differentiates a good supervisor from a simple 'employee manager'. Results show that there was neither a positive mediation (H2C), such that more exhausted supervisors are less supportive and have more emotionally exhausted employees, nor was there a negative mediation, such that supervisors recognized their own exhaustion and took actions to prevent the exhaustion of their employees. Future research should investigate this issue so that we may better understand what ways supervisor well-being, or lack of well-being, affects both the performance and the well-being of their employees. For example, researchers may find differing results utilizing supervisor

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cynicism or inefficacy on employee burn-out factors due to changes in supervisor behavior that do not necessarily occur from emotional exhaustion.

Support for H2b indicated that the amount of support a supervisor provides has a meaningful negative relationship with the emotional exhaustion of employees. This finding is in accord with previous studies. For example, Jacobs and Dodd (2003) found evidence that support from others, especially one's supervisor (Maslach et al., 2001), plays an important role in warding off emotional exhaustion and burnout. Though not initially hypothesized, emotional stability was also found to be a significant (negative) predictor of emotional exhaustion.

Despite the significant interaction of PSS and employee emotional stability, findings did not fully support my hypothesis (H3) that persons lower in emotional stability would benefit more from supervisor support than employees with higher emotional stability. In fact, results indicate the opposite may be true. This finding is counter to both conservation of resources theory and the JD-R model because the results indicate that persons who have fewer resources or are less able to maintain their resources (low emotional stability) receive no meaningful impact from supervisor support, a factor largely considered useful in maintaining resources (Babin & Boyles, 1996; Eisenberger et al. 2002). Persons high in emotional stability saw a marked decrease in emotional exhaustion when PSS was high rather than low. Counter to hypothesis H3, this finding may indicate that emotionally stable employees are better able to take advantage of support, rather than my initial argument that less emotionally stable employees find more need and use for support. Although this finding appears to run counter to both COR theory and the JD-R model, mine is not the first study to discover this inconsistency between theory and research results. When investigating the relationship between charismatic leadership and emotional exhaustion, Hoogh and Hartog (2009) found that only persons high in emotional stability

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received benefit from charismatic leaders with regard to emotional exhaustion. Researchers may benefit from this unexpected finding by rethinking the manner in which emotional stability operates at low levels. Future studies may explore why employees' low emotional stability appears to act as a barrier to the positive influence of a supportive supervisor on their emotional exhaustion and the possibility that persons high in emotional stability are better able to both receive and utilize the support provided to them.

Practical Implications

Despite the lack of support for Hypotheses 1,2a, 2c and 3, significant results for hypothesis 2b offers practical information for businesses and managers. Organizations can suffer decreased performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Cropanzano et al. 2003) and increased turnover (Houkes, Janssen, Jonge, & Bakker, 2003) when employee well-being suffers. This study provides further evidence that support from one's supervisor and an employee's emotional stability play roles in minimizing employee emotional exhaustion.

This study's unexpected findings may indicate that showing support for employees who are low in emotional stability has less effect on their emotional exhaustion and its related outcomes than would be expected. This information may lead supervisors to look into other avenues beyond displays of support when attempting to counter employee exhaustion in subordinates low in emotional stability. Although these findings may indicate that displays of support will have meaningful effects on some employees and not others, actively withholding support from those employees who receive no benefit may be interpreted as favoritism, neglect or even abusive. Alternatively, supervisors may find employees with low emotional stability benefit from actions beyond overt displays of support, such as reassignment to less stressful job areas or decreases in workload. Lastly, emotional stability's strong relationship to emotional

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exhaustion suggests that employers should continue to pay attention to the personality trait during the selection process, especially for positions that are prone to emotional exhaustion such as in the medical, child-care, and military sectors.

Limitations

This study bears several potential limitations. As discussed by Masterson (2001) in her crossover review, cause and effect relationships may be difficult to determine in studies that examine crossover between persons in similar groups or settings. Co-workers, who share similar environmental factors, such as workload, or lack of resources, may become emotionally exhausted due to their shared workplace conditions. Supervisors and employees may also share these same stressors. Whereas there was potential for a spurious cause for supervisor and employee emotional exhaustion, the employees and supervisors in this study do not frequently work in the same settings. Supervisors are often at a main facility or traveling to work sites, whereas employees spend nearly all of their time on work sites. This lack of constant contact may have caused an additional limitation by decreasing the possibility that there would be a ‘contagion’ or direct transfer of emotional exhaustion from supervisor to employee due to decreased exposure. This lack of contact may have contributed to the failure to find a contagion effect, as low levels of contact may minimize the potential transfer of emotional states from one person to another.

Another potential limitation is that supervisors may have varying levels of ability or training when dealing with their emotional exhaustion. In such industries as the military, fire fighting, and law enforcement, employees train in highly stressful situations. Supervisors who have extensive experience in dealing with stress may be better able to hide or work around their emotional exhaustion, avoiding both an emotional contagion transfer and continuing to provide

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support to their employees. Because this avenue was not investigated in the present study, future research may consider exploring the effect of coping strategies on supervisors' ability to provide support to their subordinates.

Demographic factors, such as age, race, and gender may also play a role in stress management. However, collecting these data was not permitted. Previous studies have found age relates to burnout; however, this may be due to survival bias (i.e., persons who burnout will quit earlier than those who do not). Mixed research results on the role of gender show higher instances for both men and women or no difference at all in emotional exhaustion (Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Maslach et al., 2001). Such differences as job type may also affect stress management; however, several studies who used manual labor samples (specifically construction) found that the only measureable differences between their sample and an office sample were increased levels of burnout due to work load (Linguard & Francis, 2005; Linguard & Francis, 2006). Although the results of previous studies in the field suggest that the lack of demographic information may only be a minor limitation, I emphasize that this is a potential limitation of the proposed study.

Lastly, the proposed study contains nested data, but its analysis is limited by the current statistical capabilities of the field. Whereas utilizing the Edward and Lambert's (2007) method allows for testing of total effects models, no known method is available to conduct this form of moderated mediation in a multilevel context. Fortunately, the lack of available multilevel method is not a significant problem due to the very low ICC. Utilizing Snijders and Bosker's (1999) simplified ICC calculation method ($\frac{\tau_0^2}{\tau_0^2 + \sigma^2}$), I determined the proportion of variance accounted for at the group level to be only .002, an indication that almost all variance may be attributed within groups and multilevel analysis is unnecessary. Some researchers, such as Bauer and

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colleagues, have attacked the problem of multilevel moderation mediation (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006); however, their methods were limited to lower level mediation (i.e. $1 \rightarrow 1 \rightarrow 1$) with a single second-level moderating variable. When testing this model, Bauer et al. (2006) were also limited by the statistical software available. Running their model in SAS without bootstrapping took 40 minutes. If Bauer and colleagues utilized bootstrapping with 1000 iterations, as is recommended by Edwards and Lambert (2007), they estimate the model would take upwards of 28 days to test. As statistical methods and software advance, this and similar studies may benefit from further analysis in a multilevel context.

Conclusions and Future Research

I found further evidence for the idea that support, especially from supervisors, is a useful tool in minimizing emotional stability. This study also opens the door to future research into COR and the JD-R model. The failure of supervisor's emotional exhaustion to predict PSS and the unexpected manner of the interaction of employee emotional stability and supervisor support indicate that both COR and the JD-R model may suffer notable limitations. I encourage future researchers to investigate why emotionally exhausted supervisors are able to continue to provide support to their employees despite their limited available resources. Future research may benefit from exploring the possibility that coping strategies act as a moderator of the relationship between a supervisor's emotional exhaustion and the support they provide to employees. More direct assessment of supervisor resources may also reveal what type and to what extent supervisors resources are actually depleted when they report high levels of exhaustion. This information may be useful in revealing the reason for the lack of relationship between supervisor exhaustion and support provided. Additionally, low emotional stability appears to act as a barrier, such that it appears to prevent supervisor support or charismatic leadership from

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decreasing emotional exhaustion. While the original hypotheses of this study found little support, these findings bring new issues to light and offer new directions for future study. Both the study of emotional stability and the JD-R model may benefit from replication or failure to replicate the unexpected interaction of PSS and employee emotional stability on employee emotional exhaustion.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelation Matrix

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Employee Emotional Exhaustion	2.88	1.03	(.84)			
2. Supervisor Emotional Exhaustion	2.17	0.93	-.13**	(.85)		
3. Employee Emotional Stability	3.24	0.74	-.41**	.23**	(.83)	
4. Perceive Supervisor Support	3.37	0.87	-.16**	.06	.07	(.87)

Note. Correlations are presented below the diagonal (n=242). Cronbach's Alpha is presented in parentheses across the diagonal. * p < .05 ** p < .01

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Table 2
Analysis of Simple Effects

Variable	<i>b</i>	SE <i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	R ²
Mediator model (step 1): Supervisor Support				.02
Emotional exhaustion (Supervisor)	.03	.05	.54	
Emotional Stability (Employee)	.07	.07	.99	
Emotional Exhaustion X Emotional Stability	.14	.07	1.8	
Dependent model (Step 2): Employee Emotional Exhaustion				.20
Emotional Exhaustion (Supervisor)	-.02	.06	-.36	
Emotional Stability (Employee)	-.54**	.07	-8.00	
Supervisor Support	-.14**	.05	-2.63	
Supervisor Support X Emotional Stability	-.21**	.07	-3.11	
Emotional Exhaustion X Emotional Stability	.05	.08	.68	

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

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Table 3

Conditional Direct and Conditional Indirect Effects of Supervisor EE on Employee EE through Supervisor Support

Level of Emotional Stability	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Limits	
			Lower	Upper
Conditional direct (step 3)				
-1 SD	-.06	.09		
Mean	-.02	.06		
+1 SD	.01	.07		
Conditional Indirect effects (step 4) (Through PSS)				
-1 SD	.00	.01	-.04	.02
Mean	.00	.01	-.03	.01
+1 SD	-.04	.03	-.11	.00

Note. *p <.05 ** p<.01; SD= standard deviation; confidence limits which include 0 indicate non-significant effects.

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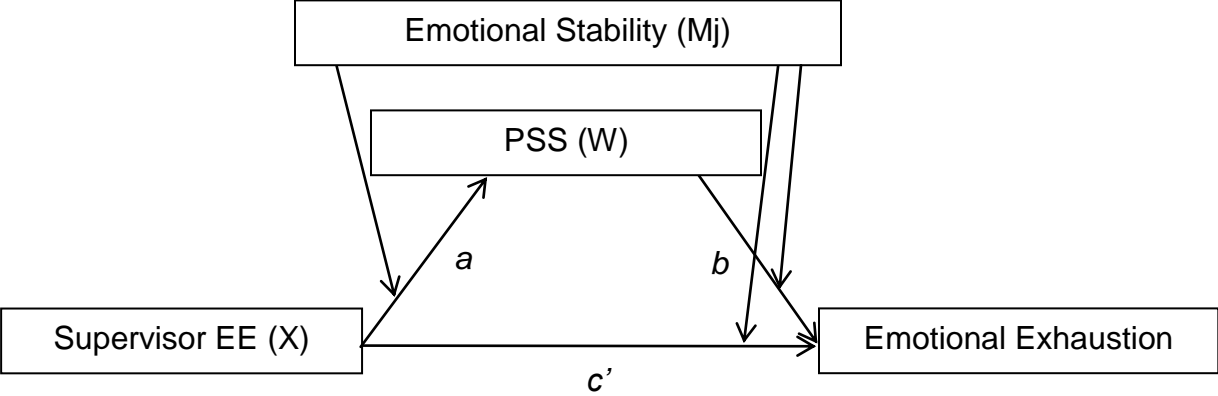


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model, adapted from Hayes (2012).

EXHAUSTED AT WORK

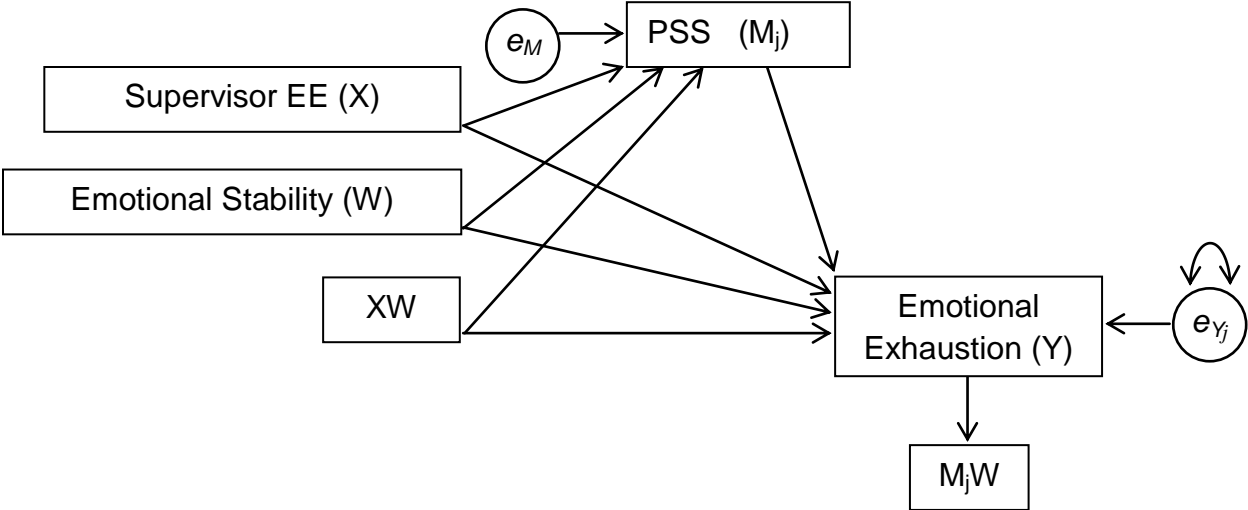


Figure 2. Proposed structural model, adapted from Hayes (2012).

EXHAUSTED AT WORK

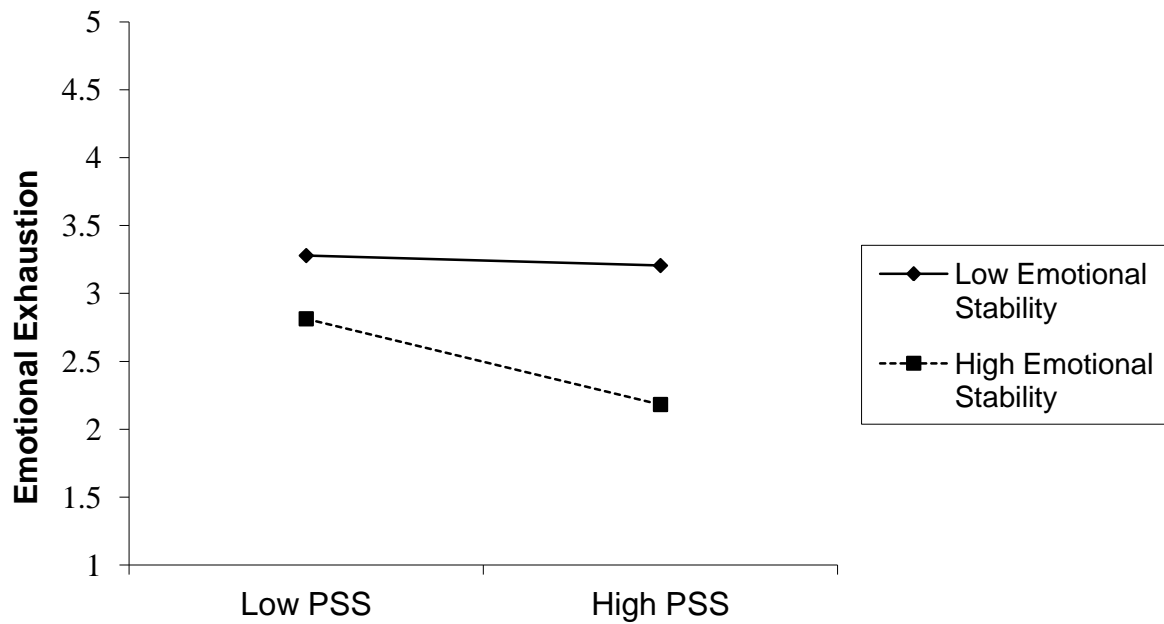


Figure 3. Emotional stability as a moderator of perceived supervisor support and employee emotional exhaustion. Low PSS and emotional stability indicate participant scores 1 standard deviation below the mean. High PSS indicates participant PSS and emotional stability scores 1 standard deviation above the mean.