

# Research on the Relationship between Psychological Safety and Individual Job Burnout

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**Abstract.** The development of globalization and the acceleration of informatization have made the competition between enterprises more and more fierce, and organizations must respond to new opportunities and challenges through organizational change. Organizational change also makes employees' working environment more and more complex, occupational uncertainties and risks are increasing, which in turn brings employees psychological insecurity and job burnout. In this paper, through combing the related research of psychological safety and job burnout, the negative relationship between psychological safety and individual job burnout is verified by empirical analysis, and according to the conclusion, relevant suggestions are proposed to the organization management, trying to help the organization take effective measures to satisfy employees' psychological safety needs and reduce the phenomenon of job burnout.

**Keywords:** Psychological safety, Job burnout, Individual.

## 1 Introduction

As a hot topic in organizational behavior, the emergence of the concept of psychological safety originates from the study of organizational change. Schein and Bennis [1] illustrated that it is necessary for organizations to pay attention to subordinates' psychological safety needs in the context of organizational change. In face of constant changes in the internal and external environment and the reintegration and alteration of resources, organizations must respond to opportunities and challenges, and win long-term survival and development through organizational changes, such as organizational structure adjustment, personnel restructuring, and strategic innovation. However, organizational change may induce organizational members' concerns, fears, and insecurity, which probably lead to increased turnover rate, slack in work, and reduced work performance and so on. Therefore, in order to help the members of the organization to overcome the uncertainty and insecurity brought about by organizational change from the psychological level, it is especially important to meet their psychological safety needs and strengthen the sense of organizational identification and trust [2]. Psychological safety not only reflects the safety needs of organizational members in the context of organizational change, but also is closely related to organizational members' work input. It can stimulate individual working enthusiasm and improve work performance, thus improving the core competitiveness of the organization.

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Conversely, it will cause slack in work and occupational burnout if psychological safety is lacking. Therefore, it is of the great theoretical and practical significance to explore the relationship between psychological safety and individual job burnout.

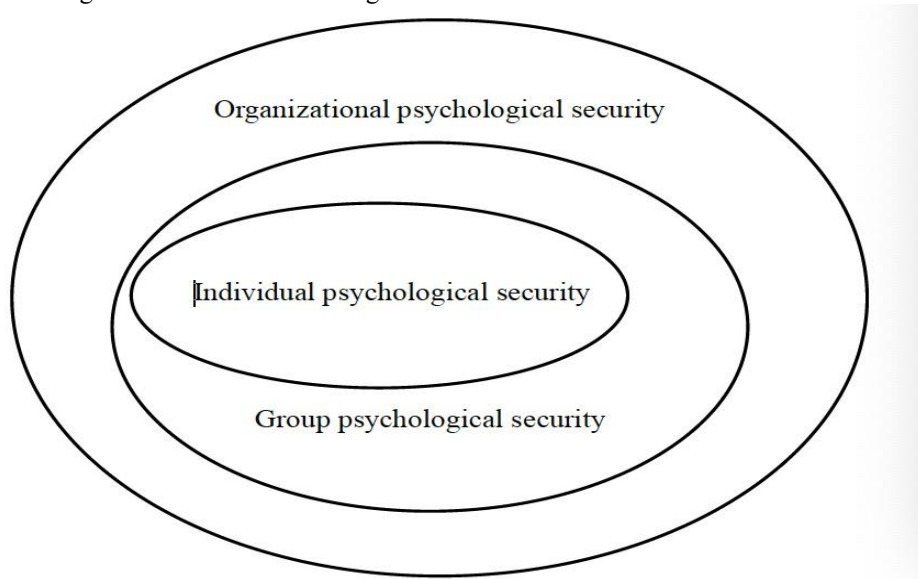
Looking from the existing literature, scholars at home and abroad have already conducted adequate research on psychological safety. There is more literature about psychological safety in foreign countries, and the time span is wider. The main research angles can be summarized into three categories: First, the research on the concept of psychological safety. Foreign scholars divide the concept of psychological safety into three levels: individual, group and organization, and define them differently. The second is research on psychological safety measurement. Aiming at the different definitions of psychological safety at the individual, group and organizational levels, foreign scholars use different measurement scales when measuring psychological safety at different levels [3]. At the individual level, most of the psychological safety measurements use the psychological safety scale compiled by Tynan [4], which includes the two dimensions of self-psychological safety and others. At the group level, the team psychological safety scale developed by Edmondson [2] is also the classic and most cited scale. Brown and Leigh [5] divided psychological safety into three dimensions of supportive management, role clarity and self-expression from the organizational level for measurement. The third is the study of influencing factors of psychological safety, mainly from the aspects of individual characteristics, quality of interpersonal relationships, group activities and structures, leadership traits, and other situational factors to analyze how to affect the psychological safety of subordinates [6].

At present, domestic scholars mainly focus on the study of the impact and function mechanism of psychological safety and discuss the impact of psychological safety on organizational members' learning behavior, work performance, innovation behavior, work behavior, advocacy behavior and other aspects. For example, Chen, Zhao and Jiang [7] used empirical research methods to deeply analyze the relationship between psychological safety and the nine sub-capabilities of team learning, and verified that psychological safety can affect team performance through the intermediary role of the overall learning ability of the team; Zhang [8] studied the relationship between the three variables of psychological safety, knowledge self-confidence and team members' willingness to share knowledge; Shi [9] deeply explored the mediating effect of psychological safety on organizational trust and employee innovation behavior; Yuan and Liu [10] used 460 corporate employees as a sample to discuss the moderating role of psychological safety in the relationship between organizational ethics and employee voice behavior. Most of the existing research focuses on the behavioral results produced by psychological safety, while research on the effects of psychological safety on work attitudes is still deficient. Although variables such as work engagement, work involvement, and work input have been confirmed to be affected by psychological safety, the current research mainly focuses on the impact of psychological safety on positive outcome variables, and is lacking in the study of the impact of psychological safety on negative outcome variables. Based on this, this article takes the negative result variable of job burnout as the research object, and explores the relationship between psychological safety and job burnout from the concepts of psychological safety and job burnout. It is hoped that through the research, the impact and function mechanism of psychological safety on individual job burnout will be revealed.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Psychological safety

There are many definitions of the concept of psychological safety in academia. Overall, according to different levels of attention, they can be divided into three levels: individual, group and organization. As shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Multi-layered concept of psychological security.

Kahn [11] first proposed the concept of individual psychological safety in the study of the impact of employee psychological safety on work engagement. He believes that individual psychological safety is an individual characteristic, which reflects the self-perception of the internal psychological state of the members of the organization, and defines psychological safety as: the organization members can express and show themselves without worrying about the negative impact of the behaviors on their personal image, status and work, which is the most recognized definition in the academic circles when studying individual psychological safety. Essentially, individual psychological security is the individual's intrinsic motivation and the mental state of shaping the individual's psychological role. When the members of the organization have a strong sense of psychological security, it will increase work input and participation; on the contrary, when the sense of psychological security decreases, job burnout increases.

The concept of group psychological safety originated from the impact and changes brought about by economic development on the traditional organizational structure. With the increasingly fierce organizational competition, the traditional organizational structure can not adapt to the new situation and new environment, the team as a more efficient and flexible new organizational model has been recognized by more and more managers, so the concept of team psychological safety comes into being. Edmondson [2] first proposed the concept of group psychological safety from the perspective of team characteristics in the study of team learning behavior, and defined it as a shared belief that the team ensures that "interpersonal risk is safe." Psychological safety at the group level describes the overall characteristics of the group, not the characteristics of individual group members. It is closely related to interpersonal trust between groups, but it also transcends interpersonal trust.

Organizational psychological security is represented by the shared beliefs of the entire organization, which belongs to the characteristics of organizational atmosphere. Brown and Leigh [5], when studying the relationship between psychological atmosphere, job involvement and job performance, defined organizational level psychological safety as organizational members' perception of organizational atmosphere and organizational environment, including perceived supportive management, role clarity and organizational characteristics that allow self-expression. When the organization adopts more supportive management, gives employees clear role expectations, and allows employees to express their views freely, members of the organization will have a higher sense of psychological security. Baer and Frese [12] believe that organizational psychological safety refers to the formal or informal organizational norms and procedures that support the open interaction of members of the organization.

Since this article studies the relationship between psychological safety and individual job burnout, the concept of individual layer psychological safety is selected.

## **2.2 Job burnout**

Job burnout was originally discovered by psychologist Herbert Freuden-berger in the 1860s when his colleagues showed a series of negative emotional and behavioral performances at work, and the professional term "burnout" was first proposed in 1974. Job burnout is used to describe the negative states such as cynicism, depression, depression, and boredom that employees show at work [13]. Maslach and Leiter [14] divide the symptoms of job burnout into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of accomplishment. Among them, emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of excessive consumption and commitment; depersonalization refers to apathy and negative attitudes or emotions towards others at work; reduced sense of accomplishment refers to dissatisfaction with one's own work performance and ability.

## **3 Research methods**

### **3.1 Research Hypothesis**

At present, domestic scholars have relatively little research on the relationship between psychological safety and job burnout. After searching, Liang [15] used 558 doctors, nurses and technicians as the research object to discuss the psychological mechanism of medical workers 'job burnout. Through empirical research, it was found that medical workers generally have job burnout, and improving employees' psychological security can effectively reduce job burnout. From the perspective of job insecurity brought by layoffs, Chen [16] established a new model of the relationship between job insecurity and job burnout of the new generation of employees, and concluded that sense of security is positively related to job burnout. Based on the above discussion, this article proposes the following assumptions:

H1: psychological safety has a negative effect on job burnout ;

H1-1: psychological safety has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion ;

H1-2: psychological safety has a negative effect on depersonalization ;

H1-3: psychological safety has a negative effect on the reduction of sense of accomplishment ;

### **3.2 Research object**

The samples in this study are teachers, corporate employees and government staff in Xi'an, Shanghai, Suzhou, Beijing and other places. In order to improve the reliability and effectiveness of the questionnaire survey, the research objects involve various industries as much as possible. The questionnaire is distributed mainly through the app "Questionnaire Star", and then the questionnaire is recovered in time through the app. The questionnaire survey and collection work lasted for one month. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed and 420 valid questionnaires were recovered. Among them, in terms of gender, men account for 41% and women for 59%. For age, 25 years and younger account for 10%, 26-30 years for 35%, 31-35 years for 27%, 36-40 years for 22%, 41% and below accounted for 6%. In terms of education level, 36% undergraduate, 61% master and 3% doctor. In terms of job nature, state-owned enterprises accounted for 23%, private enterprises accounted for 35%, public institutions and government departments accounted for 42%. In terms of working years, 31% within 5 years, 43% within 5-10 years, and 26% over 10 years.

### **3.3 Research tools**

Individual level psychological safety scale: using the Likert 9-point interpersonal interaction psychological safety scale compiled by Tynan [4]. The scale includes two dimensions of self-psychological safety and the psychological safety of others, with a total of 12 items. The self-psychological safety scale includes 7 items, and the others' psychological safety scale includes 5 items.

Work Burnout Scale: The work burnout scale developed by Maslach has a total of 12 items, including three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of accomplishment. The scale uses Likert 7-point scoring method, the higher the score, the more serious the job burnout.

## **4 Conclusion**

This article uses Amos17.0 software to perform reliability and validity analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, differential impact analysis and regression analysis on the scale to verify the relationship between psychological safety and individual job burnout. The specific verification situation is shown in the Table 1.

This study concludes that psychological safety is significantly negatively correlated with job burnout. The higher the psychological safety score, the lower the job burnout, which is consistent with previous research results. Therefore, psychological safety, as a source of occupational stress that cannot be ignored, will have an important impact on the physical and mental health and work motivation of the members of the organization. Only when employees have a strong sense of psychological security, can feel the stability guarantee provided by the organization, reasonable promotion opportunities and development space, will they see the future development prospects, and thus maintain their passion for work and are willing to devote themselves to work. Otherwise, job burnout will occur. It is suggested that the organization should establish a perfect and reasonable performance evaluation system, evaluation system, training system and effective communication channels to enhance employees' psychological security, thereby decreasing the phenomenon of job burnout.

**Table 1.** Summary table of verification of various theoretical assumptions.

No.	Assumption Content	Verification Results
H1	Psychological safety has a negative effect on job burnout	Support
H1-1	Psychological safety and emotional exhaustion have a negative impact	Support
H1-2	Psychological safety and depersonalization have a negative impact	Support
H1-3	Psychological safety and reduced sense of accomplishment have negative effects.	Support

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