How Self-compassion Affects Work Engagement: Examining the Moderating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Interpersonal Stress

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Abstract

This article aims to explore whether the level of employees' self-compassion has an impact on their own performance in the organization. And, this article explores related variables to establish a theoretical model, use the questionnaire survey method, through the network questionnaire, and collect 335 valid samples for analysis. The results show that self-compassion has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion, emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on work engagement, difficulties in emotional regulation have a negative moderating effect between self-compassion and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, self-compassion can alleviate the negative impact of employees when they are under pressure, bring benefits to the employees themselves, and lead to the employees having a positive impact on the organization.

1. Introduction

When employees feel pain or encounter difficulties, if there is no better way to deal with them, they will fall into pain and cannot extricate themselves, which will affect their work and life. For example, employees work very hard in the organization, but do not get the support and rewards of their superiors. Instead, they are blamed by their superiors for not doing well enough. Then the employees will feel pain and feel wronged in their hearts, and they will think of themselves clearly. Working hard, so hard and so tired, why do you scold me? Under these pressures, employees will feel pain and uncomfortable, but some employees will still actively work, some employees may try to complete the work, and some employees fail to complete the work. Why? This may all be related to the self-compassion of employees.

Most employees will easily develop resistance to work due to setbacks and difficulties; a small number of employees will face difficulties squarely, face setbacks bravely, and find ways to overcome them. Therefore, it is particularly important for us to study the effect of employee self-compassion on ourselves and the organization. Through reviewing related literature, most of them are studying the relationship between self-compassion and self-abuse, suicide and other behaviors. This article is from the perspective of employee self-compassion, aiming to explore the impact of employee self-compassion on employees themselves and their organization. Based on the Resource Conservation Theory (COR), this article establishes a basic model

between employee self-compassion and work engagement.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical basis

The point of view of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is to reduce resource loss, preserve existing resources and obtain new resources. When people perceive the lack of resources, the threat of losing resources, or fail to get the rewards they deserve after investing resources, individuals will work hard to obtain what they think is valuable to reduce losses. Resources include material, conditional, and personality and energy. The theory contains 2 spiral effects:

First, the loss spiral effect means that when individuals lack resources, they are more likely to feel the pressure of losing resources, and the pressure may affect their investment in other areas. When an individual feels that he cannot get a return, it will lead to the failure of the individual's resource input, thus causing more resource loss.

Second, the value-added spiral effect is that when an individual has a lot of resources, it is easier to obtain other new resources. If the individual has more resources, the more resource output will be obtained. According to research findings, the loss of the spiral effect causes more resource loss than the value-added spiral effect brings more resources, but people generally fall into the loss of the spiral effect.

2.2 The effect of self-compassion on emotional exhaustion

Compassion was originally defined as being able to truly feel the pain of others, being able to understand others well, being tolerant of others without conditions, and treating personal mistakes and failures as part of life experience, which is inevitable. With the deepening of self-concept research, scholars have gradually changed the object of sympathy from others to themselves. Among them, Neff (2003) proposed the definition of "self-compassion", which refers to individuals who can be tolerant of difficulties or failures in important things. An attitude of dealing with the pain and misfortune encountered by the individual, but also accepting the defective self, focusing only on some positive emotions of oneself, not focusing on some negative emotions, and being able to evaluate oneself objectively, and the individual also thinks the personal hardship is only a necessary part of life experience.

Self-compassion can be explored from two perspectives. The first is to explore from the perspective of self. It is a positive and positive performance. It is an individual's ability to accept a flawed self, identify with oneself with tolerance, and consider failure as part of life experience. The individual only needs to focus on maintaining physical and mental health.

Yarnell and Neff (2012) found that people with high levels of self-compassion often take a compromise approach when facing interpersonal difficulties and conflicts. Breines and Chen (2012) found that people who are not sympathetic may be less likely to accept their own moral transgressions, while those who are compassionate not only admit their mistakes but also correct their own mistakes. When studying the relationship between fear of self-compassion and psychological inflexibility, scholars found that certain individuals may show fear and resistance when facing self-compassion, which is also known as fear of self-compassion. Homan and Sirois (2017) advocated that self-compassion is good for physical health, and these benefits are a behavior that promotes health. When facing difficulties or failures, individuals

will work hard with tolerance and they will also openly accept difficulties to reduce stress and promote personal health.

The definition of job burnout by Maslach and Jackson (1987) is caused by emphasizing that an individual pays too much emotional or emotional resources in work. They also define the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment.

Self-compassion means that an individual can treat important things with tolerance after suffering difficulties or failures, and then deal with their own misfortunes or feelings, accept imperfect self, and consider failure as part of their life experience. According to the COR Theory, when individual resources suffer loss, are threatened by resource loss or the resources invested have no corresponding return, the individual will try to reduce the loss of resources and protect existing resources. Employee self-compassion can be regarded as a kind of psychological resource. Reduce the generation of emotional exhaustion. Maslach and Leiter (2008) found in their research that an individual's personality and characteristics have an impact on emotional exhaustion. Stanton et al. (2000) pointed out that when individuals face stress, self-compassion strategies can effectively control the intensity and duration of emotional arousal, thereby changing the personal negative emotional state. Therefore, this article makes the following hypothesis:

H1: Employees' self-compassion has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion.

2.3 The impact of emotional exhaustion on work engagement

Schaufeli et al. (2002) advocate that work engagement is the three dimensions of concentration, dedication and vitality, and it is the positive emotions and states related to work. Vitality means that employees work hard voluntarily and are energetic at work. Concentration means that employees devote all their energy to work, and the individual will work single-mindedly, and feel that time passes quickly, especially at work. Dedication means that employees love their work, have a sense of identity with their work, and are proud of their work. The employee's work engagement is very important to the organization because it helps the organization increase its profits.

Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of exhaustion caused by an individual's excessive expenditure of emotional resources. According to the COR Theory, when an individual suffers from resource loss, threat of resource loss, or resource input but no corresponding return, the individual will work hard to reduce resource loss, protect existing resources, and work hard to add new resources. COR theory also points out that individuals with rich resources will bring enthusiasm and enthusiasm to work, and therefore show a higher level of work engagement. Employees at work, when employees work hard, in the case of excessive emotional resources, employees will feel the loss of resources, thereby reducing investment in work. Therefore, this article makes the following hypotheses:

H2: Emotional exhaustion has a negative impact on employee work engagement.
H2a: Emotional exhaustion negatively affects employee vitality.
H2b: Emotional exhaustion negatively affects dedication.
H2c: Emotional exhaustion negatively affects concentration.

2.4 The moderating effect of difficulties in emotional regulation

Gratz and Roemer (2008) summarized previous studies and proposed a comprehensive concept. They felt that emotional regulation involves six conceptual aspects: acceptance of emotions, effective emotional regulation strategies, control of emotions, and understanding of emotions, emotional clarity and goals, and difficulties in orientation. When an individual lacks a certain aspect of function, there will be difficulties in emotional regulation. Anestis et al. (2011) advocated that personal emotion regulation difficulties should be distinguished from the individual's internal, emotion-related qualities and the individual's emotional activities, and the individual's response to emotions should be emphasized. However, some scholars argue that the difficulty of emotional regulation is close to the failure of emotional regulation, that is, the individual has a functional disorder in the process of processing his own emotions. Weinberg and Klonsky (2009) found that a lack of emotional clarity in individuals leads to an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation.

Difficulty in emotional regulation is when employees have emotional disturbances or disorders. This lack of ability is called difficulty in emotional regulation. According to the COR theory, employees who lack resources are more likely to suffer from the pressure of resource loss, which will cause other resource inputs to be more than make ends meet and accelerate resource loss. Difficulties in emotional regulation play a blocking role in self-compassion and emotional exhaustion and weaken this relationship. Therefore, this article makes the following hypothesis:

H3: Difficulties in emotional regulation play a negative moderating role in the relationship between employee self-compassion and emotional.

2.5 Moderation from interpersonal stress

Ajzen (1991) put forward the concept of interpersonal stress, which refers to the psychological pressure that individuals bring when dealing with interpersonal relationships. Such pressure often appears in the context of interpersonal communication and directly affects human behavior. Williams and Cooper (1998) in their research on work stress, divided work stress into six dimensions: work itself, management roles, interpersonal relationships, career development and achievement, organizational structure and atmosphere, and work-family conflicts. The research also defines interpersonal stress as the various objective psychological pressures that are generated in the context of interpersonal communication, which have an impact on the individual's psychology, physiology and behavior.

Interpersonal stress refers to a kind of psychological pressure brought by employees when dealing with interpersonal relationships in some situations of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal relationship is a kind of interpersonal resource. When employees feel the pressure of interpersonal relationship is great, that is, employees are paying in the interpersonal relationship. When employees feel a lot of pressure on interpersonal relationship, that is, employees are paying in interpersonal relationship. When they need help, they do not get positive feedback from colleagues and superiors. Being treated indifferently by colleagues and supervisors shows that employees lack interpersonal resources. According to the COR theory, individuals with lack of resources are more likely to suffer from the pressure of resource loss, and this pressure causes the resource input to prevent resource loss to make ends meet and accelerate resource loss. Therefore, the lack of interpersonal resources will hinder the return of employees' resource investment, and therefore will strengthen the reduction of employees' work investment, so interpersonal stress has an enhanced effect in emotional exhaustion and

work investment. Therefore, this article makes the following hypotheses:

H4: Interpersonal stress plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between employee emotional exhaustion and work engagement.
H4a: Interpersonal stress plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and vitality of employees.
H4b: Interpersonal stress plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between employee emotional exhaustion and dedication.
H4c: Interpersonal stress plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and concentration of employees.

To summarize the above research hypotheses, sort out the above-mentioned hypothetical relationships and display them as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Research framework diagram
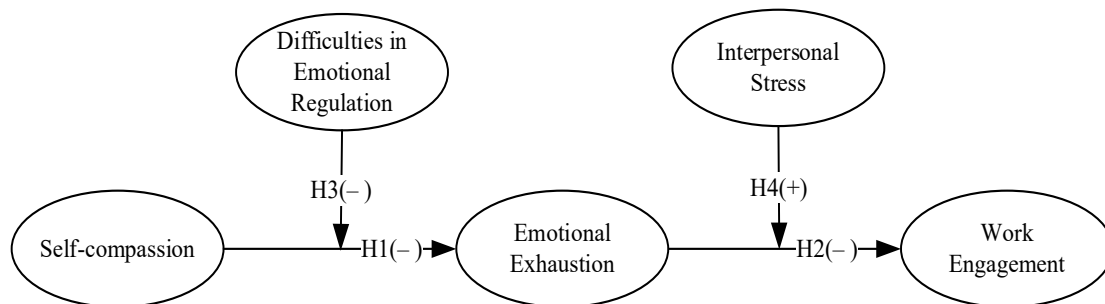
3. Research methods

3.1 Research participants and sampling

The research participants in this study are mainly in-service employees. The sampling method is to use online questionnaires to distribute through online platforms. After the collected samples have been eliminated invalid questionnaires, statistical analysis is processed based on these valid questionnaires.

3.2 The preparation process of the questionnaire

In the preparation of the questionnaire, the first step is to find a variable scale that meets the purpose of this research. This research finds that the measured scale conforms to the definition of the variable, and then selects the items on the scale to reflect the purpose of the research. Next, review and sort out the literature to see which variables will interfere with the external validity of this study. Then this article selects a total of 6 control variables, namely gender, age, working years, education level, job position and job category. In the questionnaire collecting process, in order to avoid people filling in randomly or filling out the questions without seeing clearly, the participants are also asked "Are you a current employee?" as a screening item. After a period of up to 2 months, this study began to screen the returned questionnaires.

3.3 The screening process of the questionnaire

Mainly through the screening of control variables, because the research object of this article is an in-service employee, so the questionnaire that answered "not an in-service employee" is

deleted, and then routine errors are deleted, for example, although the respondent is less than 20 years old, but fill in an employee who has been working for more than ten years, or a corporate executive.

4. Research results

The moderating analysis results of the four interactions are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. As the research hypotheses the direct negative influence relationship between H1 and H2, both are statistically significantly supported.

In M2a, self-compassion and difficulties in emotional regulation can explain 26.6% of the variance in emotional exhaustion, and self-compassion and F is significant at the level of 0.001. In M3a, after the introduction of the interaction term, self-compassion and difficulties in emotional regulation can explain 27.5% of the variance of emotional exhaustion. At this time, the regression coefficient of the interaction term is -0.111, which is significant at the 0.05 level, and the F is 16.845 ($p < .001$) Therefore, it is concluded that difficulties in emotional regulation has a negative moderating effect between self-compassion and emotional exhaustion. The research hypothesis H3 is statistically significantly supported.

In order to further explain the moderating effect of difficulties in emotional regulation, a simple slope diagram is drawn based on the results of regression analysis. The low difficulties in emotional regulation group and the high difficulties in emotional regulation group all showed a downward trend from low self-compassion to high self-compassion. In the low self-compassion, the low difficulties in emotional regulation group were slightly higher than the high difficulties in emotional regulation group, and the high self-compassion. The low difficulties in emotional regulation group are significantly higher than the high difficulties in emotional regulation group, so the effect is attenuated, so it is negative moderation (refer to Figure 2).

Table 1

Test interactions from difficulties in emotion regulation and self-compassion (N=335)

DV	Emotional Exhaustion			Vitality of Employees		
IV/Model	M1a	M2a	M3a	M1b	M2b	M3b
Gender	-.110*	-.092	-.090	.019	-.027	-.024
Age	.065	.016	.015	-.138	-.063	-.095
Education	-.057	-.016	-.016	.033	-.008	-.005
Experience	.112	.093	.100	-.100	-.021	-.040
Position	.053	.040	.045	.010	.012	.029
Self-compassion		-.501***	-.519***			
Difficulties in Emotion Regulation		-.072	-.085			
Emotional Exhaustion					-.316***	-.400***
Interpersonal Stress					.369***	.243***
Self-compassion x Difficulties in Emotion Regulation			-.111*			
Emotional Exhaustion x Interpersonal Stress						.192***
Adj R²	.009	.266	.275	-.007	.308	.327
ΔR²		.258	.012		.314	.022
F	1.577	18.249***	16.845***	.549	22.187***	21.331***

Notes: $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table 2

Test interactions from interpersonal stress and emotional exhaustion (N=335)

DV	Dedication			Concentration of Employees		
IV/Model	M1c	M2c	M3c	M1d	M2d	M3d
Gender	.052	.024	.025	.009	-.032	-.031
Age	-.019	.065	.057	-.126	-.052	-.065
Education	.069	.029	.030	.082	.042	.043
Experience	.066	.139	.134	-.215*	-.139	-.147
Position	.036	.020	.025	.009	-.011	-.004
Emotional Exhaustion		-.102*	-.124*		-.259***	-.293***
Interpersonal Stress		.522***	.488***		.390***	.339***
Emotional Exhaustion x Interpersonal Stress			.051			.078
Adj R²	.003	.319	.318	.006	.293	.294
ΔR²		.315	.002		.287	.004
F	1.179	23.315***	20.479***	1.411	20.758***	18.411***

Notes: $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

In M2b, emotional exhaustion and interpersonal stress can explain 30.8% of the variance in vitality. At this time, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal stress and *F* is significant at the level of 0.001. In M3b, after introducing the interaction term, emotional exhaustion and interpersonal stress can explain 32.7% of the variance in vitality. At this time, the regression coefficient of the interaction term is 0.192, which is significant at the level of 0.001, and the *F* is 21.331, significant at the level of 0.001. The research hypothesis H4a is statistically significantly supported, so it is concluded that interpersonal stress plays a positive role in moderating effect

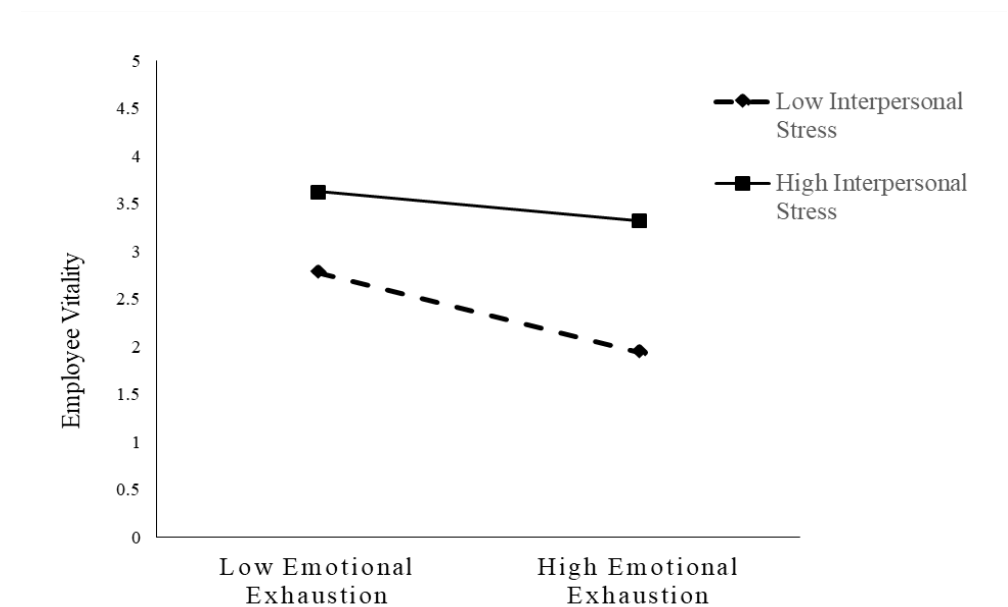between emotional exhaustion and vitality (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 2
The moderating effects of difficulty in emotional regulation

Figure 3
*The moderating effect of interpersonal stress*

As the research hypotheses H4b and H4c have no statistical support for their moderating effects. In this study, in-service employees were used as research participants, and data were collected through questionnaire surveys to analyze the theoretical relationship between self-compassion, emotional exhaustion, difficulties in emotional regulation, interpersonal stress, and work engagement (refer to Figure 4).

Figure 4

The research results of hypothesis testing
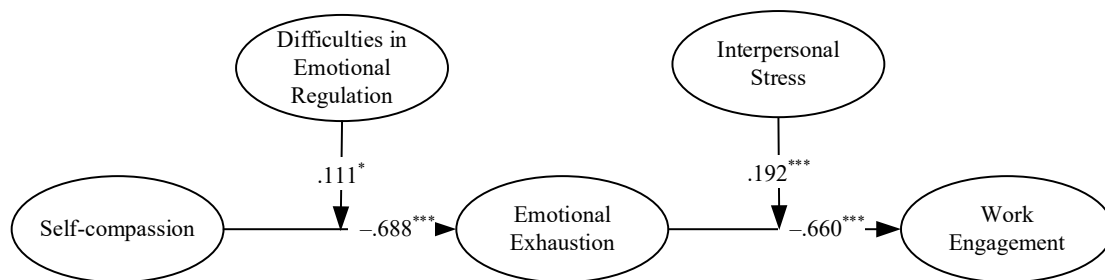
5. Conclusion

With the answers to the questions in this research, employees with higher self-compassion can indeed improve their work engagement by reducing emotional exhaustion. Among them, if employees have lower difficulties in emotional regulation, it can also promote the positive effect of this influence. In particular, if employees have high interpersonal stress, they can only increase the vitality of employees in work engagement.

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