

Abstract

In a field study of 128 middle-managers in similar roles but in different organizations within the UK public sector, we find that the quality of their leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship with their immediate supervisor is negatively related to the three dimensions of burnout. As hypothesized, LMX and communication frequency are found to interact in the prediction of emotional exhaustion. For low-quality LMX, the relationship between communication frequency and emotional exhaustion is positive with an increasingly steep upward slope as communication frequency increases. For high-quality LMX, the relationship is not as expected, but is curvilinear with an inverted U-shape. The findings support the importance of the social context of the workplace for the development and persistence of burnout. The results indicate that the quality of the relationship between employees and their manager in combination with the nature and the frequency of their interpersonal interactions are important factors for employee well-being. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature on LMX by providing further support for the importance of LMX being dependent on how frequently employees and managers interact for a new and very important outcome of emotional exhaustion.