

**Emotional Exhaustion in Manufacturing Sector: A Systematic Review of Workplace Stressors and Cultural Erosion**

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<p><b>Peer Review Information</b></p> <p><i>Type: Article</i> <i>Received: 3 February 2026</i> <i>Revised: 4 March 2026</i> <i>Accepted: 1 April 2026</i> <i>Published: 22 May 2026</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Work-related stress is becoming increasingly important in modern businesses, especially those that rely on manual labor, such as factories. The relationship between work pressure, the erosion of corporate culture, and emotional exhaustion has been relatively overlooked compared to the focus on individual sources of stress and burnout, which has been more prevalent in previous studies. This paper will provide an overview of the current body of knowledge in this area by conducting a systematic literature review to highlight existing gaps, uncover common themes, and summarize the essential findings.</p> <p>The SLR process included selecting articles from peer-reviewed journals through databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, and the Web of Science. The selection process considered predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies published from 2010 to 2025. The literature review categorizes past research into four primary areas, which include the stressors in the workplace, emotional exhaustion, deterioration of organizational culture, and industry-specific issues in the manufacturing environment.</p> <p>The findings reveal that although the existence of the stressors in the workplace, such as role uncertainty, high workloads, and job insecurities as strong predictors of emotional exhaustion is well documented in previous research, there is inadequate analysis of the mediating role played by cultural deterioration. There is also a noted lack of studies dealing with emerging markets, especially concerning the Indian manufacturing sector. Through this review, the literature will be enriched by integrating different areas of research and creating an empirical relationship between the stressors at work, cultural deterioration, and emotional exhaustion.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Workplace Stressors; Emotional Exhaustion; Organizational Culture; Cultural Erosion; Manufacturing Sector; Employee Burnout.</p>
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**How to Cite This Article**

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## Introduction

During recent years, there have been many changes in the work environment, which involve growing competition, innovations, and restructuring of organizations. All these changes have contributed to higher demands being put on employees, which means that occupational stress is becoming a prevalent phenomenon nowadays. One of the most vulnerable industries is the manufacturing industry because of its labor intensity and inflexibility.

The term “workplace stressors” refers to external factors or demands that pose challenges for coping strategies in individuals. The following examples include such sources of stress as high workload, role conflict, lack of control, and job insecurity. Constant exposure to such stressors may lead to emotional exhaustion, which is one of the three main components of burnout syndrome and involves feeling psychologically depleted of energy and emotions. Emotional exhaustion negatively impacts the health and well-being of employees as well as organizational efficiency.

While the association between stressors and emotional exhaustion is already known to exist in the academic literature, a relatively new but insufficiently studied issue is the role played by organizational culture and its gradual degradation. Organizational culture is made up of values, beliefs, and norms that determine the actions of employees. In a state of chronic stress, organizations can experience culture degradation through such symptoms as lack of trust, deteriorating integrity of leaders, decreasing cooperation, and low employee involvement. This process can make the effect of stress more pronounced, thus forming a vicious circle that leads to faster emotional exhaustion.

The connection between stressors, organizational culture degradation, and emotional exhaustion has already been recognized as theoretically relevant; nevertheless, it has not received enough attention from researchers. At present, most studies do not examine these phenomena in conjunction but study them independently. Furthermore, the existing literature is focused on the Western world, paying little attention to emerging economies such as India.

In light of the above research lacunae, the present study applies a SLR method in order to assess critically and synthesize the current body of knowledge on workplace stressors, cultural erosion, and emotional exhaustion. The following are the key objectives that this study endeavors to meet:

(1) identification and classification of the main workplace stressors, and examination of their effects on emotional exhaustion; (2) evaluation of organizational culture and its erosion as determinants of employee well-being; and (3) identification of research gaps, specifically with regard to the manufacturing sector in emerging markets. Through the analysis of empirical results from different studies, this research is expected to provide an insight into the relationship between workplace stressors, cultural erosion, and emotional exhaustion.

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This systematic review will apply the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to analyze the existing studies on stressors in the workplace, cultural decay, and emotional exhaustion. The use of the SLR method is particularly suitable for synthesizing the existing literature, providing transparency, and avoiding any form of selection bias. In order to ensure the highest possible methodological standard, the SLR will be conducted in accordance with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

### *Data Sources and Search Strategy*

A thorough search through various databases was conducted in order to capture as much relevant literature on the topic as possible. The major databases searched include:

- Google Scholar
- Scopus
- Web of Science

Keywords and Boolean operators were combined in the search strategy in an attempt to account for different variations of the key concepts. The search string that was used includes:

- ("workplace stress" OR "job stress" OR "occupational stress") AND ("emotional exhaustion" OR "burnout")

- AND ("organizational culture" OR "cultural erosion" OR "workplace culture") AND ("manufacturing sector" OR "industrial workforce")

In addition, manual searches included checking bibliographies of certain papers in order to discover relevant literature not captured in the major databases.

#### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

For assurance of relevance and soundness, certain inclusion and exclusion criteria were used in the following manner:

##### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Scholarly journal articles
- Articles published between 2020 and 2026
- Articles written in the English language
- Articles discussing work stress, emotional burnout, or organizational culture
- Empirical or theoretical research relevant to the study objectives
- Papers presented at conferences, editorials, and opinions
- Sources that are non-scholarly or unpublished
- Duplicate entries
- Articles for which the full text is unavailable
- Articles not relevant to the key concepts

#### *Study Selection Process (PRISMA Flow)*

Procedures for selecting the studies in accordance with PRISMA were as follows:

##### **1. Identification**

A preliminary search led to the extraction of many papers from the chosen databases through the use of key words.

##### **2. Screening**

Duplicated papers were eliminated, and screening was carried out based on the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles.

##### **3. Eligibility**

Articles were analyzed according to the set inclusion and exclusion criteria.

##### **4. Inclusion**

Final studies meeting all requirements were included in the study.

#### *Data Extraction and Synthesis*

The relevant information from the studies chosen was collected and sorted through an extraction process. The key pieces of information extracted include:

- Author(s) and Year of Publication
- Context of the Study (Industry/Country)
- Methods used in conducting the research
- Variables investigated
- Important results

Next, the extracted information was subjected to thematic synthesis analysis, which facilitated the discovery of repeated patterns and concepts within the body of literature. Four main themes were identified in the literature review:

1. Workplace Stressors
2. Emotional Exhaustion
3. Organizational Culture and its Erosion
4. Manufacturing Industry Context

*Limitations of the Methodology*

However, some weaknesses cannot be overlooked in spite of the use of a systematic methodology:

- The review only considers material written in English, which might mean missing important regional research.
- In spite of the wide range of databases used for the search, other research could be omitted.
- Publication bias exists since articles showing notable results are published more frequently.

**Thematic Literature Review**

The existing body of literature concerning the study of workplace stress, emotional exhaustion, and organizational culture has grown immensely within the past few years. Despite that, there is a trend where these concepts are studied individually, thereby making their findings piecemeal. The purpose of this segment is to review some of the studies conducted within the period 2020 to 2025 under four primary categories.

*Workplace Stressors*

In the context of modern organizations, stressors have been identified as the principal triggers of employee burnout and psychological stress. Modern work environments are characterized by higher levels of job demand, ambiguity, and job insecurity, all of which are factors contributing to the level of stress experienced by employees.

Kundi et al. (2021) point out that a heavy workload and tight deadlines continue to be the major indicators of workplace stress in labor-intensive industries. In turn, Zhang, Mayer, and Hwang (2021) find that ambiguous and conflicting roles cause substantial emotional and cognitive stress among employees. Such conclusions can be considered consistent with the JD-R theory which suggests that stress develops due to high demands and inadequate resource provision. Another type of organizational stress is technostress which stems from digitalization and continuous connection between employees and organizations. According to Tarafdar et al. (2020), technostress emerges when employees feel information overload and blurred work-life boundaries associated with the increasing use of information technology in workplace.

Lastly, job insecurity may be viewed as a significant stressor in the current context since it negatively impacts the level of employee engagement and well-being (De Clercq & Pereira, 2020). Job insecurity is especially relevant for manufacturing organizations whose employees are often at risk of losing their jobs due to automation and economic changes.

Despite the vast amount of research on stressors and their effects, there is a lack of literature exploring the interaction between different stressors in certain organizational contexts. The same refers to the relationship between stressors and cultural erosion in organizations.

*Emotional Exhaustion*

Emotional exhaustion, the primary symptom of the syndrome, refers to a condition when an individual feels emotionally drained after being exposed to stressors for an extended period of time. Emotional exhaustion is viewed as one of the most important measures of the well-being of workers and organizations at large.

It has recently become apparent that workplace stressors have a significant cause-and-effect relationship with the development of emotional exhaustion. For example, according to Wang et al. (2021), a high level of job demand has been found to correlate strongly with emotional exhaustion, thus negatively affecting job performance and organizational commitment. Similarly, in another study, Karatepe et al. (2020) identified a correlation between experiencing constant stress at work and burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy).

A different line of investigation is focused on emotional labor which requires constant interpersonal interaction and usually relates to occupations in the service sector. However, as a consequence of changing work-related practices and roles within teams, emotional labor has recently gained relevance even in the context of manufacturing. For instance, Hülshager and Schewe (2021) found that emotional regulation can be significantly instrumental in emotional exhaustion, in particular, when supported by organizational structures. Finally, new studies have uncovered mediating and moderating factors influencing emotional exhaustion. Specifically, according to Bakker and Demerouti (2020), psychological resilience and organizational support help in minimizing the detrimental impact of stressors. These factors, however, prove ineffective under conditions of poor or declining organizational culture.

Thus, the relationship between stressors and emotional exhaustion has been extensively researched whereas little is known about the ways

organizational features can affect the strength or nature of this relationship.

### Organizational Culture and Cultural Erosion

Organizational culture is critical in shaping how employees behave, engage, and feel about their work. It consists of shared values, beliefs, and norms within a group. This culture guides decision-making and interactions among individuals. Recent research has looked at cultural erosion, which refers to the slow decline of organizational values, trust, and unity. Schein and Schein (2021) argue that a strong organizational culture is essential for maintaining stability and harmony among employees. However, outside pressures and internal issues can weaken these cultural foundations.

A study by Jiang et al. (2022) found that high-stress environments often lead to less trust in leadership, decreased collaboration, and more workplace conflicts. These are clear indicators of cultural erosion. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2021) observed that organizations undergoing rapid changes or crises are more likely to see a breakdown in culture, resulting in increased stress and disengagement among employees.

Leadership plays a key role in either slowing down or speeding up cultural erosion. Transformational leadership can strengthen positive cultural values and reduce stress, while authoritarian or inconsistent leadership often contributes to cultural decline (Islam et al., 2020). Moreover, the relationship between workplace stressors and organizational culture is reciprocal. Stressors can harm culture, and a weak culture can amplify the impact of stressors. For instance, a lack of trust and support within an organization can make even reasonable job demands feel overwhelming, leading to emotional exhaustion.

Despite its significance, cultural erosion is not well studied in current research. Most studies focus on the positive sides of culture, leaving little attention to how and why cultures break down under stress.

### Manufacturing Sector Context

The manufacturing sector provides a unique setting for exploring workplace stress and emotional exhaustion due to its specific operational and organizational traits. Manufacturing environments often involve high production targets, repetitive tasks, strict supervision, and limited autonomy. These factors contribute to increased stress levels. A study by Liu et al. (2022) found that manufacturing workers face much higher levels of physical and psychological stress than employees in other fields. Additionally, the sector is quickly changing because of automation, digitalization, and globalization. These shifts create new uncertainties and demands for skills. According to Kumar and Singh (2023), such changes have increased job insecurity and unclear roles, especially in developing countries. The Indian manufacturing sector faces its own set of challenges, including labor-intensive work, hierarchical structures, and diverse cultures. However, there is a significant lack of empirical research that focuses on emotional exhaustion and cultural dynamics in this context. Most studies have been conducted in Western settings, which limits their applicability elsewhere. Moreover, the workplace culture in manufacturing companies often prioritizes productivity over employee well-being. This focus can lead to a decline in cultural values. Sharma and Mishra (2021) point out that neglecting employee engagement and organizational values results in higher turnover and lower morale.

Despite these findings, there has been little effort to connect manufacturing-specific issues with wider theories of stress and culture. This highlights a major research gap, particularly in understanding how the dynamics of the sector affect the relationship between workplace stress, cultural decline, and emotional exhaustion.

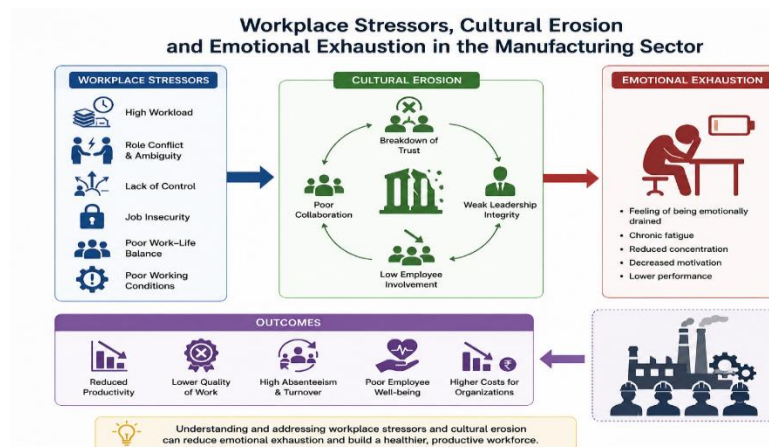


Fig. 1. Emotional Exhaustion in Manufacturing Sector

*Synthesis and Research Gap*

The thematic analysis reveals several critical insights:

- Workplace stressors are well-documented but often studied in isolation
- Emotional exhaustion is widely recognized as a key outcome of stress
- Organizational culture is acknowledged as important, but cultural erosion is underexplored
- The manufacturing sector lacks context-specific, integrated research

**Critical Analysis and Discussion**

The review shows we have made progress in understanding stress at work emotional exhaustion and company culture. If we look closer we can see that there are some big problems, with how we define these things how we study them and the situations they are used in.

These problems make it hard to get a picture of stress at work emotional exhaustion and company culture. We need to address these issues to understand workplace stressors, emotional exhaustion and organizational culture.

This will help us to develop a complete understanding of these workplace stressors and how they relate to emotional exhaustion and organizational culture.

*Fragmentation of Research Domains*

One of the problems with the research that is out there is that it does not do a good job of dealing with the important ideas. Workplace stress and feeling totally exhausted have been studied a lot. People usually look at them in a very narrow way.

For example some studies that come from the field of psychology at work mainly look at how stress affects the individual like when people get burned out or feel unhappy (Bakker & Demerouti 2020). On the hand people who study how organizations behave look at how the structure of a company and the people in charge can cause stress (Kundi et al. 2021). But these two ways of looking at things are not often combined so we do not have a picture.

What is more the culture of a company is often seen as something that does not change than something that can change when the company is, under stress. The idea that a companys culture can slowly get worse especially is not well. Has not been proven with enough evidence. Because of this the models that we have now do not show how stress, culture and what happens to employees are all connected. Workplace stress and feeling totally exhausted are still not fully. Organizational culture is a big part of this.

*Overemphasis on Direct Relationships*

The thing with studies is that they look at work stress and how it affects exhaustion in a pretty straightforward way. A lot of studies like the one done by Wang et al. In 2021 show that work stress can lead to exhaustion.

These studies often do not think about things that can affect how work stress and emotional exhaustion are connected.

- They do not consider how the culture of a company changes when it is under stress.
- This is something that is rarely looked at in research about work stress and emotional exhaustion.

This is a problem because it is hard to understand how the environment at a company affects how employees deal with stress. Work stress studies often assume that work stress affects everyone in the way no matter what company or industry they are in. Work stress studies like these do not take into account that different company cultures and leadership styles can affect how work stress impacts employees. Different industries also have an impact on how work stress affects employees.

This makes it hard to use what we learn from work stress studies in life especially in complicated places, like factories where work stress can be a big problem.

**Methodological Limitations**

The way researchers do their studies these days has some problems.

### 1. Cross-Sectional Designs

A lot of studies just look at data from one point in time. This makes it hard to figure out what causes what or how things change over time. Emotional exhaustion and cultural erosion are things that change. There are not many studies that look at them over time.

### 2. Self-Reported Measures

Most research asks people for their opinions, which can be a problem. When people answer questions they might not be totally honest. They might not remember things correctly. So when employees talk about stress and culture it might not be what is really going on in the organization.

### 3. Lack of Multi-Level Analysis

There are not studies that look at how individual people, groups and the whole organization work together. This is a problem when studying things like culture because it involves everyone and everything.

### 4. Limited Mixed-Methods Approaches

Some studies use numbers to get a picture but they do not use stories to get a deeper understanding. If researchers used both numbers and stories they could learn more, about what happens when culture erodes and how employees feel.

#### *Contextual Bias and Lack of Generalizability*

A lot of research on this topic is from rich countries. This makes us wonder if the findings can be applied to places.

The way people work and the rules and customs of regions are quite different. This is especially true in countries like India that are still growing. For instance in offices there are strict hierarchies and people often prioritize the group over themselves. These things might affect how workers deal with stress. Most research does not consider these differences. (Kumar & Singh 2023) did some research on this. Also most studies do not look at industries the manufacturing sector is very different, with a lot of work strict routines and changing technology demands. This sector needs attention in research.

#### *Neglect of Cultural Erosion as a Core Construct*

The biggest problem we found when we looked at all this information is that we do not really understand what happens to the culture of a company when it is under a lot of stress. We have studied what makes a company's culture. We have not looked closely at what happens to it when things get tough.

Most of the time people who study companies think that the culture stays the same even when things are really hard.. Some new information is showing us that when companies are under stress for a long time it can hurt the trust between people the way they communicate how well the leaders do their jobs and the values that everyone shares. This is what Jiang and his team found out in 2022.

We do not have a way to understand what happens to a company's culture when it is under stress. This is a problem because it means we cannot explain why some companies do okay when they are under stress but others do not. If we do not think about what happens to the culture then our ideas, about how companies work are not complete. Cultural erosion is an issue and we need to think about it more. Cultural erosion is something that can really hurt a company so we should try to understand erosion better.

### **Research Gaps**

#### *Lack of Integrated Theoretical Frameworks*

There is a hole in the research when it comes to the workplace. We do not have a framework that looks at workplace stress the culture at work and how people feel exhausted.

Most studies only look at one thing at a time. They look at how stress affects people or they look at the culture at work. They do not look at how these things are connected. For example some researchers like Bakker and Demerouti and Wang and others have written about stress and burnout. They have not looked at the bigger picture. This means we do not really understand how all these things work together.

Research Gap: We need a model that shows how workplace stressors influence exhaustion through the mediating role of cultural erosion,

which is the erosion of the workplace culture.

#### *Under exploration of Cultural Erosion*

The culture of an organization has been looked at a lot. What happens to it when the organization is under a lot of stress for a long time is not well understood.

Most of the time researcher's focus on the things about an organizations culture like how people work together trust each other and have good leaders. They do not look much at how these good things can get worse, over time as noted by Schein & Schein in 2021.

Research Gap: There is insufficient conceptual clarity and empirical investigation of cultural erosion as a dynamic and measurable construct.

#### *Limited Focus on Emerging Economies*

A lot of the research is focused on countries, which makes you wonder if the results are really applicable to other places.

Countries like India have their way of doing things with things like a lot of levels of management many different types of workers and social and cultural things that can affect how people feel stressed, at work (Kumar & Singh 2023).

Research Gap: We do not have studies that look at how stress, culture and feeling really tired affect each other in India and other countries that are growing really fast.

#### *Sector-Specific Research Deficiency (Manufacturing)*

The manufacturing sector is special because it has things like doing the tasks over and over being closely watched by supervisors and having to meet production deadlines. These things set it apart from industries that focus on services.

So a lot of the research that has been done so far looks at all sectors in the same way without really thinking about what makes manufacturing different when it comes to stress. For example Liu and others found this out in 2022.

Research Gap: We need to do research that focuses just on the manufacturing sector so we can understand how stress and culture work together in these kinds of environments. The manufacturing sector has its unique stress dynamics and culture and we need to study the manufacturing sector specifically to learn more, about it.

### **Conclusion**

This study looked at how things like stress at work changes in company culture and feeling completely drained emotionally are all connected, in the manufacturing sector. The study used information from research from 2010 to 2025 to get a complete picture of how these things affect each other. The study found that things that cause stress at work like much work not knowing what you are supposed to do and feeling like you might lose your job can make people feel emotionally exhausted.. It is not that simple. The study also found that the culture of the company plays a role in how stress affects people.

One important thing this study found is that when company culture starts to break down it can make things worse for employees. When people are stressed for a time it can make them not trust the company not communicate well and feel like they are burning out. This is a way of looking at how stress works in companies. The study also found that there is not research on how these things work in countries that are still developing like India especially in the manufacturing sector. Because India has its unique culture and way of doing things the study says we need to do more research that is specific to that context.

Overall this study helps us understand how all these things are connected. It gives us a framework for thinking about them. It also shows us where we need to do research in the future so we can make things better, for employees and companies.

### **Future Research Directions**

#### 1. Empirical Validation of the Framework

Future studies should try to validate the proposed model using numbers and a mix of research methods in factories and manufacturing plants.

#### 2. Longitudinal Studies

We need studies that go on for a time to really understand how cultural erosion and emotional exhaustion change over time.

### 3. Multi-Level Analysis

Research should consider the individual, team and whole organization levels to get an understanding of the issue.

### 4. Contextual Research in Emerging Economies

More studies are needed in India and other similar countries to make sure the findings are relevant and apply to these places.

### 5. Exploration of Moderators

Future research should look into how:

- Leadership styles
- Support from the organization
- Employees ability to bounce back affect the link, between stress and exhaustion.

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