

Article

Relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout: The Unexpected Influence of Affective Commitment

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Abstract: Objective: Ethical climates and their influence on emotional health have been the subject of intense debates. However, Personal Ethics as a potential resource that can mitigate Burnout syndrome has gone unnoticed. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the effect of Personal Ethics on the three dimensions that constitute Burnout, considering the moderating influence of Affective Commitment. Design/methodology: A model consisting of three simple moderations is used to solve this question. The sample includes 448 professionals from the Colombian electricity sector with university-qualified education. Findings: Personal Ethics mitigates Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, but it is not related to Personal Realization. Affective Commitment, unexpectedly, has an inverse moderating effect. In other words, as this type of commitment intensifies, the positive impact of Personal Ethics on Burnout and Depersonalization decreases until it disappears. Furthermore, Affective Commitment does not influence the dynamic between Personal Ethics and self-realization. Research limitations/implications: A longitudinal study would strengthen the causal relationships established in this research. Practical implications: Alignment of values between the individual and the organization is crucial. In fact, integration between the organization and its personnel through organic, open and connected structures increases psychological well-being through values linked to benevolence and understanding. Social implications: Employees' emotional health is transcendental beyond the organizational level, as it has a significant impact on personal and family interactions beyond the workplace. Originality/value: The potential adverse repercussion of Affective Commitment has been barely examined. Additionally, Personal Ethics, when intensified by high Affective Commitment, can lead to extra-role behaviors that transform what is voluntary into a moral imperative. This situation could generate emotional fractures and a decrease in achievement. This perspective, compared to previous research, introduces an innovative element.

Keywords: Personal Ethics; Affective Commitment; Emotional Exhaustion; Depersonalization; self-realization; Burnout



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1. Introduction

Currently, organizations focus their efforts on institutionalizing an ethical work environment that impacts the employees' fundamental values. Personal Ethics can be conceptualized as the set of underlying beliefs, values and attitudes that determine individual behavior (Turnipseed 2002). In this context, the theory of cognitive moral development proposed by Kohlberg (1969) maintains that ethical behavior is largely based on prior learning. That is, a resolution of ethical dilemmas can be achieved through a moral advancement acquired through an ethical education seeking to maximize collective interests (Wang and Calvano 2015). Therefore, agreement between individual principles and those associated with business policies can be a critical indicator that anticipates the amount of energy, and resources, that professionals dedicate to counteract work-related excess demands (Teresi et al. 2019).

Certainly, policies aimed at fostering an ethical work culture can be more effective when the professional has the ability to act in accordance with his or her moral principles. Hierarchical restrictions, or those imposed by the organization itself, when such threaten the integrity or personal values, are sufficient reasons to weaken the psychological well-being of the employee and lead to progressive Emotional Exhaustion (Dzeng and Curtis 2018).

Thus, ethics and its impact on organizational structure have captured the attention of numerous academics and professionals in recent years (Ayub et al. 2022). An ethical environment at personal level can create an attenuating barrier that links work attitudes with less emotional fatigue (Elçi et al. 2015).

Emotional Exhaustion Syndrome (Burnout) can be characterized as a negative response from individuals to chronic tension, which is derived from a highly demanding work environment (Freitas et al. 2023). Burnout, from a psychological approach, induces a level of exhaustion that causes affective and behavioral deterioration (Edú-Valsania et al. 2022), leading to permanent states of frustration and Emotional Exhaustion, affecting professional development in addition to dehumanizing the individual (Schaufeli et al. 2020).

Christina Maslach was the first to make known the concept of Burnout, referring specifically to professionals who provided services with high-intensity interactions (Maslach 1982). This syndrome was particularly evident in health professionals, whose dedication was intense and prolonged toward people in need or dependency. This response to chronic stress was defined through three factors: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and low personal sense of accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson 1986).

In this sense, previous research evaluating the possible corrective effect of an ethical climate on Burnout has focused on global aspects, such as culture or management, without delving into individual perceptions (Gomes et al. 2022). Furthermore, most recent studies have focused on hospital centers and have been conducted in a COVID-19 context (Barr 2020; Li and Peng 2022; Ozdoba et al. 2022; Rivaz et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022).

Consequently, it is a priority to extend these concerns to other economic sectors that have received less attention from the scientific community. Likewise, morality and an ethical environment become key elements, considered from an individual perspective, as moral principles and priorities, beyond having a superficial impact, are desirable objectives that motivate certain behaviors and serve as life guides (Sagiv et al. 2017). An ethical culture likely reinforces satisfaction and commitment, which are fundamental elements for the employee's emotional well-being (Elçi et al. 2015).

On the other hand, Affective Commitment modulates emotions and provides the employee with a series of expectations that usually generate positive moods (Ochoa Pacheco et al. 2023; Semlali and Elrayah 2022). Affective Commitment is defined as the emotional predisposition of the employee toward his or her organization, and it implies that the individual relates pertinence with satisfaction and psychological well-being (Santiago-Torner 2023c). This bond and identification usually includes extra-role behaviors as the employee is driven to actively get involved in achieving organizational objectives (Cao et al. 2020).

Along these lines, Affective Commitment emerges as an emotional engine that, in addition to acting as a significant work resource, can contribute to mitigate the potentially negative relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout. In fact, an emotion-based commitment has a strong impact on the employee's work attitude (Starbird et al. 2022). The desire to remain in a job reflects conformity with the principles of the organization, and this synergy becomes a valuable resource to contain excessive stress (Liu et al. 2020).

This study is conducted in Colombia, which is a country that has experienced constant economic and political changes in the last 50 years which have affected essential ethical principles. For this reason, the Colombian electricity sector, aware of its role and seeking to ethically involve employees, has implemented control and management policies since 2015. Values such as transparency or responsibility are part of a comprehensive anti-corruption program that aims to promote good practices. However, beyond people acting ethically

due to situational pressure, the sector seeks to promote a voluntary and conscious ethical perception that positively impacts the employee's emotional health.

This study is relevant and distinguishes itself from previous ones for several reasons. First, the impact of Personal Ethics, as a component of a climate determined by moral convictions and norms on Burnout, has not received adequate interest in the academia. For instance, [Ayub et al. \(2022\)](#) investigate an individual ethical context using a single dimension scale considering more general aspects. According to these authors, work attitudes create a moral environment where employees experience less tension, and this environment favors their emotional health. Evidently, a work attitude aimed at commitment and consideration for others has a positive impact on Personal Realization, and this reduces Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization ([Buckley et al. 2021](#)). In a similar vein, [Saleh et al. \(2022\)](#) conclude that an ethical climate focused on individual moral values plays a crucial role in the employee's emotional well-being. Being able to apply one's own beliefs is an essential situational factor supporting the employee and mitigating Emotional Exhaustion. A notable limitation is that only one dimension of Burnout is considered. Furthermore, they suggest that future research include samples from different cultures to verify the generalizability of their results.

Second, the possible mitigating effect of Affective Commitment on Burnout has been studied but not adequately in developing countries. Specifically, no comparative studies have been identified in specific industrial sectors in Colombia.

This research corroborates the findings of ([Lapointe et al. 2011](#)) by stating that Affective Commitment is an emotional resource that affects employees' behaviors and motivation to manage their daily responsibilities. It indicates an effective adaptation between the individual and his or her work role. Therefore, it is usually linked to positive emotions and constitutes an internal resource that makes it easier for employees to sincerely express their emotions. These favorable conditions, when developed in a subjective and personal environment, relate to feelings of self-esteem and satisfaction that prevent the risk of Burnout ([Setti et al. 2016](#)).

Third, the moderating effect of Affective Commitment on Burnout has been examined from various perspectives but not as a specific element that can influence the impact of Personal Ethics. For example, [Liu et al. \(2019\)](#) use this construct to analyze the impact of lack of consideration at work on Emotional Exhaustion. Similarly, [Liu et al. \(2020\)](#) examine how the work–family conflict affects Burnout, considering Affective Commitment as a factor that can alter the intensity and nature of this relationship.

Therefore, this study proposes examining the effect of Personal Ethics on the three dimensions of Burnout, considering the moderating influence of Affective Commitment.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Personal Ethics and Burnout

Burnout is a social problem that affects the health of individuals regardless of their nationality. The insufficiency of personal resources prevents employees from adequately carrying out their work. Maslach and her colleagues were pioneers in studying how employees cope with high emotional stress through various cognitive strategies. In an exhaustive process of observation and conversations with employees, Maslach and her colleagues defined Burnout as a multidimensional concept that goes beyond certain negative feelings ([Maslach and Jackson 1981](#)). Burnout encompasses both physical capacity and various individual psychological spheres. Therefore, the loss of motivation and commitment associated with Burnout continues to be a relevant issue in the labor policies of any country ([Maslach and Jackson 1986](#)).

Today, the Colombian electricity sector has a clear social perspective. In this sense, professionals and public officials are exposed to a stressful context where corruption has been, for decades, a widely accepted behavior model ([Langbein and Sanabria 2013](#)). Thus, changing personal priorities, through the assimilation of new values, becomes a critical motivational mechanism that affects the behavior and emotional state of employees in

the workplace (Tartakovsky 2016). In fact, Personal Ethics is a key instrument to balance emotions in complex work environments. In this regard, the Colombian electricity sector has undertaken different initiatives since 2015 with the objective of using transparency and ethical values to increase its credibility as well as to also foster an ethical climate that becomes a conducting thread useful for the employee and its emotional well-being (Santiago-Torner 2023c).

Values intentionally assimilated, and retained, direct individual behavior. Therefore, they are motivation factors that influence the perception that each individual has about reality and its associated context (Lee and Kim 2023; Sousa et al. 2023). From this point of view, the approach focused on the coherence of values considers that when the principles and ideals have a strong fit with the person and the surrounding work conditions, it is easier for individuals that experience more well-being to be more motivated and to strive to remain a member of the organization (Tartakovsky 2016; Tartakovsky and Cohen 2014).

Personal and institutional values likely integrate with well-being and motivational logic through opportunities to achieve important goals, perceived social support, and prevention of internal conflict. This theoretical balance increases the emotional well-being and the feeling of self-development (Elçi et al. 2015; Sorthaix and Lönnqvist 2014).

In this sense, the study sector promotes an ethical climate justified through norms and ideals that focus on rectitude, integrity and what is morally accepted. Furthermore, highlighted among the institutional values are social justice, equal opportunities and traditional principles such as family safety. Consequently, this broad conceptualization is expected to guide organizational behavior toward decisions that have positive effects on the employee's cognition and emotional level.

In fact, the theory of Schwartz (2012) determines that values shape professional experiences and roles. Consequently, principles aimed at personal safety, considering others, solidarity, or compliance with rules, act as mechanisms that mitigate exhaustion from emotions (Hemsey and Dahling 2023).

As previously mentioned, the Colombian electricity sector has a special inclination toward the well-being of its employees. Therefore, it makes efforts to ensure that work and family demands do not conflict with each other (Santiago-Torner et al. 2023a, 2023b). The perception of organizational support triggers an ample feeling that the work climate and its values have an impact on individual daily experiences, which positively affects the satisfaction of professionals, especially by reducing their stress levels (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner 2016).

The convergence between a climate of justice and personal values is likely to create an ethical, non-prejudiced relationship between organization and employee, which reduces Emotional Exhaustion, in addition to having a favorable impact on Personal Realization. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. *Personal Ethics mitigates Emotional Exhaustion.*

H2. *Personal Ethics mitigates Depersonalization.*

H3. *Personal Ethics has a positive impact on Personal Realization.*

2.2. Moderating Effect of Affective Commitment on the Relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout

There is an interactive dynamic between personal and work ethics. The work culture promoted by the Colombian electricity sector deliberately strives to enhance the well-being of its employees and society through an ethical conduct integrated into daily routines. From this perspective, trust stands as a fundamental and transversal ethical value (Ouedraogo and Ouakouak 2018).

Trust relates to associated values such as integrity and good intentions (Martins et al. 2023). It is a psychological state that bears an expectation of vulnerability to the actions of others. Therefore, interpersonal trust is intrinsically related to commitment, particularly Affective Commitment, since it is based on shared beliefs that generate a strong sense of belonging (Bloemer et al. 2013).

Along these lines, the strategy of the Colombian electricity sector, by promoting a supportive corporate environment and shared rules, accentuates the need to standardize processes within a framework of mutual trust. This facilitates uniformity in beliefs and adherence to institutional values, promoting a natural inclination toward wanting to be part of the organization. Affective commitment emanates from a prior process where individuals internalize values that define them (Santiago-Torner 2023c).

Thus, it is logical to think that the individual ethical values and attitudes that embody ethical behavior, when joined by the principles of reciprocity and well-being transmitted by Affective Commitment, mitigate the negative effects derived from Emotional Exhaustion while promoting solid feelings of self-realization.

Under this perspective, Affective Commitment can reinforce the attenuating effect of personal values and beliefs on Burnout syndrome and explain the circumstances under which this relationship occurs. For instance, Cao et al. (2020) consider that Affective Commitment is linked to a strong sense of belonging. Therefore, professionals are willing to invest time and effort in achieving organizational objectives. Similarly, Personal Ethics and Affective Commitment can combine and give way to a series of resources that prevent frustration, lack of satisfaction, and a possible exhaustion of emotions.

In fact, Liu et al. (2019) or Liu et al. (2020) confirm the moderating role of Affective Commitment. These researchers apply the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and suggest that Affective Commitment functions as a resource that prevents prolonged stress from becoming discouragement and frustration. Indeed, positive emotions constitute personal assets that provide long-term benefits and can be used to face future emotional demands.

H4. *The moderation of Affective Commitment optimizes the attenuating effect of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion.*

H5. *The moderation of Affective Commitment optimizes the attenuating effect of Personal Ethics on Depersonalization.*

H6. *Moderation of Affective Commitment optimizes the positive effect of Personal Ethics on Personal Realization.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Type of Study and Study Context

The study was quantitative in nature and based on three moderation processes. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothetical model. Regarding the context of this research, the Colombian electricity sector has experienced continuous transitions in the last seven years. Energy modernization, and change toward anti-corruption policies, require constant analysis to evaluate the impact of these new scenarios on the employees' emotional health. In addition, we also researched how Affective Commitment, or the individual perception of ethics, can influence these relationships and direction.

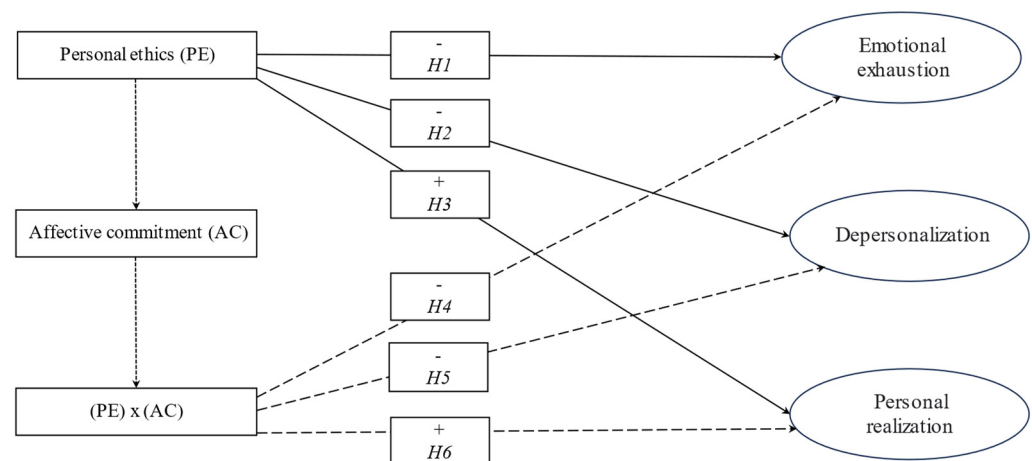


Figure 1. Research models. Notes: The direct relationships between PE and the three dimensions of Burnout are represented by solid lines (hypotheses H1, H2 and H3). The moderating effect of AC is established through dashed lines (hypotheses H4, H5 and H6).

3.2. Participants and Procedure

Data were collected through a survey distributed to six prominent organizations in the Colombian electricity sector. The sample was designed to include the main cities in the country: Bogotá, Medellín, Pereira, Ibagué and Manizales. The questionnaire was completed by 448 professionals from the Colombian electricity sector with university-qualified education. Selection bias refers to experimental errors that lead to an inaccurate representation of the sample. An important cause of selection bias occurs when subgroup characteristics are not considered. This type of bias is common in non-probabilistic convenience sampling and in selections that only include individuals with similar characteristics. In this research, a probabilistic cluster sampling was followed, considering the main cities where companies in the Colombian electricity sector are located. Cluster sampling is the most appropriate method when the population under study is spread over a wide geographic area (Lu et al. 2022). In this study, we attempted to reduce as much as possible some previous biases, such as self-selection, response and exclusion biases. To this end, preliminary contact was established with each of the participating organizations to discuss the main objectives of the research and the available resources.

Participating companies allocated 45 min for employees to complete the survey over several days. Additionally, the main researcher was present to clear any doubts and explain the objectives of the study. A few weeks prior, we sent documents regarding voluntary withdrawal, data confidentiality and a brief presentation of the most important aspects of the study and its relevance in the sector. Regarding the distribution of respondents by gender, 39% (175) were women and 61% (273) were men, while 4.5% (20) were part of the management staff. The average age of the participants was 39.75 years ($SD = 8.65$). Job Seniority was approximately 10 years ($SD = 5.33$). Some 42% (188) did not have children. However, 39% (175) lived with older adults for whom they were responsible. Overall, 100% of the professionals had a university education and more than 60% (269) had graduate studies.

3.3. Measurements

A six-point Likert scale was used for all measurements, ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”.

Personal Ethics was measured using the three-item scale suggested by Victor and Cullen (1988). For example, “in this Institution, there is no room for morality or Personal Ethics”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.72.

Affective Commitment was measured using the six-item scale suggested by Meyer and Allen (1991). For example, “this organization personally means a lot to me”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.86.

Emotional Exhaustion was measured through the five-item scale suggested by Schaufeli et al. (1996). For example, “I am emotionally exhausted because of my job”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.90.

Depersonalization was measured using the five-item scale suggested by Schaufeli et al. (1996). For example, “I have become more cynical about the usefulness of my work”. Following the suggestions of Salanova and Schaufeli (2000), question number 13 was eliminated. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.90.

Personal Realization was measured using the six-item scale suggested by Schaufeli et al. (1996). For example, “I can effectively solve problems that arise in my work”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.89.

Control variables included Gender and Job Seniority. It is important to mention that hypotheses tests were consistent with or without the control variables.

3.4. Data Analysis

Initially, we sought possible outlier data that could alter the exploration of the results through probability identifier (<0.001), using statistical software SPSS version 25. Regarding the normality of the variables, the values of asymmetry and kurtosis were demarcated, and the five variables were below 2, indicating normality (Kline 1998). Simultaneously, a homogeneity of variances test was conducted, and it was determined that there was homoscedasticity, as $p > 0.05$.

Subsequently, multiple regression analyses were executed using the PROCESS Macro version 3.5. For this purpose, simple moderation model 1, proposed by Hayes (2018), was used with a CI of 95% and a bootstrapping sampling of 10,000. Regarding the drawbacks of collinearity, it was verified that the VIF indices were less than 5. Finally, the Johnson–Neyman technique was used to delimit the regions of statistical significance, enabling to specifically observe the effect of the independent variable (Personal Ethics) on the dependent variable (Burnout) for different values of the moderating variable (Affective Commitment).

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analyzes

First, plausibility is evaluated using Composite Reliability (CFC) values, Cronbach’s alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All CFC values and Cronbach’s alphas are above 0.70, which conforms to the suggestions of Hair et al. (2011). AVE indices exceed 0.50, which is significant (Table 1).

Table 1. Convergent and discriminant validity.

| | ALPHA ¹ | CR ² | CFC ³ | AVE ⁴ | DV ⁵ |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Personal Ethics | 0.72 | >1.96 | 0.740 | 0.560 | 0.740 |
| Affective Commitment | 0.86 | >1.96 | 0.830 | 0.690 | 0.830 |
| Emotional Exhaustion | 0.90 | >1.96 | 0.860 | 0.680 | 0.820 |
| Depersonalization | 0.90 | >1.96 | 0.850 | 0.670 | 0.810 |
| Personal Realization | 0.89 | >1.96 | 0.880 | 0.660 | 0.810 |

Note: The table shows the degree to which the measurement of the items that include the same concept are correlated (convergent validity) and the theoretical difference between the different constructs (discriminant validity). ¹. Cronbach’s alpha. ². Critical coefficients. ³. Composite Reliability. ⁴. Average Variance Extracted. ⁵. Discriminant validity. Self-prepared.

Table 2 presents the correlation between variables and discriminant validity (diagonal), which justifies its validity in a square root of AVE greater than the highest of the Pearson correlations (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The Gender variable does not have significant correlations. Job Seniority is related to Emotional Exhaustion ($r = 0.129$; $p < 0.05$). Personal

Ethics is widely associated with all variables except Personal Realization ($r = -0.060$; $p > 0.05$). Affective Commitment positively and significantly affects the three dimensions of Burnout. As expected, the three constructs that form the Emotional Exhaustion syndrome have strong links with each other.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics.

| Constructs | N | M | SD | S | A | PE | AC | EE | D | PF |
|---------------------------|---|------|------|----------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Gender (S) | 1 | 1.4 | 0.49 | x | | | | | | |
| Seniority (A) | 1 | 3.6 | 1.8 | 0.037 | x | | | | | |
| Personal Ethics (PE) | 3 | 2.0 | 0.67 | -0.099 * | -0.041 | (0.740) | | | | |
| Affective Commitment (AC) | 6 | 29.8 | 3.8 | 0.082 | 0.073 | -0.187 * | (0.830) | | | |
| Emotional Exhaustion (EE) | 5 | 23.1 | 5.6 | 0.028 | 0.129 * | -0.239 * | 0.445 * | (0.820) | | |
| Depersonalization (D) | 4 | 23.3 | 5.1 | 0.039 | 0.069 | -0.261 * | 0.571 * | 0.646 * | (0.810) | |
| Personal Realization (PF) | 6 | 29.6 | 3.9 | 0.001 | 0.087 | -0.060 | 0.430 * | 0.349 * | 0.390 * | (0.810) |

Note: The table shows the calculation of the descriptive information and the Pearson correlations. Discriminant validity (diagonal) is also included. (N) Number of items. (M) Mean. (SD) Standard Deviation. Significant correlations * ($p < 0.05$). CI (95%) ($n = 448$). Source: Self-prepared.

4.2. Moderation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

A negative relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout was proposed along with the moderating effect of Affective Commitment. The moderation analysis was executed through the PROCESS Macro. The different regression analyses are divided into three different models. Table 3 and Figure 2 includes the relationship between Personal Ethics and Emotional Exhaustion (model 1). It is verified that Personal Ethics buffers the negative effect of Emotional Exhaustion ($\beta = -1.714$; $p < 0.05 [-2.834; -0.594]$), which confirms H1. Contrary to what was expected, the moderating effect of Affective Commitment, instead of maximizing the mitigating effect of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion, decreases it ($\beta = 0.045$; $p < 0.05 [0.008; 0.082]$), which rejects H4.

Table 3. Moderation Analysis (Model 1).

| Effect | Route | β | p | t | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| R: 0.493. R ² : 0.243. SE: 23.657. F: 28.309. p: 0.001 | | | | | | | |
| Effect PE ¹ —EE ² | b1 | -1.714 | 0.003 | -3.008 | 0.570 | -2.834 | -0.594 |
| Effect AC ³ —EE | b2 | -0.021 | 0.920 | -0.100 | 0.212 | -0.438 | 0.396 |
| Effect PE × AC—EE | b3 | 0.045 | 0.017 | 2.395 | 0.019 | 0.008 | 0.082 |
| Effect control variable Gender | | -0.365 | 0.443 | -0.768 | 0.476 | -1.301 | 0.570 |
| Effect control variable Seniority | | 0.292 | 0.021 | 2.323 | 0.126 | 0.045 | 0.539 |
| Conditional eff. AC (PE-EE) | Low (25) | -0.587 | 0.001 | -4.415 | 0.133 | -0.849 | -0.326 |
| | Medium (30) | -0.362 | 0.001 | -3.735 | 0.097 | -0.552 | -0.172 |
| | High (35) | -0.137 | 0.319 | -0.997 | 0.137 | -0.406 | 0.133 |

Notes: The table shows the effect of ¹ Personal Ethics on ² Emotional Exhaustion; the effect of ³ Affective Commitment on EE. The combined effect of PE and AC (moderation) on EE. Different conditional effects of the moderator variable AC (low, medium, and high). (R² = 0.243). Statistical strength (f^2) is medium (0.250).

Table 4 and Figure 2 includes the relationship between Personal Ethics and Depersonalization (model 2). It is confirmed that Personal Ethics buffers the negative effect of Depersonalization ($\beta = -1.522$; $p < 0.05 [-2.183; -0.860]$), which confirms H2. Contrary to what was expected, the moderating effect of Affective Commitment, instead of maximizing the mitigating effect of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion, decreases it ($\beta = 0.043$; $p < 0.05 [0.021; 0.065]$), which rejects H5.

Table 5 and Figure 2 includes the relationship between Personal Ethics and self-realization (model 3). Contrary to expectations, Personal Ethics does not influence Personal Realization, and Affective Commitment does not moderate this relationship. Thus, hypotheses H3 ($\beta = 0.187$; $p > 0.05 [-0.478; 0.852]$) and H6 ($\beta = -0.005$; $p > 0.05 [-0.027; 0.017]$) are rejected.

Table 4. Moderation Analysis (Model 2).

| Effect | Route | β | p | t | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| R: 0.611. R ² : 0.373. SE: 8.244. F: 52.598. p : 0.001 | | | | | | | |
| Effect PE ¹ —DEP ² | b1 | −1.522 | 0.001 | −4.523 | 0.336 | −2.183 | −0.860 |
| Effect AC ³ —DEP | b2 | −0.067 | 0.595 | −0.532 | 0.125 | −0.313 | 0.180 |
| Effect PE × AC—DEP | b3 | 0.043 | 0.001 | 3.867 | 0.011 | 0.021 | 0.065 |
| Effect control variable Gender | | −0.242 | 0.390 | −0.861 | 0.281 | −0.794 | 0.310 |
| Effect control variable Seniority | | 0.056 | 0.452 | 0.752 | 0.074 | −0.090 | 0.202 |
| Conditional eff. AC (PE-DEP) | Low (25) | −0.448 | 0.001 | −5.704 | 0.079 | −0.602 | −0.294 |
| | Medium (30) | −0.233 | 0.001 | −4.076 | 0.057 | −0.346 | −0.121 |
| | High (35) | −0.018 | 0.820 | −0.228 | 0.081 | −0.178 | 0.141 |

Notes: The table shows the effect of ¹ Personal Ethics on ² Depersonalization; the effect of ³ Affective Commitment on DEP. The combined effect of PE and AC (moderation) on DEP. Different conditional effects of the moderator variable AC (low, medium, and high). (R² = 0.373). Statistical strength (f^2) is high (0.460).

Table 5. Moderation Analysis (Model 3).

| Effect | Route | β | p | t | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| R: 0.436. R ² : 0.190. SE: 8.336. F: 20.722. p : 0.001 | | | | | | | |
| Effect PE ¹ —SR ² | b1 | 0.187 | 0.580 | 0.553 | 0.338 | −0.478 | 0.852 |
| Effect AC ³ —SR | b2 | 0.345 | 0.006 | 2.741 | 0.126 | 0.098 | 0.593 |
| Effect PE × AC—SR | b3 | −0.005 | 0.629 | −0.483 | 0.019 | −0.027 | 0.017 |
| Effect control variable Gender | | −0.214 | 0.448 | −0.759 | 0.282 | −0.769 | 0.341 |
| Effect control variable Seniority | | 0.099 | 0.187 | 1.323 | 0.075 | −0.048 | 0.245 |

Notes: The table shows the effect of ¹ Personal Ethics on ² Self-realization; the effect of ³ Affective Commitment on SR. The combined effect of PE and AC (moderation) on SR. Different conditional effects of the moderator variable AC (low, medium, and high). (R² = 0.190). Statistical strength (f^2) is medium (0.220).

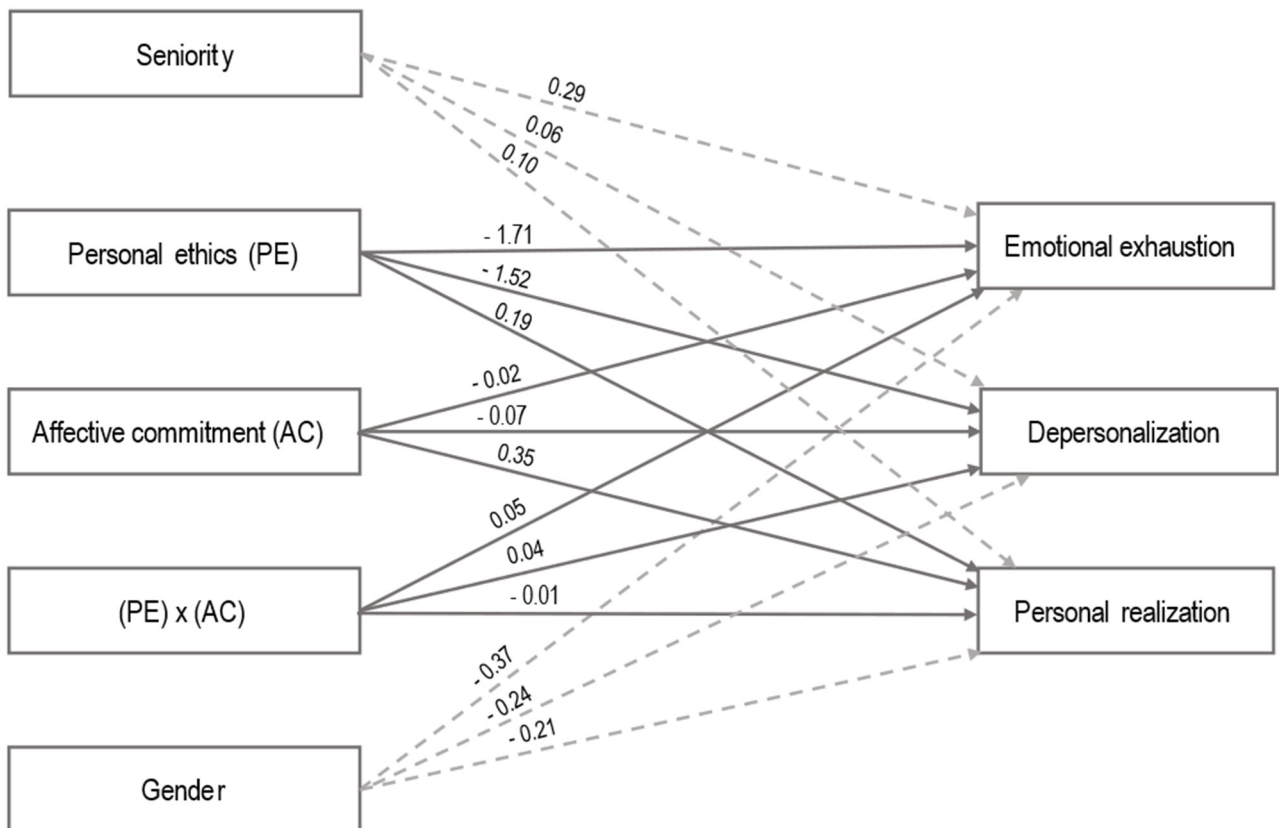


Figure 2. Regression analysis results. Note: The figure shows the proposed statistical diagram of simple moderation (three models).

Figure 3 shows the moderating effect of Affective Commitment (AC). The PROCESS Macro facilitates three conditional effects, which delimit a low, medium or high perception of AC. As Affective Commitment increases, Personal Ethics buffers less intensely the perception of Emotional Exhaustion. The high sensation of Affective Commitment completely neutralizes the attenuating effect of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion.

Figure 4 represents the impact of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion, which is conditioned by the various values acquired by variable AC, considering the Johnson–Neyman method.

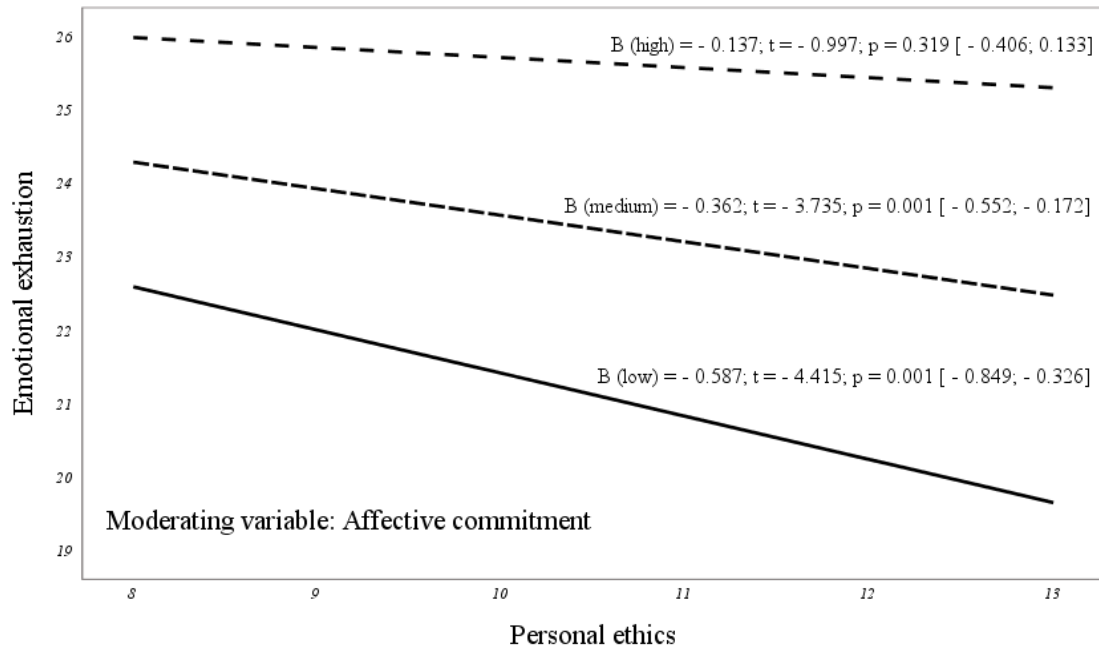


Figure 3. Moderating effect of Affective Commitment. Note: The figure shows the moderating effect of the Affective Commitment variable on the relationship between Personal Ethics and Emotional Exhaustion.

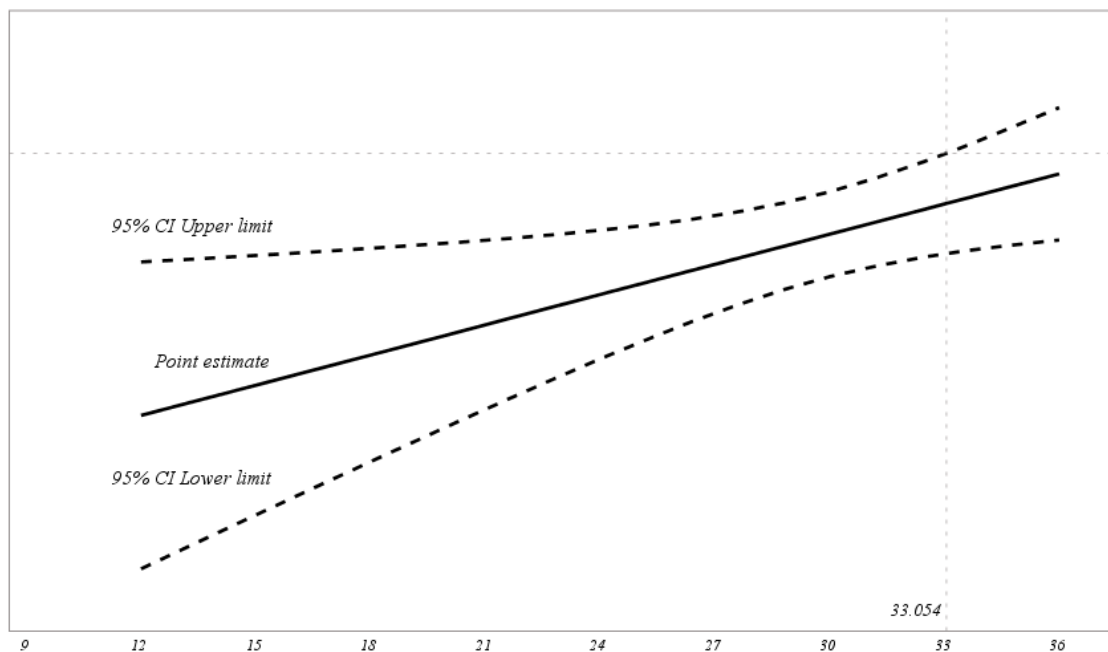


Figure 4. Conditional effect of Personal Ethics-Emotional Exhaustion. Note: The figure shows the region of statistical significance (lower left quadrant) in which Personal Ethics, conditioned by the different values of the moderating variable Affective Commitment, influence Emotional Exhaustion.

Figure 5 indicates the moderating effect of Affective Commitment (AC). The PROCESS Macro facilitates three conditional effects, which delimit a low, medium or high perception of AC. As Affective Commitment increases, Personal Ethics buffers less intensely the perception of Depersonalization. The high sensation of Affective Commitment completely neutralizes the attenuating effect of Personal Ethics on Depersonalization.

Figure 6 represents the impact of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion, which is conditioned by the various values acquired by variable AC, considering the Johnson–Neyman method.

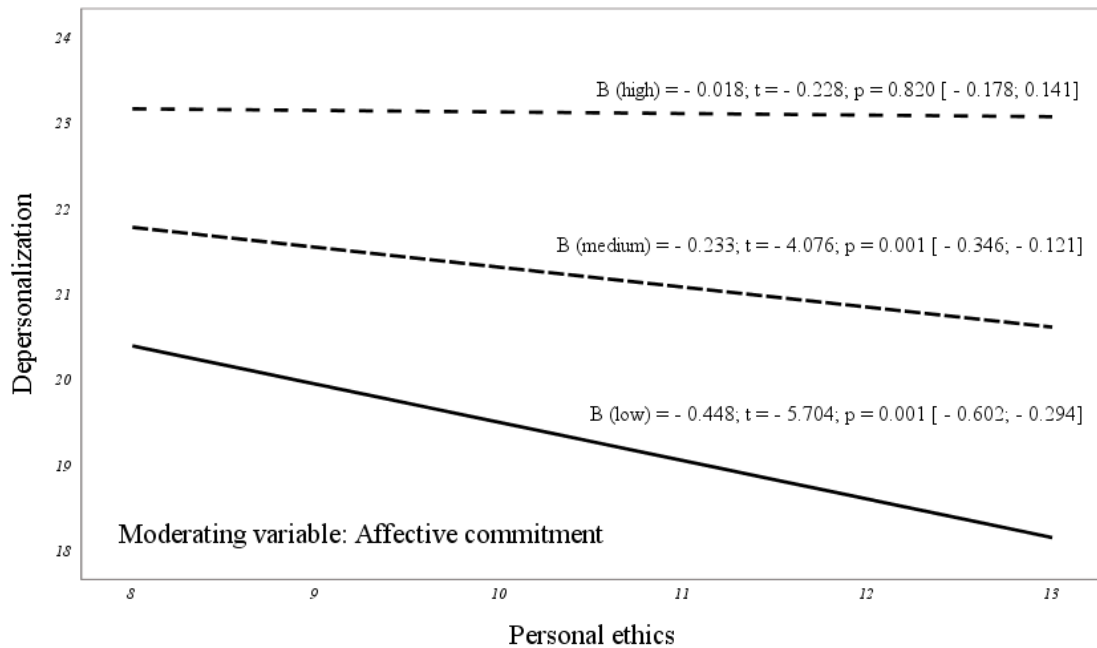


Figure 5. Moderating effect of Affective Commitment. Note: The figure shows the moderating effect of the Affective Commitment variable on the relationship between Personal Ethics and Depersonalization.

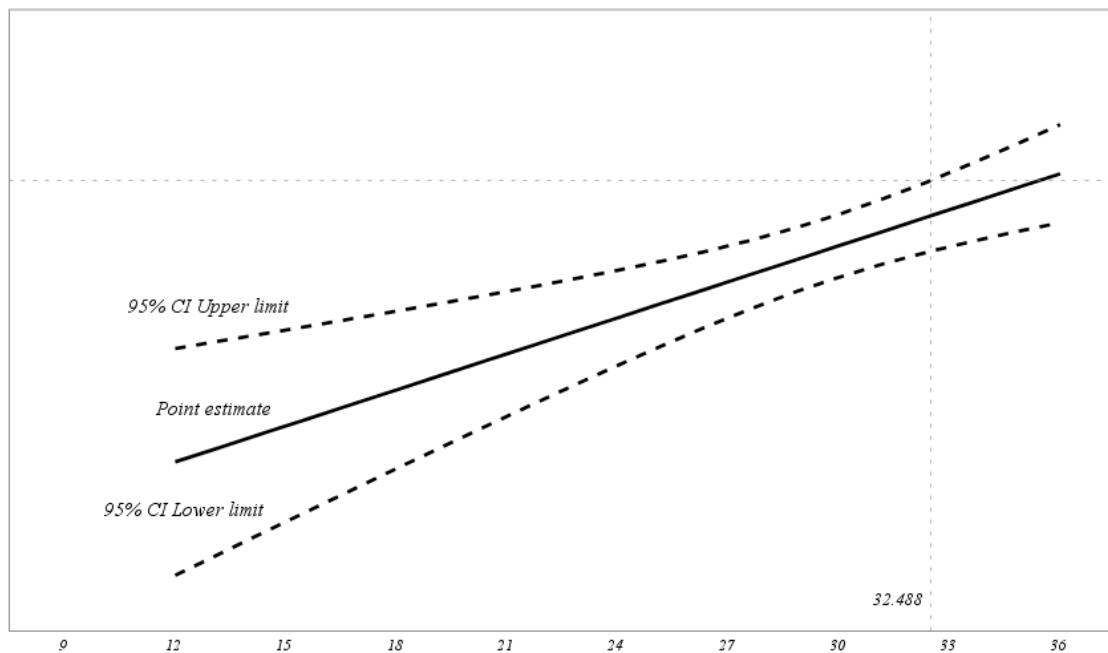


Figure 6. Conditional effect of Personal Ethics—Depersonalization. Note: The figure shows the region of statistical significance (lower left quadrant) in which Personal Ethics, conditioned by the different values of the moderating variable Affective Commitment, influence Depersonalization.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this research was to revise how Personal Ethics is related to Burnout through the moderating effect of Affective Commitment.

The results prove the attenuating effect of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization (hypotheses 1 and 2).

The Colombian electricity sector promotes ethical guidelines that consider the community in general. The social identity approach establishes that there can be relationships between the normative guidelines promoted by the organization and the employee's individual values, which usually translates into strong feelings of belonging (Teresi et al. 2019). Moral centrality, when shared, influences behavior and becomes a tool for emotional readjustment, which can in turn buffer the negative effects of stress while preventing work behaviors from deviating from the norm (Ayub et al. 2022).

Indeed, affinity between personal values and the expectations from the organizational role, which employees adopt, become a critical source of psychological resources. From this perspective, common principles develop an environment of trust and low interpersonal conflict, which prevent sustained stress that usually translates into Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization (Mulki et al. 2008). In fact, the authors cited above consider that when an employee perceives moral imbalances between him/her and the rest of the actors involved in the operation, he/she intentionally seeks his/her organizational exit (Sert et al. 2014).

On the other hand, it is likely that the predominant values in the Colombian electricity sector are related to benevolence and universalism. Specifically, organizational views are aimed toward consensus, understanding and interest for others. However, the non-significant association between Personal Ethics and self-realization (Hypothesis 3) raises a question about whether, at least to some extent, the objectives between employee and organization come into conflict at some point (Sagiv et al. 2017).

In principle, (Sagiv et al. 2017) consider that personal improvement or ambition for power are poorly compatible with feeling part of a whole and concerning for the well-being of others. In this sense, Sorthaix and Lönnqvist (2014) agree that self-interest and emphasis on recognition (achievement) are related with low Personal Realization and low life satisfaction in countries with high levels of development. At the same time, the same authors consider that in countries with limited resources, socially focused values tend to lead to frustration and low Personal Realization. In fact, Colombia has gone through episodes of violence, corruption and mistrust for decades, which have surely deteriorated essential values. Therefore, social status and abundance of material resources (power) can be sources of emotional well-being, which has the opposite effect in places with low poverty rates and strong collective stability.

Colombia is one of the countries with the most social inequality in the world, which can be reason for discouragement in the industrial sector studied. Away from this condition, and based on the results obtained, the guiding principles that motivate action by its employees may be the moral bases established in 2015. However, the relationship between having good intentions and being able to implement them generates imbalance and strong feelings of frustration. In fact, not being able to unlearn and adapt to new circumstances may lead to moments of weakness, which tend to lessen feelings of personal development.

On the other hand, and surprisingly, the moderating effect of Affective Commitment behaves contrary to what was expected. The greater the perception of Affective Commitment, the less attenuating the influence of Personal Ethics on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, which rejects the initially raised Hypotheses 4 and 5. In this sense, the Colombian electricity sector is subject not only to important internal changes but also to intense political and economic pressures, so its management is transparent and responsible.

Therefore, the study sector has insisted on values associated with benevolence, which emphasize social needs, and affinity with the principles that regulate good anti-corruption practices. Under this light, the paradigm of value congruence establishes that the integration

of ethical principles between an organization and its employees influences psychological well-being, simultaneously expanding motivation (Tartakovsky 2016).

However, this adaptive effort involves a high consumption of emotional resources. When Personal Ethics and values are subordinated to a complex sociocultural context, it is likely for employees to depend on deep coping strategies that consume a greater number of resources (Hobfoll et al. 2018). In this sense, Affective Commitment can act as a double-edged mechanism, meaning that it does not necessarily have to be constantly linked to positive work attitudes (Santiago-Torner 2023a).

Recent studies have linked Affective Commitment to greater organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is characterized by voluntary behaviors and additional efforts that far exceed the functions related to the work role (Alshaabani et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2018). In this sense, extra-role behaviors are usually accompanied by greater workloads that amplify the emotional energy which employees allocate to be able to resolve them. Personal Ethics, in reality and when coinciding with high Affective Commitment, can convert the spontaneity of extra-role behavior into an internal pressure that denatures its voluntary meaning.

Similarly, Lapointe et al. (2011) introduce the concept of surface acting, which represents suppressing negative emotions, or adapting positive ones, to the needs of the environment in a forced and artificial way. This compensatory strategy involves an investment of emotional resources that can explain the transition from an intentional attitude to an imposed one and why this mismatch between work and emotions leads to exhaustion. Furthermore, the specific nuances that shape the sector studied may constitute an additional external tension.

Under this perspective, Vigoda-Gadot (2006) suggests that environmental pressures force organizations to improve their effectiveness by all the means available to them. Consequently, extra-role behaviors may be the result of management strategies or overwork atmospheres that intentionally increase the number of activities, and the time to do them, until they become an accepted norm. In fact, Petitta and Vecchione (2011) conclude that work overload affects the employee's energy and well-being to the point of exhaustion. The sector studied is formed almost exclusively by professionals with high academic education. This particularity may motivate employee's participation in a work approach where work day extensions are part of wanting to explore their potential and also their level of commitment. This additional time investment, when sustained, can lead to a gradual depletion of emotional resources, symptoms of Depersonalization, and low Personal Realization (Brown and Roloff 2011). All this can shed light on the results obtained.

Finally, the non-significant moderation of Affective Commitment in the relationship between Personal Ethics and work achievement contradicts Hypothesis 6. This result may be due to various reasons. To begin, Colombia is an emerging country where the standard of life is very distant from that of countries with high resource development. Thus, it is likely for asymmetries in the congruence between personal values and organizational values to exist (Schwartz 2012). The Colombian electricity sector defends values focused on what is pro-social and on institutional trust. On the other hand, highly qualified professionals may seek, at least partially, personal benefits and professional success, in other words, motivations centered on selfish positions.

This imbalance of approaches, without being an absolute reality, can reduce the perception of Personal Realization. In fact, Sortheix and Lönnqvist (2014) deduce that people-centered values lead to low work satisfaction in competitive environments. Furthermore, a climate of overwork can also limit work development and satisfaction, which can become another mitigating mechanism dismantling the moderating effect of Affective Commitment (Ramaci et al. 2020).

To conclude, the last important result is that Affective Commitment does not have a significant direct relationship with Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, but it does have a significant direct relationship with Personal Realization. Although these relationships are not subject to any hypothesis, they are considered relevant and unforeseen. In any case, they are consistent with the results obtained by Lambert et al. (2018). An

explanation may come from the very nature of Colombian society and its clear collectivist tendency. Therefore, emotion control does not depend exclusively on the organizational bond and it is likely to also rely on the family.

Amidst the conflict situation in the country, which directly affects the sector analyzed, it is likely for the family role to be over-dimensioned to the detriment of the organizational role. Employees may consider that other forces, independent of the institutional psychological bond, may be more important to protect, or because the distress can be significant enough to lead to Emotional Exhaustion.

On the other hand, Affective Commitment improves Personal Realization. In this sense, the sample analyzed is made up of professionals with university studies, which relates to a higher level of initiative and to wanting to contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. This means there is an intrinsic desire in the employee to become a differentiating factor. For this reason, emotional affinity with the organization can be part of the voluntary motivation, mentioned above, that guides efforts in such a way that the employee feels that his contribution is decisive (Santiago-Torner 2023b).

6. Conclusions

According to the theory of cognitive moral development (Kohlberg 1969), Personal Ethics and its related values promote an understanding of the environment and facilitate individual integration into the environment.

The Colombian electricity sector has allocated a large part of its resources to guarantee the dissemination of ethical codes consistent with the motivations of its employees. In this direction, the need to break the paradigm of corruption, as a behavior model accepted for decades, continues to be a key issue without a permanent short-term solution.

Therefore, this research represents an advance compared to other previous studies by identifying the buffering role of ethical values on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization, on a personal scale and in an emerging country as Colombia.

A social perspective in favor of the least-favored sectors, and the perception of organizational justice, increase employee satisfaction and confirm that affinity between institutional and personal values can become a useful psychological resource to prevent the negative effects of Emotional Exhaustion syndrome (Burnout). In fact, when Personal Ethics ceases to be a theoretical construct and becomes a behavior model, it strengthens interpersonal trust and prevents excessive psychological tension related to the work context.

However, Personal Ethics is not related to a greater self-realization. Socially focused values and institutional collectivism are not common practices in a country as Colombia (Páez and Salgado 2016). Therefore, interest in others and benevolent logics may encounter an everyday scenario that frustrates the employee's expectations.

On the other hand, contrary to what was expected, Affective Commitment inversely moderates the relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout. Affective Commitment is a resource that initially buffers exhaustion from emotions. However, Personal Ethics and Affective Commitment are both related to greater OCB and extra-role behaviors. Consequently, individual disposition as well as a climate of excessive work can distort the voluntary nature of behaviors outside the work role.

High and uninterrupted participation in work activities requires a constant restitution of resources. When these are not there, psychological balance is no longer sustainable, and this context of overreaching translates into excessive emotional tension that affects the employee's energy until it is exhausted. Situations of emotional overstimulation can likely modify personal sensitivity until it is emptied out of content.

7. Practical Implications

This research has different practical implications. First, it goes beyond the claims proposed by Wang and Calvano (2015). In other words, moral education can result in more integral employees and better leaders. The ambiguity associated with the theoretical study of ethics suggests that it is key to be able to intervene the entire decision-making process,

in order to identify that the guidelines and collective values are the priority, and for this to generate an ethical precedent that can be internalized. The Colombian electricity sector needs to learn the limit between acceptable behaviors and those that are not. In fact, this relativism generates reprocessing and errors due to possible differences between personal and organizational values and also due to intentional manipulation of the norm to achieve a specific objective.

Second, the centrality of ethics, from an operational point of view, requires specific training plans for leaders that highlight the importance of compliance with the psychological contract, of moral bonding through example, and of the use of trust as a critical element in robust interpersonal relationships (Fantinelli et al. 2023). Using work groups can be especially useful for better conceptual and practical assimilation.

Third, work on the congruence of values between the individual and the organization is critical. In fact, this compatibility implies greater psychological well-being, a sense of belonging, and sufficient motivation to partake in achieving organizational objectives (Tartakovsky and Cohen 2014). Values associated with benevolence and universalism buffer Emotional Exhaustion. On the other hand, other values such as self-interest and ambition for power tend to mentally exhaust employees (Tartakovsky 2016). An appropriate strategy is to prioritize personnel selection considering personal values beyond hard skills. Furthermore, values and their progression need confirmation to prevent conflict and possible social sanctions. This situation represents an opportunity to strengthen relationships.

Fourth, this research has shown that Personal Ethics is not related to Personal Realization, and it is likely that the social, political and economic context of the country (Colombia) is not the most favorable for this to happen. Workshops aimed at working on and properly managing emotions can be a solution. Skills such as knowing how to wait or analyze a situation with an empathetic perspective, realistic objectives, and the capacity to adapt to adverse environments (resilience) are essential tools to not slow down the self-perception of development.

Fifth, the reverse moderation of Affective Commitment is a worrying fact. One of the possible causes for this is a climate of overwork, or extra-role behaviors, linked to an inappropriate management of emotions. Actually, ethical behaviors when joined by high Affective Commitment can induce the OCB to exceed its voluntary essence (resource) and become an obligation (demand). An uninterrupted work overload may be an implicit reason explaining this change. Furthermore, these types of environments do not benefit Personal Realization either, which is consistent with the results obtained.

The Colombian electricity sector must be aware that sustained effort may eventually increase the inability to neutralize the negative effect of labor pressures (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner 2016). In this sense, leaders need to provide spaces with work teams to establish limits so that employees, through segmentation strategies, can distance themselves emotionally from their work role. Furthermore, organizational ethics committees, apart from being a protocol entity, have the responsibility of approaching professionals to listen to them. Intrusive or abusive leaderships that promote a work environment without time restrictions, protected by commitment and good intentions, must be avoided by all means available to the sector.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This research has an important drawback. First, the conditional process model, being subject to cross-sectional design, cannot draw exact conclusions about causes. However, some limitations evidenced in other studies, for instance the influence of the common method variance, could be attenuated. This drawback occurs when collecting different variables, whether dependent or independent, through a single source. Partially following the indications of Podsakoff et al. (2012), six reporting sources are used. Second, to exercise some control over the contextual effect, surveys are distributed on different days, and the order of the questions is changed as each organization has its own questionnaire. Measuring the dependent and independent variables at different times was not possible.

Additionally, two independent procedures are used to minimize the social desirability bias: (1) surveys are completely anonymously, and (2) the importance of responding appropriately is emphasized in previous meetings. Finally, one of the authors was present in the six questionnaire response processes. In this way, the participants' tendency to be consistent in their responses, the ambiguity bias of the item, or an inference induced by the Likert scale without the neutral option, used uniformly throughout the questionnaire, were attenuated (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Regarding future research, there are a number of moderation mechanisms that may also explain the relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout. For example, benevolent or principled work climates, along with psychological safety, can function as significant resources to attenuate symptoms of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and in turn enhance the employee's Personal Realization.

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