

# The Role of Self-Control in Reducing Burnout within Toxic Work Environments: A Narrative Review of Self-Regulation Theory in Indonesian Multisector Organizations (2024-2025)

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## ABSTRACT

*This narrative review examines whether self-control reduces burnout in toxic work environments and whether Self-Regulation Theory remains applicable in Indonesian multisector organizations. The review synthesizes open-access empirical literature published between 2024 and 2025, prioritizing Indonesian multisector evidence and using complementary international evidence where the Indonesian corpus is still limited. The central argument is that self-control matters, but it is rarely sufficient on its own. Employees who can monitor environmental cues, evaluate social threat, and adjust behavior are better able to cope with hostile, demanding, or normatively corrosive workplaces. However, the evidence also shows that burnout is structurally shaped by leadership, ethical climate, organizational justice, workload, and resource availability. In Indonesian hotels, servant leadership was associated with stronger work ethic culture, while burnout played a mediating role in that relationship, indicating that the work environment can either deplete or protect employee energy. In public-sector organizations, transformational leadership and work engagement were linked to innovative work behavior, suggesting that supportive leadership can buffer strain and preserve adaptive behavior. In Indonesian higher education, ESG-related environmental, social, and governance practices improved employee performance and well-being, showing that governance and culture can support psychological sustainability. In digital and team settings, leader emotional intelligence and positive emotional climate were associated with higher flourishing and performance. Taken together, the literature supports Self-Regulation Theory only partially: self-control helps employees respond adaptively, but it does not neutralize a toxic environment by itself. The strongest implication is that burnout prevention in Indonesian organizations requires a dual strategy strengthening individual self-regulation and redesigning organizational conditions that generate chronic strain.*

**Keywords:** self-control, burnout, toxic work environment, self-regulation theory, organizational climate.

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## INTRODUCTION

Burnout has become one of the most persistent organizational health risks in contemporary work. It is not simply fatigue or temporary stress; it is a cumulative response to chronic work pressure, emotional overload, and a lack of recovery resources. In organizational settings, burnout often reflects an imbalance between what the job demands and what the worker can mobilize cognitively, emotionally, and socially to remain effective. The job demands-resources perspective captures this pattern well by arguing that strain develops when demands are high and resources are limited, while engagement is more likely when resources are available even under pressure. That model is useful here because toxic work environments are precisely those in which demands rise while the resources needed for sustained adaptation are weakened.

The Indonesian evidence from 2024–2025 shows that the quality of the work environment matters. In a hospitality-sector study in Bandung, servant leadership was positively associated with work ethic culture, and burnout functioned as a mediating mechanism in that relationship. That is important because it suggests that employee exhaustion is not merely a private psychological state; it is a relational outcome shaped by leadership and organizational climate. In a separate public-sector study from eastern Indonesia, transformational leadership and work engagement were direct predictors of innovative work behavior, indicating that supportive leadership can preserve adaptive functioning in settings under administrative pressure. In Indonesian higher education, ESG-driven social and governance practices were associated with better employee performance and well-being, again suggesting that organizational design can either aggravate or reduce strain.

This makes self-control a theoretically important but practically incomplete explanation. Self-regulation theory assumes that individuals monitor their environment, appraise threats, and adjust behavior to protect goal pursuit. In a toxic workplace, that means employees may suppress impulsive reactions, reinterpret hostile cues, delay retaliation, set boundaries, or seek socially acceptable exits from conflict. These responses can reduce immediate escalation and help employees keep functioning. Yet the same theory also implies a limit: if threats are chronic and recovery resources are scarce, self-control becomes costly. The individual may continue to adapt, but the cumulative cost increases the likelihood of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and withdrawal. The question is therefore not whether self-control matters, but whether it can meaningfully reduce burnout in the absence of organizational repair.

The recent Indonesian literature suggests that the answer is conditional. Leader emotional intelligence and positive team emotional climate were shown to improve employee flourishing and performance in a 2024 *Frontiers* study, implying that psychologically supportive climates can foster more sustainable self-regulation. Likewise, a 2024 meta-analysis on emotional competence training found that emotional competencies can be trained at work, which means self-regulatory and emotional coping capacities are not fixed traits but developable resources. At the same time, evidence from an open-access study on digital-era organizational commitment found that ethical environments help reduce technology-related distress, again reinforcing the point that organizational context is a core determinant of whether self-control is protective or merely compensatory.

The gap in the literature is clear. There are still few Indonesian multisector studies that directly test self-control as a buffer against burnout in explicitly toxic work environments. Most open-access evidence instead addresses adjacent constructs: servant leadership, organizational justice, ethical climate, work engagement, emotional climate, and employee well-being. That fragmentation makes it difficult to evaluate Self-Regulation Theory in a clean, direct way, but it also creates an opportunity for theoretical synthesis. The novelty of this review lies in that synthesis: it uses 2024–2025 evidence from Indonesian multisector organizations to assess whether self-control plausibly reduces burnout within toxic environments and whether the theory holds in practice when the organization itself is part of the problem. The objective is to determine whether self-regulation is a sufficient explanation, a partial explanation, or mainly a coping mechanism that must be paired with organizational redesign.

Self-control is important not only for individual resilience, but also for helping employees avoid being swept into the negative patterns of a toxic work environment. In hostile workplaces, self-regulation enables employees to remain professional, control impulsive reactions, and preserve their goals and values. At the same time, managers play a decisive role in shaping whether such self-control can develop effectively. A supportive manager creates a conducive environment that strengthens self-regulation across employees, while a toxic manager undermines it and accelerates burnout

## REASERCH METHODS

This study employed a structured narrative review design. The literature base was limited to open-access sources published between 2024 and 2025, with Indonesian multisector evidence prioritized whenever available. The review drew on empirical studies from hospitality, public administration, higher education, digital work, and broader organizational psychology, because the direct intersection of self-control, toxic work environment, and burnout remains underrepresented in a single sector. Search terms included combinations of self-control, self-regulation, burnout, toxic work environment, servant leadership, ethical climate, organizational justice, work engagement, and Indonesia. Studies were included if they reported empirical findings on burnout, employee well-being, leadership climate, or emotionally demanding work conditions. Foundational theory sources were used only for conceptual anchoring. Synthesis was narrative and thematic, with attention to how individual self-regulation interacts with leadership, ethics, and organizational resources.

The review strategy was appropriate because the evidence base is heterogeneous. Some studies measure burnout directly, others focus on work ethic culture or well-being, and others examine leadership and climate as predictors of adaptive behavior. Rather than forcing these studies into a narrow meta-analytic frame, the review identifies a conceptual pattern: environments with stronger leadership, fairness, and ethical support reduce strain, while environments that are emotionally corrosive or normatively unstable increase the need for constant self-control. That distinction matters because the theory under review is not only about individual coping, but also about whether ongoing self-monitoring can preserve goal pursuit when work conditions are persistently adverse.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Burnout is structurally produced, not merely individually felt

The reviewed evidence strongly suggests that burnout should not be interpreted as personal weakness. In the Indonesian hospitality study, servant leadership was positively related to work ethic culture, and burnout played a mediating role in the relationship. This means that the quality of leadership shaped how much emotional depletion workers experienced and how they expressed work ethic behavior. In practical terms, employees in supportive environments may still have to self-regulate, but the burden is less corrosive because leadership reduces ambiguity, hostility, and emotional turbulence. That finding points away from a purely individualistic account of burnout and toward an interactional account in which the workplace itself is part of the causal chain.

A similar pattern appears in the public sector. In eastern Indonesia, transformational leadership and work engagement were associated with innovative work behavior, while organizational justice did not show the same impact in that particular study. Even so, the practical implication is clear: when leadership and engagement are strong, employees are more likely to behave adaptively rather than defensively. That matters for self-regulation theory because self-control is easier to sustain when the organization sends

clear, supportive signals. When the climate is weak, employees must devote more energy to monitoring social cues and regulating reactions, which leaves less energy for the task itself.

In higher education, ESG-driven environmental, social, and governance practices were associated with better employee performance and well-being. This finding widens the lens beyond traditional leadership. It suggests that organizational systems, not just supervisors, shape whether employees can stay psychologically healthy under pressure. Governance practices in particular amplified the positive effects of ESG. For the present review, that matters because self-control is likely to be more effective when institutional structures reduce uncertainty, encourage fairness, and provide predictable norms. A toxic work environment, by contrast, does the opposite: it raises the number of cues that must be monitored and makes self-regulation more costly.

## **2. Self-control helps, but only as a bounded personal resource**

Self-regulation theory is still useful because it captures the active side of coping. Employees do not simply absorb toxic environments; they interpret them, monitor risk, and attempt to regulate behavior so that their goals remain intact. In a difficult workplace, self-control allows a worker to avoid impulsive conflict, withhold immediate retaliation, remain professionally composed, and delay reactions until the organizational context is safer. That function is especially important in highly hierarchical or politically sensitive settings, where emotional overreaction can damage reputation or career prospects. The theory therefore explains why many employees appear calm in toxic settings even when they are internally exhausted. They are not unaffected; they are regulating continuously.

Yet the evidence also suggests a boundary condition. The 2024 review of emotional competence training found that emotional competencies can be improved through workplace intervention, which implies that self-regulation is trainable but not limitless. If a workplace continually depletes employees through excessive demands, poor leadership, or moral inconsistency, the capacity to self-regulate is gradually eroded. The implication is not that self-control fails, but that it becomes less efficient under chronic strain. In that sense, self-regulation theory holds only partially: it explains how people try to adapt, but not how long they can sustain adaptation when the environment itself is toxic

## **3. The strongest evidence of “toxic environment” comes from supportive-climate studies**

Because the direct Indonesian literature on “toxic work environment” is still limited, the review uses studies on leadership, climate, justice, and well-being as indicators of the same underlying phenomenon. One useful example is the 2024 *Frontiers* study showing that perceived leader emotional intelligence improved follower emotional intelligence, job flourishing, and performance, and that positive team emotional climate strengthened this relationship. The conceptual implication is that emotional climates can either stabilize or destabilize self-regulation. When climate is positive, employees need less defensive self-control; when climate is negative, they must spend more effort managing threats, which can increase burnout risk.

Another useful indicator comes from the digital-age organizational commitment study, which found that an ethical environment can mediate technology-related distress. Although the outcome there was nomophobia rather than burnout, the mechanism is highly relevant. Ethical and trustworthy environments reduce the sense of threat and uncertainty that forces employees into constant vigilance. In a toxic workplace, by contrast, employees must not only perform their tasks but also actively scan for hidden costs, reputation risks, and interpersonal threats. That is exactly the sort of sustained monitoring that self-regulation theory predicts will consume resources over time.

The same logic appears in the organizational-culture evidence from software teams. A large empirical study found that organizational culture, climate for learning, sense of belonging, and inclusiveness

were positively associated with work satisfaction, which in turn was associated with reduced burnout. Even though that study is not Indonesian, it is valuable as a benchmark because it shows that burnout falls when the culture supports learning and psychological safety. It supports the inference that self-control alone is not enough: employees need an environment that does not constantly force them into defensive regulation

#### **4. Does Self-Regulation Theory apply in Indonesian multisector organizations?**

On balance, the answer is yes, but only conditionally. The theory appears applicable because Indonesian multisector evidence consistently shows that employees who work in supportive environments where leadership is ethical, climate is positive, governance is stronger, and engagement is encouraged function better and show less strain. In those conditions, self-control is likely to operate as the mechanism by which workers interpret threats, delay impulsive responses, and maintain goal-directed behavior. In other words, the theory fits the micro-level coping process.

At the same time, the evidence does not support a strong claim that self-control alone reduces burnout in toxic environments. Burnout in the reviewed studies is more convincingly explained by organizational conditions: leadership, ethics, climate, engagement, and governance. Self-control helps employees remain functional, but it does not substitute for structural reform. That is the most important theoretical conclusion of this review. Self-Regulation Theory is valid as a description of how employees cope, but it is incomplete as an explanation of burnout reduction because it underestimates the causal role of the workplace itself

#### **5. Implications for HR and management**

For organizations, the implication is straightforward. Training employees in self-control, emotional regulation, and boundary management can help, but such interventions will have limited value if the organization continues to generate chronic strain. HR systems should therefore combine individual development with organizational redesign. That means clearer role expectations, less abusive supervision, stronger ethical standards, more psychological safety, fairer governance, and policies that reduce unnecessary emotional labor. The literature suggests that these changes are more likely to reduce burnout than self-control training alone because they lower the volume of threats employees must manage in the first place.

The practical strategy is not either-or. Self-control interventions are useful when they are embedded in a healthier organizational system. For instance, emotional competence training may help employees manage difficult interactions, while servant leadership or ethical governance reduces the frequency of those interactions. In that configuration, self-regulation becomes a true resource rather than a compensatory burden. That is the most defensible conclusion for Indonesian multisector organizations in 2026: burnout prevention should not be outsourced to individual willpower. It should be treated as a shared responsibility between the employee and the organization.

### **CONCLUSION**

This narrative review concludes that self-control can reduce burnout only partially within toxic work environments. Self-Regulation Theory is useful because it explains how employees monitor threats, appraise social risk, and adjust behavior to maintain goals under pressure. However, the Indonesian multisector evidence from 2024–2025 shows that burnout is primarily shaped by organizational conditions such as leadership quality, ethical climate, governance, engagement, and psychological safety. Self-control helps employees cope, but it cannot neutralize a persistently toxic environment on its own. Therefore, the theory

holds in a limited sense: it explains individual adaptation, but burnout reduction requires both self-regulatory capacity and structural workplace reform.

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