



- Findings from Research -
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Overview

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1. History of burn-out research

The Pioneering Phase



- Initial articles appeared in the mid-1970s in the US;
- Was based on workers in human-service;
- burnout was studied in terms of an individual's relational transactions in the workplace;
- Qualitative in nature - used techniques was interviews, case studies, and on-site observations.
- central focus on relationships;
- a strong applied, social psychological orientation

The Empirical Phase

- More systematic empirical research - more quantitative in nature;
 - focus was the assessment of burnout;
 - the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach&Jackson (1981);
 - the concept of burnout was extended to occupations beyond the human services and education;
 - industrial-organizational psychology
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2. Defining the construct

What is **burnout**?

”Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.”

(Maslach et al.; 2001 p. 397).



Three dimensions of Burnout

Exhaustion

The exhaustion component represents the basic individual stress dimension of burnout. It refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources.

Cynicism

The cynicism (or depersonalization) component represents the interpersonal context dimension of burnout. It refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job.

Reduced professional efficacy

The component of reduced efficacy or accomplishment represents the self-evaluation dimension of burnout. It refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity at work.

Outcomes

On job performance

- Absenteeism
- Intention to leave the job
- Actual turnover
- Lower productivity

On health

- Mental dysfunction – negative effects in terms of mental health:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Drops in self-esteem

People experiencing burnout might have negative impact on their colleagues (greater personal conflicts; disturbing job tasks).

Thus, burnout can be 'contagious' – negative feedback circle in a team!

3. Diagnostical aspects

- Diagnostic tools
 - Is burnout just simply depression and anxiety?
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Diagnostic tools: Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

MBI – HSS (Human Services Survey)

Personal report sample:

http://www.mindgarden.com/docs/MBIHSS_SamplePersonalReport.pdf

Group report sample:

http://www.mindgarden.com/docs/MBIHSS_SampleGroupReport.pdf

MBI – ES (Educational Survey)

MBI – GS (General Survey)

Is burnout just simply depression and anxiety?

MBI findings showed:

burnout is **related** to depression and anxiety, **but** it is a problem that is **specific** to the **work context** –

depression: tends to pervade every domain of a person's life.

Five common elements of the burnout phenomenon

(Maslach & Schaufeli 1993 in Maslach et al. 2003)

- ❑ There is a predominance of *dysphoric symptoms* such as mental or emotional exhaustion, fatigue, and depression.
 - ❑ The emphasis is on *mental and behavioral symptoms* more than physical ones.
 - ❑ Burnout *symptoms are work-related*.
 - ❑ The symptoms manifest themselves in *"normal" persons who did not suffer from psychopathology before*.
 - ❑ Decreased effectiveness and work performance occur because of *negative attitudes and behaviors*.
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4. SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Where does burn-out occur?

- Job characteristics
 - Occupational characteristics
 - Organizational characteristics
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Job characteristics

- Burnout: response to **overload**. Experienced *workload and time pressure* are strongly and consistently related to burnout.
 - role **conflict** and role **ambiguity**: both consistently show a moderate to high correlation with burnout.
 - a **lack of social support** is linked to burnout. Lack of support from supervisors is especially important, even more so than support from coworkers.
 - a **lack of feedback** is consistently related to all three dimensions of burnout.
 - burnout is higher for people who have little **participation in decision making**. Similarly, a lack of autonomy is correlated with burnout.
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Occupational characteristics

- **job-related** stressors (see above) **correlated higher with burnout than client-related** stressors (such as problems in interacting with clients, frequency of contact with chronically or terminally ill patients, or confrontation with death and dying).
 - new research: focus on **emotion-work variables** (e.g. requirement to display or suppress emotions on the job, requirement to be emotionally empathic) - these emotion factors do account for *additional variance* in burnout scores over and above job stressors.
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Organizational characteristics

- Hierarchies, operating rules, resources, and space distribution can have a far-reaching influence, particularly when they **violate basic expectations** of fairness and equity.
 - **violation of the psychological contract** (employees are expected to give more in terms of time, effort, skills, and flexibility, whereas they receive less in terms of career opportunities, lifetime employment, job security, etc.)
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5. INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Who experiences burn-out?

- Demographic characteristics
 - Personal characteristics
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Exercise

- Have a look at this table and think about the last situation when you were exhausted....

 - What did you do?
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Coping grid (Pines & Aronson 1988 p. 145)

	ACTIVE	INACTIVE
DIRECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing the source of the stress• Confronting source• Adopting a positive attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignoring source of the stress• Avoiding source• Leaving
INDIRECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talking about the source of stress• Changing self• Getting involved in other activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alcohol or drugs• Getting ill• Collapsing

Demographic characteristics:

- Age (burnout is more likely to appear earlier in one's career)

- Sex

Male score higher on cynicism

Female score higher on exhaustion

might be related to gender role stereotypes:

- Nurses – more likely female
- Police officers – more likely male

- Marital status

unmarried (especially men) vs married

single vs divorced

- Education

Higher level of education vs less educated

(It is not clear how to interpret this findings, given that education is confounded with other variables, such as occupation and status)



Personal characteristics

- More likely to become burned out:
 - People who display *low level of hardiness* (that is low involvement in daily activities, low sense of control over events, less openness to change)
 - People who have an *external locus of control*
 - People with *low self esteem* (in particular, coping with stressful situations: in more passive, defensive way).
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7. Person within the context

New theoretical framework (see Maslach et al. 2001) that focuses on the degree of match/mismatch, between person and six domains of job environment.

Mismatches arise when process of establishing a *psychological contract* leaves critical issues unresolved, or when the working relationship changes to something that a worker finds unacceptable.

Six areas of worklife that encompass the central relationships with burnout:

Workload, Control, Reward, Community, Fairness, Values

Workload

too many demands exhaust an individual's energy to the extent that recovery becomes impossible. Workload is most directly related to the exhaustion aspect of burnout.

Control

It is distressing for people to feel responsible for producing results to which they are deeply committed while lacking the capacity to deliver on that mandate.

Reward

Lack of appropriate rewards for the work people do.

This lack of recognition devalues both the work and the workers.

Lack of reward is closely associated with feelings of inefficacy.

Community

- ❑ People thrive in community and function best when they *share praise, comfort, happiness, and humor with people they like and respect*. Social support reaffirms a person's membership in a group with a shared sense of values.
- ❑ Some jobs isolate people from each other. However, the most *destructive of community is chronic and unresolved conflict with others on the job*.

Conflicts produce constant negative feelings of frustration and hostility, reduces the likelihood of social support.

Fairness

Unfairness can occur when there is *inequity of workload or pay*, when there is *cheating, evaluations and promotions are handled inappropriately*.

Experience of unfair treatment is *emotionally upsetting and exhausting*, also fuels a deep sense of cynicism about the workplace.

Values

A conflict between values (exp.: in order to make a sale they might have to tell a lie). In other instances, there may be a mismatch between their personal aspirations for their career and the values of the organization.

Interaction of the six areas - Not clear how much of mismatch people are willing to tolerate.

These areas provide a conceptual framework for the crises that disrupt the relationships people develop with their work.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION: How to deal with burn-out?

Intervention strategies

- to treat burnout
- to prevent burnout

Focus was primarily on **individual-centered solutions**, such as removing the worker from the job, or individual strategies for the worker, in which one either strengthens one's internal resources or changes one's work behaviors.

This is particularly paradoxical given that research has found that SITUATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL factors play a bigger role in burnout than individual ones.

Philosophical and pragmatic reasons underlying the predominant focus on the individual, including notions of individual causality and responsibility; it seems easier and cheaper to change people than organizations!

*People may be able to tolerate greater workload if they **value the work and feel they are doing something important**, or if they **feel well-rewarded** for their efforts.*

Interventions should target also these areas of value and reward!

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- *Neither changing the setting nor changing the individuals is enough; effective change occurs **when both develop in an integrated fashion!***
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- *Although the potential value of **organizational interventions** is great, they are often not easy to implement (investment of time, effort, money)...*
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- *Employees participated in weekly group sessions designed to identify ways of reducing the perceived inequities in their job situation.*
 - *In comparison with control groups, participants reported a significant decrease in emotional exhaustion at six months and one year after the intervention*

(van Dierendonck et al 1998 in Maslach et al. 2003).

References

- Maslach C., Schaufeli W.B., Leiter M.P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397- 422.
 - Pines A. & Aronson E. (1988). *Career Burnout: Causes and Cures*. New York: The Free Press.
 - Schwartzhoffer R.V. (2009). *Psychology of Burnout*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
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