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Reducing Employee Burnout: The Role of Organizations

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Reducing Employee Burnout: The Role of Organizations

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty
of the Department of Leadership Education
College of Education
of Winona State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science

by

Aixa E. Evenson

(April 29, 2022)

Acknowledgment

To my family, forever my roaring audience, without your support I wouldn't have legs on which to stand. I love you.

To Dr. Cindy Killion, for vigorously challenging me as a writer during my years as an undergraduate. To you, I attribute my love of communication through the written word.

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Abstract

Organizations experience high rates of burnout amongst their staff. Whether it be team productivity, staff deadline completion pace, work engagement, staff turnover rates, or other relevant areas of a leader's team, burnout has shown to cause a significant decrease in satisfaction and functionality in a staffer's workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The purpose of this study was to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout. Theories that support this study are the Job-Demands Resource Theory, the Conservation of Resources Theory, and the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change. Each of these theories present a need for organizational change regarding burnout in employees (Esaki et. al., 2013). This qualitative study focused on a leader's perspective. An anonymous survey was sent to 10 participants from varying organizations in the Midwest region of the United States. The principal researcher used thematic coding to identify themes for conclusions and leadership implications. Results of this study reflected significant training gaps and incongruence of protocol, each of which is a precursor for burnout. A consistent message throughout each explored theory, is the notion that burnout poses incredible problems and challenges for public health (De Hert, 2020). This study's findings framed ways in which organizations currently lack preventative burnout measures, have limited statistics regulating workplace stressors, and how organizations can better engage leadership.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

Burnout amongst the workforce is not a new concept, yet it continues to affect employees, leadership, and organizations. Psychoanalysts introduced burnout in the 1970's, with an emphasis on burnout as a syndrome (Schaufeli et al., 2001). Burnout syndrome, as specified by Dr. Christina Maslach, an American Social Psychologist, is “prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job” and is defined by the three dimensions that influence personal accomplishment: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and professional inefficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2001, p. 399). Although emotions have shown to play a central part in work experiences and their relevance to performance, burnout is unfortunately, not officially defined nor recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Allen et al., 2012). Burnout syndrome occurs in all professions that run the risk of placing excess work-related stress on staff members. Research shows, when burnout amongst staff is not addressed, teams make more mistakes, have higher turnover, and an increased chance of lawsuits for various issues that may occur due to the organization's responsibility or lack thereof to burnout (De Hert, 2020).

In accordance with Maslach, burnout is a response to problematic employee vs. workplace relationships (Couser, 2019). Understanding burnout is fundamental to an organization enforcing leadership participation in burnout preventative measures. Support in the workplace has shown to create paramount outcomes in reducing employee burnout and increased job satisfaction (Esaki et al., 2013). With leaders being the gatekeepers between employees and the organization for which they are affiliated, organizations can uphold practices that support the quest for leaders to handle, prevent, or reduce burnout amongst their teams. These practices

provide the organization with measurable insight into its overall turnover rates due to staff burnout. Research confirms that while leading with empowering messages and playing to emotionality, leadership helps develop an engaging, positive environment in which team members feel safe to be creative and involved (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020).

Throughout this chapter, the problems associated with burnout, the type of leadership engagement, and the significance of an organization's responsibility to support leaders in reducing burnout, are explored. This was utilized as a foundation for the study. Identification of research questions, limitations and delimitations of the study, and an overall summary of content conclude this first chapter.

Problem Statement

Organizations and their leaders lose staff to burnout. Research supports the notion that burnout could be prevented or reduced by organizations prioritizing and providing appropriate resources (De Hert, 2020). Over a two-year span, burnout rates in a study of physicians were reported 50% or greater (Henson, 2016). Thus, the current problem lies with organizations experiencing higher rates of burnout amongst their staff. Whether it be in team productivity, staff deadline completion pace, work engagement, staff turnover rates, or other relevant areas of a leader's team, burnout has shown to cause a significant decrease in satisfaction and functionality in a staffer's workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A survey conducted in 2019 reported that more than half of the 228 participants felt their organization was, "slightly to highly ineffective at helping them address burnout (Croke, 2020, p. 8)." Failure to be proactive may result in organizations suffering employee dissatisfaction, lower job performance, and in more severe cases, frequent turnover (Tummers & Bakker, 2021).

Various theories explore why organizations need to be concerned with providing support for their leaders as it pertains to burnout reduction or prevention. The Job Demands-Resource theory, the Conservation of Resources Theory, and the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change all concur that a work environment affects overall job performance. To better prepare for impactful change, the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change identifies ways in which an organization can develop values that can influence follower attitudes. With an emphasis on transformational leadership and its corresponding practices, these theories support the need for further exploration of staff burnout and its relationship to organizational responsibility. Each of the mentioned theories is explored further in Chapter II.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout. This study took a qualitative approach to discovery and focused on leaders who have direct reports within their organization. The principal researcher chose organizations with a size of 15 employees or more in the Midwest region of the United States, particularly in the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois. This research aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What training is offered to minimize burnout?

RQ2: What type of burnout reduction practices have been implemented?

RQ3: What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?

Background of the Problem

Burnout has three dimensions that make up its multidimensional construct: emotional exhaustion, increased depersonalization, and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment (Esaki et al., 2013). According to Maslach and Jackson, emotional exhaustion is the front runner

of burnout cause (Esaki et al., 2013). Each of these is better defined in relation to the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change. No matter the situation, when a leader is faced with an employee experiencing stress, organizations are fronted with tension, employee behavioral changes, and employee emotional exhaustion (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017).

Throughout its conception, burnout has shown to be most prevalent in professions involving numerous interactions with people (DeHart, 2020). Furthermore, these professions are known for producing workaholic tendencies which lead to stress or the negative physical and emotional outcomes that represent burnout. Workaholics develop irrational beliefs about themselves and their work such as believing they are the only ones capable of the work needed, or falsely predicting catastrophe if they, themselves, do not finish the work. Workaholism influences individuals to “have a compulsive drive to gain approval” (van Wijhe et al., 2013, p. 338). This increased desire for approval from significant others, like their leader, can induce burnout in individuals and corrupt others if they have influence in the team dynamic. Burnout amongst teams leads to an increase in turnover, job error, and overall cost inducing issues for an organization (DeHart, 2020).

Although an organization may argue it is the employee’s responsibility to address their work-related wellness, a myriad of studies has shown that an institution’s recognition and response to the problem can be pivotal in reducing negative effects it has on the team and organization (DeHart, 2020). Diminished job performance, depression, absenteeism, and overall inefficacy are all results of burnout from teams who lack adequate equipment, managerial support, and supplemental support (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Research evidence suggests that the behavior of a team leader does influence the well-being of the employees they lead, particularly with emphasis on organizations that uphold transformational leadership practices

(Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). Without an organizational push to engage leadership teams in workplace support, burnout is more likely to occur (Esaki et al., 2013).

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations present in this research are whether an organization recognizes burnout and/or has a burnout protocol. Additionally, a limitation is if the organization provides education for its leaders to gain perspective and understanding of burnout. Lastly, the study limitation includes the amount of time a participant has functioned in the leadership role.

Delimitations of this study include organizations in the Midwest area in the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois, with a size of 15 employees or more to scale the research into a sizeable review. Also, to gain perspective from a leader's point of view, the delimitation must fall only to participants who have direct report/s.

Definition of Terms

A definition of terms is necessary in the understanding of research, study, and the progression of the topic. The following terms and definitions are deemed relevant.

- **Burnout:** prolonged response to a strained inter-working relationship between employee and organization, which breaks down into three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and personal inefficacy (Shanafelt, 2017).
- **Workaholism:** a compulsion to need to work in excess than what reality of the job requires (van Wijhe, et al., 2013).
- **Transformational leadership (TFL):** a leadership style and approach that influences change in social systems, organizations, and/or individuals (Tafvelin et al., 2019).

- **Emotional intelligence:** an individual's capacity to handle stress (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020).

Summary

Burnout, as given in both the problem statement and background in chapter I, continues to present as a complex problem with various symptoms felt not by one person, but throughout an entire organization. These symptoms, if left unattended, may result in undesirable consequences not only for the individual but potentially the organization. As this chapter explained, because burnout has no official definition for organizations or other leaders to reference, additional research must be conducted to ensure organizations address burnout and provide their leaders with preventative measures in the workplace. The limitations and delimitations surrounding the research questions and study were presented by the principal researcher and accompanied with a definition of terms that relate to the topic at hand. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout.

Chapter II provides a review of literature. It includes theoretical framework, development and symptoms of burnout, leadership engagement, and organizational responsibility.

Chapter II – Review of Literature

Introduction

The literature review is organized first by an exploration of the theoretical framework of the Job Demands Resources Theory, the Conservation of Resources Theory, and the Valuation Theory of Organizational change. Each of these theories present a need for organizational change regarding burnout in employees (Esaki et. al., 2013). Next, the development and symptoms of burnout are analyzed. With its supporting research, burnout symptoms are explained and generalized into three dimensions, each of which leads to the detriment of the next (De Hert, 2020). Finally, the ways in which to engage leadership and identify the organizational and leadership responsibility of reducing burnout, are thoroughly discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Because this study used qualitative research, a theoretical context aids the researcher in pinpointing which issues offer the most importance (Creswell, 2014). To better assist this study of identifying the role of an organization supporting its leaders in reducing staff burnout, three theories lay the foundation for perspective. The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change uphold theoretical perspectives that helped shape the research questions and research design for this study.

Although theories addressing burnout, specifically, are beneficial to note, this study aims not just to identify burnout in a staff member, but mainly the organization's role in supporting its leaders. This type of study requires a view into the emotional intelligence of leaders and the kind of theories that explain the consequences of organizations that refuse to partake in the health and safety of their employees. The first theory that supports this study is the Job Demands Resources

(JD-R) Theory. The JD-R Theory analyzes the work environments that affect the well-being of employees and overall job performance (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). To better dissect this theory, it is imperative to understand the difference between job demands and job resources. Separating various job characteristics into these two categories allows further dissection for what precisely influences overall employee health and motivation. According to Tummers & Bakker (2021), job demands is more associated with physiological and psychological costs, which ultimately necessitate persistent effort. Job resources, however, focus more on overall development and personal growth stimulation. Job resources help employees reach their work-related goals and in turn, reduce the job demands that weigh heavily physiologically and psychologically on an employee's self-worth. Simply stated, job demands can lead to unsustainable efforts. Consequently, the lack of job resources may unsuccessfully alleviate job demands in the path to goal completion. Each of these categories relates to job strain and the idea that burnout happens as a result.

Although knowing why employees become burnt out is a good start to the reduction of it, understanding how, as a leader, they can reduce or prevent burnout in their teams is another important factor to consider. The concept of transformational leadership is most fitting for the groundwork of a leader's position in reducing burnout. One study commented that "transformational leadership behaviors could play a more distal role than work organization factors by acting simultaneously on perceived job resources and job demands." (Fernet et al., 2015, p. 27). This perception of job resources and job demands because of leadership type and influence it has on those factors, leaves room for organizations to take responsibility for providing appropriate resources for their leaders. As much as transformational leadership has proven to influence people's perception of job resources and demand, many organizations have

yet to provide adequate training for leaders as they step and continue working in leadership roles (Mayfield et al., 2015).

The JD-R Theory affirms that burnout in employees, often brought on by job strain, does, in fact, lead to lower job performance; whereas for leaders who are more engaged in motivating their team and reducing strain, employee job performance is attractively higher (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). A study conducted at the Mayo Clinic, with more than 2,800 physicians, cited by Couser & Agarwal (2019), found that with each increase of multifactorial leadership, there was a corresponding 9% increase in chance of satisfaction in the workplace, and a 3% decrease of burnout. This Mayo Clinic study suggests that positive reflection of the organization will exist so long as companies develop comprehensive leaders, who can proactively intervene by their ability to identify the signs of job strain. The JD-R Theory helps shape the argument for organizations needing to not only acknowledge, but unequivocally identify, their role in reducing burnout amongst staff by providing resources for their leaders.

The second model shown to accentuate the need to identify the organization's role to support leadership teams reducing employee burnout, is the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. This theory also connects to the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change. The COR Theory investigates the relationship between transformational leadership and follower burnout, which ultimately suggests that the resource loss consequently leads to burnout (Tafvelin et al., 2019). As stated with the support of the JD-R Theory, a leader cannot have appropriate or accessible resources without the organization setting the standard for the amount and type of resources desired. With COR Theory, resources are ultimately defined as "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right" (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 399). According to supplementary research, resources help prevent an individual from distinguishing

certain events as stressors (Tafvelin et al., 2019). With successful prevention from stressors, the more resilient the individual is to stress. Resilience to stress leads to lower chance of emotional exhaustion, the main cause of burnout (Esaki et al., 2013).

The COR Theory also proposes, the more an organization makes the resources accessible to leaders, the more likely that leader can identify new resources to practice and share (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Just as organizations feel the effects of burnout ripple through itself, when leaders experience possession of resources from their organization, the better a leader's ability is to utilize resources with vigor and support. In doing so, the leader is more likely to engage in transformational leadership behaviors that result in staff reporting being less burned out (Tafvelin et al., 2019). To increase the rate at which leaders utilize a transformational leadership style and enhance these benefits, the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change must be understood (Esaki et al., 2013).

Emotional exhaustion has a direct correlation with Valuation Theory of Organizational Change (Esaki et al., 2013). Valuation theory suggests that individuals and diverse organizational groups perceive change with a variety of interpretations. Such differing viewpoints may lead to significant disparities between the valuations held by individuals or the organization (Esaki et al., 2013). As the chapters suggest, when values are not being met in an organizational environment, emotional exhaustion begins. For an organization to effectively implement change, valuation theory focuses on personal meanings that an organization can integrate into the workplace, which an individual may deem valuable (Esaki et al., 2013). In doing so, this creates a resilience to emotional exhaustion because leaders are more likely to be emotionally available to handle discord with their staff by exercising positive relationship characteristics.

Development and symptoms of burnout

According to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (MMD), burnout affects a staggering 28% of the general population (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). For perspective, 28% of the general population based on the 2020 United States Census Bureau count equates to 92.7 million people. Although burnout, as previously mentioned, has not been recognized in the MMD as something diagnosable, it does have symptoms that are generically defined amongst psychology professionals. Research implies that, “burnout happens when ‘one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform’” (Maslach et al., 1996, p. 20, as cited in Tummers & Bakker, 2021, p. 2), which can stem from various factors in the workplace. The three generalized dimensions associated with burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy (Esaki et al., 2013).

Symptom development for burnout is rarely brought on by the employee's need to complain about work. Instead, burnout symptoms stem from lack of strong leaders, poor management of job demands, and an organization's failure to impose proper procedures of stress mitigation (Henson, 2016). The first indication of burnout root from symptoms that fall under emotional exhaustion. Research states that emotions and emotionality are “perceived to be central to experiences at work and are studied as relevant predictors of performance” (Raja, Song, & Arvey, 2011, p. 1107). An individual's emotions may be influenced by the type of leadership style and overall culture of an organization's values (Turnidge & Cole, 2016).

Secondary in dimension, although more severe but less likely to occur without the presence of emotional exhaustion, is depersonalization. Symptoms like anxiety, depression, isolation, and in some cases, substance abuse, false relationship, or divorce are results of

cynicism for a job (De Hert, 2020). These repercussions in an individual's personal life can ultimately lead to the detriment of depersonalization. Depersonalization is defined as not caring, to the point of objectifying people and becoming detached from feeling altogether (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). When caring levels are at a minimum, it leads to the third dimension of symptoms that also increase the risk of turnover and catastrophic mistakes for an organization (Allen et al., 2012).

Reduced professional efficacy and personal accomplishment is the final dimension that leads to burnout in an individual. Symptoms of this final dimension stem from the stress of an imbalance of effort and reward in the workplace. Conditions in a workplace with high job demands and low levels of reward are considered intensely stressful (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). With an individual experiencing emotional exhaustion, a feeling of little care for their place in a work setting, and overall decreased reward for goal completion, stress has an intense effect on an individual's personal actions (De Hert, 2020).

Leadership engagement

In reference to the Mayo Clinic study mentioned earlier in this chapter, the risk of burnout is drastically decreased when leaders allow their employees to work with their professional focus on at least 20% of what the employee deems as meaningful work (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). In other words, the more positive an employee's work life is, the more productive they will be because there is not a distraction from the assorted depths caused by burnout. An organization's attempts at mitigating or reducing burnout are unsuccessful without the full engagement of leadership (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). A potential response is for organizations to adopt the transformational leadership (TFL) style. Research shows that TFL is one of the utmost constructive leadership styles and consistently shows a correlation with

positive outcomes, desirable workplace culture, and higher levels of enthusiasm when reaching for goals (Turnidge & Cole, 2016).

Although organization participation is ideal for a leader's advanced education accessibility surrounding TFL, the individual leader must also be open to engaging in ways that haven't always been considered normative. Unlike the historic foundation of transactional leadership where leaders offer rewards or punishments from task execution, Turnidge & Cole (2016) say TFL can build from that foundation to achieve superior levels of success and an overall impact of employee well-being. Typical behaviors of the TFL style are ones intended to enable employees to reach their fullest potential. The various behaviors of TFL include empowerment, encouraging challenges, and inspiring visionary work. This leadership style though, does require the leader to either inherit or adopt emotional intelligence. It is said that "for an individual to successfully approach the complexities of leadership, emotional intelligence will serve the individual well in working with others and adapting to the challenges and opportunities as needed," (Allen et al., 2012, p. 182). Without the use of emotional intelligence when deploying TFL, the leader will have less of an impact on decreasing an employee's emotional exhaustion and reduction of burnout (Croke, 2020).

Emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is an individual's capacity to handle stress (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020). Research shows that the depth of one's own emotional intelligence significantly aids in the influence of thoughts, behaviors, and decisions because there is a better ability to monitor one's own emotions while handling the emotional outbursts of others (Allen et al., 2012). With emotional intelligence at the core of TFL, it is important a leader recognizes the varying differences and similarities of their team members to better accept and appropriately react to issues that may arise. The ability to diagnose leadership challenges,

pinpoint course of action, and intervening when desiring necessary outcomes, are all effects of a leader being fully engaged with the TFL style (Allen et al., 2016). To provide emotional relief to employees, “a leader may practice their emotional intelligence with social support, for it is shown to serve as a preventative of burnout” (Esaki et al., 2013, p. 88). How leaders gain access to training and tools for emotional intelligence, TFL, and the likes, is where the organizational responsibility enters the equation of burnout reduction.

Organizational responsibility

When burnout exists in an employee, the organization feels the downstream impact of various errors, team pitfalls, leadership hiccups, resentment in the workplace, and staff turnover (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). With this, an argument can be made that there is a need for organizations to support its leaders by encouraging the identification of burnout and providing tools that help reduce the severity or frequency of it (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). According to Couser & Agarwal (2019), to effectively engage leadership, the organization must provide stable programs, tools, and/or user-friendly resources. In doing so, this creates a more fiscally successful organization that has strong cultures and leaders that can withstand adversity. For this study, the focus is on identifying the organization’s role in supporting their leaders to reduce burnout amongst staff.

An increase in leadership support has been shown to statistically lessen emotional exhaustion and burnout symptoms (Croke, 2020). The organizational psychology literature outlines the consistency of positive well-being and overall follower outcomes, which are linked to the encouragement of TFL not only within an organizational setting but also in leadership training (Turnidge & Cole, 2016). Research shows that the leaders’ own well-being may be an influential factor in their overall ability to manage the well-being of their employees (Tafvelin, et

al., 2019). With such research confirmation, organizational responsibility to providing leaders with resources, only strengthens the relationship between the type of leadership behaviors, like transformational leadership, has on staff burnout. Because the type of leadership affects the overall symptom severity and presence of burnout, the association of emotional intelligence ultimately revolves around the resources an organization provides (Allen et al., 2012).

Organizational resources may include innovative training, continued education, and leadership development. There are four primary objectives for leadership development, which include conceptual understanding, skill building, feedback, and personal growth (Allen et al., 2012). In each of these objectives, a leader's emotional intelligence serves as the foundation to successfully adapting to challenges and opportunities to better support staff during transitional or emotionally draining scenarios (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Mitigating workplace stressors stem from an organization's priority of identifying the likely drivers of burnout in their setting, and engaging leadership in the conversation (Couser & Agarwal, 2019). It is essential that an organization encourage its leaders to exhibit empowering behaviors to their teams. Giving meaning to a team's work by recognizing efforts, demonstrating confidence in a team by allowing participation of the decision-making process, and improving the team's skills to better encourage innovative and efficient work, all symbolize empowering behaviors (Croke, 2020).

Summary

Chapter II identified three theories, symptoms of burnout, the types of leadership engagement, and an organization's responsibility to reducing burnout. Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and Valuation Theory of Organization all show promise as reasons for identifying the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce employee burnout. Additionally, the development and symptoms of

burnout were identified. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy are the three generalized dimensions of burnout (Esaki et al., 2013). To assist the foundation of research for this study, different forms of engaging leadership were explored. Both transformational leadership and emotional intelligence were highlighted as main drivers of prevention of emotional exhaustion, and ways in which leadership can engage with teams. Each of these presented as influential factors of the sense making process “by which people seek to understand and clarify ambiguous or ill-defined situations or environments, including organizational contexts, crisis situations, and unstructured environments” (Allen et al., 2012, p. 187). And finally, the organizational responsibility to supporting their leaders in reducing burnout was explored. Research shows that various reasons can be economically quantified, like return on investment, to affirm organizations that it is economically responsible to develop resources that mitigate burnout symptoms arising in the workplace (Couser & Agarwal, 2019).

Chapter III offers perspective of the research methodology. The research design, sample and setting, instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, and a summary are all explored to support the research methodology of this study.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout. This chapter contains the description of the research design and the justification for utilizing the qualitative approach to data. In addition, this chapter includes the population description, the participant sample, the instruments used to collect data, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

RQ1: What trainings are offered to minimize burnout?

RQ2: What type of burnout reduction practices have been implemented?

RQ3: What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?

Research Design

The qualitative research method was the best approach for this study to identify the organization's role in supporting leaders to reduce staff burnout and build data to encourage organizations to engage in burnout reduction practices. By using the qualitative research method, themes often develop during data analyzation, which indicate more exploratory means of gathering results (Campbell, 2014). Also, qualitative research data discovery is used when a specific topic has not been extensively explored before. In relation to burnout, some mental health professionals and consulting agencies have written and marketed certain tactics for individuals to take ownership over their feeling burnt out, but there is little research that give organizations the responsibility of reducing burnout, which is what this study explored (Esaki et al., 2013).

To benefit these findings further, participant responses are anonymous. Anonymity and privacy are typically related to each other, but ultimately privacy is inherently normative and allows freedom of choice to remove informational identifiers (Matthew, 2010). When this barrier is effectively engaged, qualitative responses may lead to more detail and less stale, data driven responses. Additionally, researchers argue that including privacy and anonymity will often lead to unreachability, which is the state that others may not reach or be identified for further interaction (Matthew, 2010).

This study used an online survey created through Qualtrics. The online survey was a mixture of Likert scales, multiple choice, and open-ended questions, all pertaining to the participant's individual experience as a leader in their organization. A qualitative approach was designated to understand the leader's perspective of burnout amongst their staff and how/if their organizations are identifying and/or providing resources to help reduce burnout.

Sample and Setting

Participants for this study were recruited from other organizations to obtain a sample of employees (leaders) who have employees reporting to them. The seven participating organizations were chosen using the principal researcher's networking contacts. The participating organizations provided no identifying information of the participant from their organization other than concurring that each participant is a leader in their organization (has employees reporting to them). Organizations were selected based on their size, being of at least 15 or more employees. Every participating organization varied in overall size and number of participants for this study.

A total of 10 leaders in various organizations with the size of 15 or more employees, were asked to complete an online survey based on their personal experience. Between 3 and 12 is

an ideal sample size for qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Because a qualitative data collection discovers emerging trends by answering open-ended questions, the method can be time-consuming and therefore, is better collected from a moderate sample size (Campbell, 2014). The sample size of 7 was an ideal target number of participants to ensure the necessary information was collected to answer research questions and offer the principal researcher some flexibility if unknowns were to occur.

Instruments

The principal researcher created and dispersed surveys to participants via email. The principal researcher created a one-time, anonymous survey, using the Qualtrics platform licensed with Winona State University. The survey collected demographic data, leadership related experiences, and personal experiences with their affiliated organization's burnout reduction practices. The survey questions were written based upon the principal researcher's literature research surrounding the topic. Each survey question was tailored to one of the three research questions presented in this study. The goal was that the responses to each survey question may help uncover conclusions for each research question.

Data Collection Procedure

When studies involve the participation of human subjects, the International Review Board (IRB) must be notified by the principal researcher of study intentions, including a detailed description of the data collection process. The IRB gave this study an "Exempt" status, which is required for a study to move forward. The IRB approved this research process before the data collection process because the principal researcher submitted the required information.

To appropriately gather the desired information from participants, the principal researcher chose to create an anonymous survey. From the group being studied, the desired data

for this collection process needs to involve descriptive, social, and/or attitudinal material. Classically, questions within a survey intend to collect each of these three types of information to ensure the final data set is suitable for identifying relationships and patterns between variables (Nowell et al., 2017). This research study comprised a total of 10 survey questions – a mixture of open ended, Likert scales, and multiple choice. Each question was organized to better answer the three research questions posed in this study. Because the study is focused on the organization supporting its leaders, the survey was created with the intent that leaders in their organization will answer the survey questions. The term “leaders,” for this study, was identified as any employee who currently has employees reporting directly to them. The organization, aside from agreeing that the participant is a leader in the organization, provided no identifiable information that could lead one to ascertain a particular participant.

An email with the attached survey was sent to the principal researcher’s network of colleagues from various companies in the Midwest region of the United States. Each of the participant’s agreed to participate in the study after an initial, permission seeking email was sent from the research to the principal researcher’s network of colleagues. To ensure the principal researcher’s network of colleagues stayed unidentifiable, the survey was made anonymous. Research shows, individuals are more likely to participate if anonymity is guaranteed, for it not only protects the identity of the participant, but also their privacy (Matthews, 2010). The survey results were stored in a password secured Qualtrics account on the principal researcher’s password protected computer. Each of these methods, both the anonymous survey and being on a password protected computer, allow the participants the room to be more transparent and “have ‘freedom of thought and expression,’ that would otherwise be stifled in a public climate,”

(Matthews, 2010). Two months after the completion of the study, all surveys are to be permanently deleted to secure absolute confidentiality.

Data Analysis

After data collection from this study was completely by the principal researcher, qualitative research exposed themes and patterns. To better identify these themes and patterns, the principal researcher used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to assist qualitative research in producing trustworthy findings so that it can be translated for communication purposes to other researchers who may use different research methods (Nowell et. al., 2017).

In the data analysis process, the researcher is responsible for safeguarding all data. The researcher must disclose the data honestly, even if the data that may present as contrary to the researcher's beliefs or predispositions (Creswell, 2014). The principal researcher analyzed all data uniformly so that results accurately exemplify the unique findings of each participant.

Summary

Chapter III discusses the research methodology which includes the research design, sample and setting, instruments used to collect data, and the data analysis. To understand each participant's personal experience as a leader in their organization and discover themes amongst the answers, a qualitative method approached was used in this study.

Chapter IV provides a description of demographics, the data analysis from the study, results of the online survey, and a summary.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the study sample, the data analysis process, and an overall summary of the results. The number of participants who responded to the survey are outlined with various demographic data. The description of the sample defines how the principal researcher identified the term, “leader” as it relates to the study, and the type of organizations from which the participants work. The principal researcher also used an interview and document review to identify appropriate survey questions. Parallel to that, the data analysis process reviews the raw, qualitative findings from the survey. Dissecting the three research questions, this chapter examines the corresponding survey questions that lead to an outline of various responses from anonymous participants.

Description of Sample

As a requirement, the participants of this study needed to identify as a “leader” in their organization. A “leader” for this study, is any employee who currently has employees reporting directly to them. A survey was sent to 10 participants in various organizations within the Midwest. The size of the organizations has at least 15 employees from which these participants are employed. Seven of the 10 participants answered the distributed survey.

Demographics

Survey questions 1-3 were set for demographic purposes. These were placed to identify any possible patterns between gender, how long a participant has been at their organization, and/or if there was influence dependent upon how many years a participant has been in a leadership role. Four of the participants identify as a male, while the other three participants identify as a female. Two of the participants reported having 10+ years of leadership experience.

Two participants reported having 5-10 years of leadership experience, and the remaining three participants reported having 0-5 years of experience in a leadership position per definition from the study.

Data Analysis

To better identify an organization's role in supporting leaders to reduce staff burnout, the following research question (RQ) was proposed:

RQ1: What trainings are offered to minimize burnout?

Survey questions (SQ) used to answer this research question were:

Survey question 4 (SQ4): What trainings are offered to support burnout reduction (emotional exhaustion training, recognition of teams, motivating language, SMART goals, etc.)? Please explain.

SQ5: How often does your organization review burnout with leadership teams?
(Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Annually, Not sure, Never)

In response to SQ4, "What trainings are offered to support burnout reduction? Please explain.", five of seven (71%) participants reported not having any trainings offered by their organization. Participant 5 expressed, "I have not been offered any support for burnout reduction. When I do a search on our company website, I am unable to quickly find resources for leaders to reduce burnout." The two participants (29%), whose organizations offer trainings, consistently promote them for leader use. Participant 6 shared, "my company engages in daily microlearning modules (10–15-minute online training sessions) that range in topic on everything from mental wellness to new ways to work."

The Likert scale question for SQ5, "How often does your organization review burnout with leadership teams?" offered a single choice selection from the answers of weekly, bi-weekly,

monthly, quarterly, annually, not sure, and never. The responses for SQ5 had forty-three percent of participants answering, “not sure” for the frequency of organizations reviewing burnout with leadership teams. Twenty-nine percent of the participants were firm in their “never” response, whereas Participant 6, who expressed daily micro-learning modules in SQ4, was the only one who responded with “monthly.”

The survey results for RQ1, reported that seventy-one percent of participant organizations do not offer trainings to support burnout reduction. Furthermore, nearly half (43%) of survey participants are unsure of the frequency their organization reviews burnout with leadership.

In addition to the first research question, the second research question was proposed to better identify an organization’s role in supporting leaders to reduce staff burnout:

RQ2: What type of burnout reduction practices have been implemented?

Survey questions used to answer this research question were:

SQ6: How does your organization encourage employee wellness (insurance programs, workplace signage, gym memberships, therapy discounts, etc.)? Please explain.

SQ7: How confident are you in your ability as a leader to identify employee burnout? (Not confident at all, Slightly confident, Somewhat confident, Fairly confident, Very/completely confident, Don’t know)

In response to SQ6, “How does your organization encourage employee wellness? Please explain” Participant 6 stated,

We have a comprehensive benefits program that rewards improved health numbers from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. We have a free gym onsite in our corporate office. We have a corporate wellness initiative that shares wellness tips on a weekly basis. Of the 5000 employees that work at my company, 2500 work in the warehouse or on our delivery trucks. This is physically demanding work that requires a certain level of physical health.

Like Participant 6, another participant (Participant 7) emphasized the various options currently offered by the organization, however, some disdain was expressed with the mention of a mental health hotline. Participant 7 indicated, “A mental health hotline that is not always staffed.” Eighty-six percent of the participants were able to provide examples of ways their organization encourages employee wellness.

Although results for the responses regarding review of burnout weighed heavily in the unknown category from the participants, the results of SQ7, “how confident are you in your ability as a leader to identify employee burnout?” were split. Forty-three percent of the participants felt “somewhat confident” whereas the other forty three percent felt “very/completely” confident.

The survey results for RQ2, reported that of the eighty-six percent of participants able to provide examples of ways their organization encourages wellness, the most expressed ways in which their organization implements burnout reduction practices were, a health insurance benefit program for improved health throughout the plan year, and organizations sharing wellness tips (meditation or workout remedies).

Finally, offered for further clarity, the third research question was proposed:

RQ3: What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?

Survey questions used to answer this research question were:

SQ8: What protocol is in place for an employee who is feeling overwhelmed? Please explain. If unknown, please write, “not known.”

SQ9: How do your employees receive recognition from your organization for a job well done? Select all that apply. (Award meals, Identified in newsletter or

organizational publication, Point system, Prizes, Certificate of achievement, Other
– please explain)

SQ10: How much emphasis does your organization place on reducing staff
burnout? (None at all, A little, A moderate amount, A lot, A great deal, I don't
know)

In response to SQ8, “What protocol is in place for an employee who is feeling
overwhelmed?” forty-three percent of the participants were able to articulate protocol, or their
understanding of potential protocol. Participant 2 stated,

At a corporate level, there is protocol in place that I am aware of. On my team, when an
associate identifies feelings of being overwhelmed or I notice them, we set aside 1 on 1
time to cover the following: review/adjust workload; Prioritize tasks; delegate to other
departments as capable; have associates wrap up early if their head isn't in the right space
to complete tasks (not as a repercussion but rather as time to practice self-care).

Reflecting a similar protocol, Participant 6 stated,

Our first step is to check in with the employee to see if we are reading and gauging
properly. Second, we check to see if there is anything that we can do within the
manager/subordinate relationship. Beyond that, we have a list of corporate resources that
we can refer people to (counseling, doctors).

Despite his organization’s protocol status of “not known,” Participant 3 offered additional
perspective by expressing, “there isn’t an official protocol, but I will intervene and offer
additional support/guidance to alleviate as much as possible.” Fifty-seven percent of participants
responded, “not known” for the type of protocol their organization has in place for employees
who feel overwhelmed.

As shown in Table 1, results from SQ9, “How do your employees receive recognition
from your organization for a job well done? Select all that apply” reflect the percentage of
responses from each participant for every recognition type. These responses indicate majority
(28%) of participant organizations recognize their employees with prizes like gift cards, trophies,

etc. Reflecting the same percentage (28%), the “other” recognition type selected by participants offered additional examples from their explanation. However, two of the five participants who selected “other,” stated, “none that I know of,” which is the opposite of the three participants who were able to give examples of types of recognition. Some examples from their explanations were personalized notes and company apps.

Table 1

Types of recognition from an organization for a job well done

Recognition type	% Of Responses
Other (please explain)	28% (five of seven)
Prizes (gift cards, trophy, etc.)	28% (five of seven)
Identified in newsletter or organizational publication	16% (three of seven)
Certificate of achievement	11% (two of seven)
Point system	11% (two of seven)
Award meals (dinners, lunches, etc.)	6% (one of seven)

In response to SQ10, “how much emphasis does your organization place on reducing staff burnout?”, forty-three percent of participants responded, “none at all,” whereas an additional forty three percent responded with “a moderate amount.” All forty-three percent of participants who answered, “a moderate amount,” had responses regarding protocol for SQ8.

Survey results for RQ3, “What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?”, identified diverse protocol for employees being burned out but majority (57%) of participants were not able to articulate a protocol. Additionally, various recognition efforts from the organization were explained, and a split result of organizations either placing “a moderate amount” or “none at all” on reducing staff burnout helped clarify the measures that are in place to gauge employee burnout.

Summary

Chapter IV reviews the study that was completed by seven of the ten participants who identify as leaders in their organization. Each organization from which these participants work

have a size of at least 15 employees. The leadership experience of each participant varied between 0-10+ years. Four of the participants identify as a male whereas three of the participants identify as a female. Seventy-one percent of the participants reported not having any trainings offered by their organization to aid in the reduction of employee burnout. Fifty-seven percent of participants did not know of a protocol for employees who feel overwhelmed. Despite this, however, eighty-six percent of the participants were able to provide examples of ways their organization encourages employee wellness. And finally, in response to how much emphasis their organization places on reducing staff burnout, forty-three percent of the participants responded, “a moderate amount,” whereas an additional forty-three percent responded with “none at all.”

Chapter V provides a discussion surrounding the survey results displayed in chapter IV. Additionally, conclusions are drawn from these results to best serve a response for each of the three research questions explored in this study.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout. In this final chapter is a discussion about the study and its three research questions. With reference to the theoretical framework and other studies, conclusions are drawn to expand on this study's findings. Moreover, because this study focused on the organization's role for the leader, the conclusion implications on leadership are explored. And finally, for other researchers to expand on this topic, recommendations for future research are made, as well as a summary that captures the study's findings.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored the ways an organization currently supports the leadership efforts of employee burnout reduction. Previous chapters examined background information of burnout and its relation to leadership engagement. Additionally, previous chapters defined the research questions and methodology, as well as the findings of this study. This study demonstrated that there is not congruent protocol for burnout reduction, and organizations rarely review the topic of burnout with leadership teams. This study also shows that leaders have a significant training gap as it relates to burnout and how it can be reduced in the workplace. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What trainings are offered to minimize burnout?

RQ2: What type of burnout reduction practices have been implemented?

RQ3: What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?

Data collection was performed through an anonymous survey, an interview, and document review. To explore the findings of participant responses, the principal researcher used

thematic coding. Two themes emerged for each research question. The two themes for RQ1 include (1) no regulated statistics representing burnout, and (2) limited trainings focus on burnout. Two themes for RQ2 are (1) leaders define burnout without organizational input, and (2) wellness efforts are benefit package focused. For RQ3, two themes are (1) employee recognition, and (2) incongruence of burnout protocol.

Theoretical Connection

The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Theory, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, and the Valuation Theory of Organizational Change shaped the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. A consistent message throughout each theory, is the notion that burnout poses incredible problems and challenges for public health (De Hert, 2020). As seen in the research, positive employee outlook reduces frequency or severity of emotional exhaustion and other symptoms of burnout that play into the varying dimensions of it (Craig, 2021).

Several participants expressed a degree of knowingness as to their ability to identify burnout in employees. While the perception of identifying burnout existed with the participants, many also expressed that their organizations do not have a specified protocol for handling a burned-out employee. Research shows that without the proper leverage of job resources to job demands, burnout is inevitable (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Although participants believe they can identify burnout, the study showed that their organizations do not regularly address trainings, nor do they have a protocol for it. With this, the participants' efforts at preventing burnout in their teams may be muddled or ineffective.

Majority of the participants also identified an unknowingness of the frequency to which their organizations review or address burnout with leadership. In line with COR Theory, without appropriately addressing threats, leaders are not as motivated to create resources. (Tafvelin,

2019). Without suitable resources, the leaders and their teams lack vigor. Vigor, as defined by the research, can support a leader's engagement in transformational leadership behaviors (Tafvelin, 2019). According to this study's findings, participants reported either a "moderate amount" or "none at all" for the emphasis an organization places on reducing staff burnout. Only Participant 5 uttered that a contracted counselor was brought in as a resource to handle elevated stress in the workplace.

Research shows that there are three levels of change to reduce burnout risk. Each of these levels includes modifying the work process, improving professional development programs, and promoting healthy behaviors for an individual to reduce stress (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). In this study, each of these areas are reflected in participant responses, which theme around Valuation Theory. Valuation Theory focuses on personal meanings that an organization can integrate into the workplace, which allows an organization to effectively implement change (Esaki et al., 2013).

Based on similarity of responses and participants' meaning, themes were identified and grouped together for each of the three research questions. Two themes emerged for RQ1, "What trainings are offered to minimize burnout?": no regulated statistics to represent burnout, and limited trainings focus on burnout.

Research Question 1 Discussion

Theme 1: No regulated statistics to represent burnout

Turnover rates for an organization, because of burnout, are lessened when leadership teams have appropriate resources to decrease the intensity of job demands while still producing strong results (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Because this study focused on the leader's perspective, each of them reviews various statistics with their organization's leadership teams, on

a regular basis. The study's findings show that most participants have little to no knowledge of their organization reviewing statistics that represent burnout or increased stress in the workplace. Additionally, no examples were given to indicate that the leaders are encouraged to regularly review burnout or work that's affected by stress induced working environments. The lack of statistics for this study reveals a low emphasis on maintaining a congenial working environment, and instead, indicates that the organization says they obtain resources for employees, but do not actually track the effectiveness of it.

Theme 2: Limited trainings focus on burnout

Well-being of leaders is shown to have a direct effect on the leadership style exercised in the workplace (Tafvelin, 2019). This means, when leaders are not being trained to handle various workplace mis happenings with regulated, people-focused responses, employees may find themselves dissatisfied with their leader's ability. Without the work of both the work environment and the employee's own attitude being addressed, burnout in the dimension of depersonalization is more likely to occur (De Hert, 2020). A response relevant to this question includes Participant 2, "The company has all of the right encouragements in place at a high-level view, but in practice very little is done from a culture standpoint to ensure that the programs are being appropriately/effectively utilized." Participant 3 also indicates that there are not many trainings pertaining to burnout but that, "We have some programs/classes that offer insights into productivity improvement and managing working from home."

For RQ2, "What type of burnout reduction practices have been implemented?" two themes emerged: lacking burnout reduction practices, and wellness efforts are benefit package focused.

Research Question 2 Discussion

Theme 1: Lacking burnout reduction practices

Due to the breaking of psychological contracts between organizations and employees, society has high expectations of organizational responsiveness and overall engagement to worker needs (Mayfield, 2014). The incongruence of organization and leadership definitions of burnout, and its relation to stress inducing factors in the workplace, leave room for misunderstanding of the worker needs. Tafvelin's (2019) research shows that when organizations work with leadership, they are better able to identify developmental opportunities for employees. Additionally, when leaders have the organizational support to serve an employee's individual needs, it communicates a compelling message that the workplace has meaning, and that the employee's contribution is meaningful. Employees who feel engaged and part of a working environment that has an understood resiliency toward stressful work, are less likely to feel emotionally exhausted and cynical about their work (Croke, 2020).

Majority of the participants of the study expressed an unknowingness of trainings pertaining to burnout and with such, gave information regarding their own efforts to identify and engage in burnout reduction activities. Responses that support this claim include those from Participant 1. Participant 1 stated, "None within [my organization] that I am aware of. A limited set of resources through my professional development organization." Another to indicate a different level of involvement is Participant 3 who stated, "None really. We have some programs/classes that offer insights into productivity improvement and managing working from home."

Unlike the majority, two participants exemplified ways in which their organizations provide standardized trainings. Participant 7 stated, "My company engages in daily microlearning modules (10-15 minute on-line training sessions) that range in topic on everything from mental

wellness to new ways to work.” And Participant 2 shared, “SMART Goals Annually during Annual Goal Planning; Meeting Free days monthly; Team Recognition; Emotional Intelligence Training/Webinars.” Each of these examples reflect research findings of ways an organization can provide supportive, leadership resources. These were also the only two participants whose organizations review burnout with leadership teams on a monthly and annual basis.

Theme 2: Wellness efforts are benefit package focused

As research suggests, promoting employee wellness is a foundational piece to addressing employee burnout (Allen, 2012). Six of the seven participants articulated their organization’s health insurance benefits regard physical health improvements throughout the year.

Select responses from participants include those of Participant 5. Participant 5 stated, “Every year our organization offers a \$200 reward to all employees for participating in a wellness assessment and activity. The company also offers insurance programs and discounts at gym memberships.”

However, it may not be enough to simply encourage an employee’s physical health. Gathering resources that engage employee mental health is also a factor in burnout reduction. Like the research shows, an employee who can exemplify vigor, means they experience high energy levels and mental resilience, each of which lead to a willingness to invest effort at work (Tafvelin, 2019). This must be done though, with the appropriate resources or the effects will not take place. To back this finding, Participant 7, the one who mentioned mental health hotline frustration in Chapter IV, expressed “Subpar insurance depending on where you live.” Participant 3 was the only participant to express various examples of encouraging employee wellness, aside from benefits with the health insurance:

Participant 3: We have had volunteer training classes, regarding managing stress. We

have given every associate access to the full paid version of “Calm” at no cost. Internally at our corporate office we have recently built yoga/meditation rooms. In one of our newest [distribution center] we have created an entire area for associates that can shoot pool, play darts, and enjoy free snacks. There is a taproom, and plenty of relaxation rooms.

For RQ3, “What measures are in place to gauge employee burnout?” two themes emerged: employee recognition, and incongruence of burnout protocol.

Research Question 3 Discussion

Theme 1: Employee recognition

Like research shows, contributing to employee well-being is done through promotion of autonomy and expediting a community-based work environment (De Hert, 2020). In this study, participants described ways in which these characteristics and institutional factors are shared. Responses relevant to this question include Participant 6’s statement of, “a program called appreciATD where anyone in the organization can recognize anyone else” being an important tool recently implemented to encourage employees to find goodness in their workplace.

Theme 2: Incongruence of burnout protocol

Organizations empower leaders and their degree of vigor by providing congruent, easily followed protocol to strengthen their ability to diffuse hectic situations that could lead to stress (Henson, 2016). Leaders with a higher degree of vigor will initiate or design job resources that can be used to reduce burnout (Tafvelin, 2019). Participants had difficulty articulating a specified protocol and only one shared their desire to be helpful when an employee is feeling burned out. The response from Participant 3 supports this by stating, “There isn’t an official protocol, but I will intervene and offer additional support/guidance to alleviate as much as possible.” Participant 2 and Participant 6 were the only two participants to express similar protocol, but even then, as seen in Chapter IV, each protocol had varying degrees of

organizational involvement. All other participants were unable to provide an organizational burnout protocol.

Three conclusions include: leaders have a significant training gap, organizations rarely review the topic of burnout with leadership teams, and there is not congruent protocol for burnout reduction. In each of these conclusions, leadership implications follow.

Conclusions and Leadership Implications

The results of this study clarify that even though many organizations encourage employee wellness, few focus on burnout, specifically, and the role they play in reducing it. The results of this study are important because organizations are made up of leaders who have teams of employees susceptible to burnout. Due to this study's results, it can be argued that with the goal of leaders having a better, more cohesive influence on the positivity of employee outlook, it is an organization's responsibility to provide adequate resources for their leaders. Through a thorough review of the collected data, the principal researcher generated several leadership implications for practice.

Conclusion 1: Leaders have a significant training gap regarding the definition, reduction, and reaction to burnout, some in part because there are no organizationally regulated statistics representing burnout for consistent review.

Implication 1: Leaders are the first line of defense to an organization's makeup of problem solving. With the awareness that leaders lack appropriate training regarding burnout, organizations may consider implementing concurrent trainings that continually improve a leader's response to emotionally taxing stressors. Ways to incorporate more training for leadership teams may be meeting quarterly with a designated module focused on each dimension of burnout, or possibly getting an instructor to put on a seminar two times a year to answer

questions and engage leaders in difficult scenarios they may encounter. The implementation of consistent training increases the knowledge around burnout, its symptoms, and overall prevention.

Conclusion 2: Organizations rarely review the topic of burnout with leadership teams which empowers leaders to define burnout without organizational input and keep wellness efforts focused only on benefits packages.

Implication 2: People enable organizations to function. Organizations may benefit from the acknowledgment that people have emotional responses to increased stressors in a work environment. Conflicting resources can encourage polarity amongst the workforce and departments. An example of a conflicting resources would be one leader defining burnout with a degree of severity, whereas a leader in a different department refuses to acknowledge or define burnout because the organization has not placed importance on it. When a person moves from one department to another, without a consistent leadership view of burnout or the seriousness level to which it is addressed in that department/organization, confusion and emotional stress may occur. Organizations may benefit from providing resources that specifically address and track the effectiveness or utilization of burnout resources to ensure it is serving its purpose. Resources for physical health that are encouraged with benefits packages are a good start. However, the addition of resources that specifically address burnout may include emotional intelligence seminars, an on-site psychological professional, hybrid working options, monitorization of schedules and workloads, and holding walking meetings to promote movement in the workday.

Conclusion 3: There is not a congruent, organizational protocol for a leader to follow when burnout occurs amongst employees. Instead, the emphasis is placed on employee recognition.

Implication 3: Having protocol in place keeps the order of an organization and eliminates the chance for chaotic or stressful working environments. Ways in which organizations can contribute to reducing stress in the workplace is to have a universally understood protocol that is consistently communicated from leaders to their teams. Workaholism is reduced when individuals have clear knowledge and expectations about their work and know it is safe to express discontent when it arises. Organizations could contribute to protocol innovation by defining burnout and reviewing measures deemed appropriate by sources (like psychology professionals or consultants) that deal specifically with stressful working environments. Decreasing the chances of depersonalization in the workplace as it stems from emotional exhaustion, can be done by implementing a regular review of protocol with leadership. This protocol could then have modules designated to the completion of employee certification, much like sexual harassment protocol has been implemented throughout the years.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study did help identify ways in which an organization may play a role in helping leadership with burnout reduction efforts. However, most participants agreed they could identify burnout, even though the survey results shown that organizations do not regularly review it. This could mean that “burnout” is defined differently by individual participants. As explained in the literature, burnout is not yet officially recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which creates a less unified definition and overall understanding of the syndrome (Allen et al., 2012). With that, further research may need to ensure an organization includes a definition of burnout or the study needs to include a definition to decrease the amount of room for interpretation when seeking answers from participants regarding well-being.

Conjunctionally, gathering participants from Human Resources as well as other specified departments of the organization may help identify patterns on congruence or incongruence.

In addition, every participant who identified as female had only been in a leadership position for 0-5 years as opposed to their male counterparts who majority reported being in a leadership position for 10+ years. As this relates to burnout, majority of the participants were either unsure or had never had their organization review burnout with leadership teams. To assist on further studies, it may be pertinent to identify whether gender plays a role in ability to identify burnout amongst their team. Correspondingly, it may be worth researching if females in leadership positions for longer periods of times, yield different responses to this study.

Summary

This study aimed to identify the organization's role in supporting their leaders to reduce staff burnout. After conducting an online, anonymous survey, several themes were identified surrounding burnout in the workplace and the responsibility of organizations to create resources for leaders. Additionally, this study's findings concluded that organizations rarely review the topic of burnout with leadership teams, there are significant training gaps regarding burnout, and there is no congruent protocol for when burnout occurs. Further research guidelines may include a streamlined definition of burnout to increase the study's chances at tracking clear responses from participants.

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