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MBS Outstanding Thesis

Bachelor's Thesis

**Mitigating, Managing and Moving Past Burnout:
An Organizational Perspective on Mental
and Physical Well-Being**



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Abstract

Over the past years, the term burnout has been used by many to describe their feelings of stress and overwhelm. Burnout, however is not just an isolated feeling, but a syndrome which is experienced after ongoing negative experiences. The dangers that burnout poses for organizations and their employees are plentiful. In this thesis, the causes, symptoms and prevention strategies will be discussed. Focusing mainly on physical and mental well-being activities to overcome this state, both the existing literature and the empirical research support the importance of maintaining optimal health. The objective of this thesis is to delve deeply into the best practices that an organization can incorporate to reduce employee burnout and encourage a healthy work environment.

Various assessment methods and models will be discussed and applied in two forms of empirical research. The results from a self-reporting survey of 50 people, will align with the information divulged from the literature and highlight the key takeaways mentioned from theory. Additionally, 7 in-depth interviews with HR professionals and managers of teams will provide key insights into the reality of their work environments. Altogether, the data and knowledge gathered from the literature and the empirical research will help deliver critical recommendations for organizations and their employees to boost their overall well-being.

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1 Introduction

1.1 General setting

The term burnout has become internationally recognized and is warned about in nearly every industry (Mariithi and Kariuki 2020, p. 37). Although there have been countless studies and research dedicated to burnout, the origins and the evolution of the concept show just how rapid its prevalence has become. Maslach and Schaufeli (2018, pp. 2-8) break the evolution into two phases: “The Pioneer Phase and The Empirical Phase”. The difference between the two is that the Pioneer Phase focused on the conceptualization of the term and its clinical symptoms, and the Empirical Phase focused on empirical research and the development of models and theories. Another main difference between the two phases is that during the former, most of the work was solely done in the United States of America: later moving to other areas of the world during phase two (Maslach and Schaufeli 2018, pp. 6-7). This is evidence that the term burnout has evolved and has been adapted many times to reach its current global context. Originally, burnout was studied mainly in relation to careers that focused on the care of others, however it has now grown to reach every career path (Turnipseed 1998, p. 627).

Over time, there have been multiple models and frameworks that aided in assessing a person’s symptoms to accurately distinguish their burnout severity. Not only have the creation of various models helped measure burnout, there is also plenty of research and studies that have tested them to understand which ones have the highest validity and reliability (Golembiewsky 1989, p. 5). A commonly used measure of burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which has three separate categories: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Schaufeli, Bakker, Hoogduin, Schaap and Kladler 2001, p. 566). The MBI shows that burnout does not pick and choose its victims carefully. This level of exhaustion and depletion can be reached from anyone and for many different reasons. Companies around the world are dealing with daily battles such as competition and other external threats, however, they also focus on various internal obstacles – burnout being one of those main issues (Levinson 1996, pp. 156).

As today’s society progresses, and places a higher importance on productivity, the pressure and stress of being the best, and doing the most, can wreak havoc on people’s

nervous and immune systems. Donald, Taylor, Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright and Robertson (2005, pp. 410) mention that there is a positive relationship between job stress and productivity, but only to a certain point, after which will then affect the person negatively. Moreover, there are long-lasting physical effects that can result in chronic stress, fatigue, and even psychological issues such as feelings of negativity, resentment, and low self-worth (Maslach and Leiter 2016, p. 44; Levinson 1996, p. 154). It is essential for employees working in high demand jobs to incorporate on a daily basis activities that benefit them such as physical activity, rest, and social interaction (Oerlemans and Bakker 2014, p. 304).

It is important to note that everyone experiences stress in daily life, however the factor that separates and helps people prevail, is their individual ability to cope with their stress (Masood, Ahmed, Choi and Gutierrez-Osuna 2012, p. 4895). Aldossari and Chaudhry (2020, p. 827) highlight that some coping strategies can have negative impacts on the organization, such as absenteeism and disengagement. Positive coping strategies can be learned and taught within organizations to help foster a proactive approach to dealing with stress, which in the end, will benefit everyone involved. (Delany, Miller, El-Ansary, Remedios, Hosseini and McLeod 2015, p. 1306). Later, a lesser-known concept called the Coping Reservoir will be introduced and discussed. This model will show the impacts that coping skills have on an individual.

As can be seen, there are many factors that contribute to someone reaching the point of burnout, but there are also many activities that companies can adopt to prevent burnout. There has been vast research on burnout and the creation of various models have been applied to understand what causes people to reach this state of exhaustion. Specifically, the Biopsychosocial Model and the Salutogenic Model will be introduced and analyzed. We will apply these models to burnout prevention and health promotion later. Both models indicate that reaching the burnout state can be a holistic issue and happens when a combination of events, or continuation of several factors all culminate to a certain point. The latter fluctuates between the opposing perspectives of health promotion and risk factors and tries to find a point in the middle which aids in developing a continuum (Antonovsky 1996, p. 14).

Implementing the learnings from these models can assist organizations when developing programs or benefits for their employees to ensure an optimal working environment. Whether the effort is as superficial as including a perk such as a gym membership or a deeper and more systemic restructuring, such as leadership styles and trainings of managers to create a sustainable and positive working environment, burnout needs to be acknowledged and avoided at all costs. This will not only help keep the employees safe and healthy, but will also have major benefits for the organization as a whole, because unsatisfied employees could eventually lead to workers who are no longer motivated to do their jobs (Hombrados-Mendieta and Cosano-Rivas 2013, p. 240).

Further along, topics of discussion include: the origin of burnout, what burnout looks like, how to treat burnout, best practices of avoiding burnout, and much more. The empirical research conducted will be presented and the results will be meticulously discussed. The data taken from a questionnaire of employees from different areas of the world to directly see if people are feeling supported by the organizations they work for, and what the most common needs are to experience full support will be analyzed extensively. An additional source of qualitative data will be examined from a series of interviews of people who work in the human resources department, or are responsible for managing teams or individuals who have experienced burnout, of varying companies. Based off the literature and the data, recommendations will be given so that organizations can utilize these learnings in the future to generate or modify their current work environments and culture to support employees to the best of their abilities.

1.2 Definition of the problem

Burnout is not only a major problem for the people who experience it, but also for the organization that they work for. Furthermore, burnout can affect individuals at all levels of the organization, including senior executives to lower level management (Levinson 1996, p. 153). When an employee has reached this severe level of exhaustion, it can lead to unwanted results such as lower efficiency, negative interactions and employee turnover (Rahim and Cosby 2016, p. 1255). To support the above sentiment that multiple stakeholders are affected by burnout, Maslach and

Jackson (1980, p. 100) write, “The consequences of burnout are potentially very serious for the staff, the clients, and the larger institutions in which they interact”.

This is what makes the research of burnout and how to avoid and handle it so important. The health of people should be at the forefront, and companies that prioritize this will be able to operate more sustainably than others who do not. It is important for the organization to monitor whether employee satisfaction and well-being has a positive correlation with the organization’s performance. Cotton and Hart (2003, p. 119) summarize this perfectly, saying “...it is not sufficient to be concerned with occupational wellbeing in itself, but instead, occupational wellbeing must be linked to outcomes that affect organizational performance”. Huddleston, Fry and Brown (2012, p.15) also point out that organizations are trying to both improve their employees physical and mental health while also benefiting themselves due to the residual effects from these programs and benefits.

There is also the issue of investing in effective programs and initiatives to help employees in their pursuit to a manageable work-life balance. Without the proper education on the subject, many companies may be spending resources incorrectly in hopes that they are helping their employees. Since burnout can have major financial repercussions for the organization, it is important to invest in the proper training and care that employees need to avoid it (Carod-Artal and Vázquez-Cabrera 2013, p. 27). It is the aim of this thesis to accurately identify what truly works and what does not, so that the proper recommendations can be given in the end. At the end, the recommendations given will be a cumulation of data gathered from the research as well as the information gathered from the literature review.

1.3 Objectives of the thesis

There are multiple objectives in which this thesis aims to accomplish. The first is to provide a general understanding of what burnout is, how it can be identified and ultimately avoided. Secondly, this thesis will discuss and argue the connection between one’s mental and physical well-being, and the importance of a holistic approach to overcoming burnout. It will also cover the topic of stress, both work-related and personal, and the effects that it has on an individual. Coping mechanisms will be thoroughly debated and will also be linked to the idea that organizations should

be implementing additional stress prevention strategies. Lastly, the data collected will point clearly to approaches which have been tested and shown success.

The purpose of the theoretical and empirical research was to answer two main research questions. Additionally, below you will find the hypotheses to each respective question. These research questions will be answered and acknowledged later in section 4.2.

1. *Out of the 6 areas of worklife, which area tends to be the most unsatisfactory for people?*
 - a. *H1: The majority of people are most unsatisfied with the reward area of worklife.*
2. *Are mental and physical well-being activities being offered to employees on a regular basis? To what extent do these activities play a role in stress reduction and coping?*
 - a. *H1: Companies are offering both physical and mental well-being activities to their employees. These activities help employees manage stress and also impact whether that stress results in burnout.*

1.4 Key term definitions

1.4.1 Burnout

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of burnout will be taken and adapted from Schaufeli and Greenglass. They define burnout as "...a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding" (2001, p. 501). Lee and Ashforth (1990, pp. 743-744) discuss the differences between the three pillars of burnout, based off of a definition by Maslach in 1982. Those three pillars are (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization, and (3) reduced personal accomplishment (p. 743). According to the extensive research done on burnout, emotional exhaustion has been identified as the key constituent (Wright and Cropanzano 1998, p. 487). Leiter and Maslach (2003, p. 93) point out that burnout is focused on the deterioration of an individual's psychological state as a result of ongoing and constant stressors. Further along, this thesis will slightly amend the aforementioned definition, and show that research has proven that burnout also can be reached due to other circumstances outside of the

working environment (Peters, Montgomery, Bakker and Schaufeli 2005, p.44). In their findings, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2005, p. 662) also detail the difficulties that arise from determining stressors from work versus stressors that arise outside of the workplace, specifically, in the home environment.

1.4.2 Stress

Stress is a commonly used term by many people. However, stress is not only related to workplace interactions, it can also be caused by a plethora of scenarios. The definition of the term to be referred to in this thesis is taken from a paper written by Folkman (2010, pp. 901-902). She states that “Stress is defined as a situation that is appraised by the individual as personally significant and as having demands that exceed the person’s resources for coping” (2010, pp. 901-902). The appraisal process can be split into two categories: primary or secondary. These will be discussed deeper later in the thesis when talking about the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping. The relevance of stress in relation to burnout is major and will be discussed extensively in the following pages.

1.4.3 Coping

For the context of this thesis, the meaning of the term coping will be taken again from Folkman’s 2010 article. “Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors people use to manage the internal and external demands of stressful events” (2010, p. 902). Coping is not one singular action, however, it is a process or series of actions (Lazarus 1993, p. 235). He writes, “...coping changes over time and in accordance with the situational contexts in which it occurs” (p. 235). There is no uniform way of coping, however, there are many ways in which someone can cope. Porensky and Wells-Di Gregorio (p. 9) showcases a handful of coping strategies that range from diaphragmatic breathing to progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). Additionally, they provide a distinction between two types of coping: problem and emotion-focused coping; the latter being that the problem, or stressor, the individual is facing is not able to be changed by them (p.6). Different coping styles depend on the personality type of the employee. According to Dewe and Guest (1990) there are four different coping styles: “rational task-oriented behavior, utilization of home resources, postponing by distraction attention or avoiding the issue, and passive attempts to tolerate effects” (Dewe and Guest 1990, as cited in van Deldhoven and van Daalen 2009, p. 94).

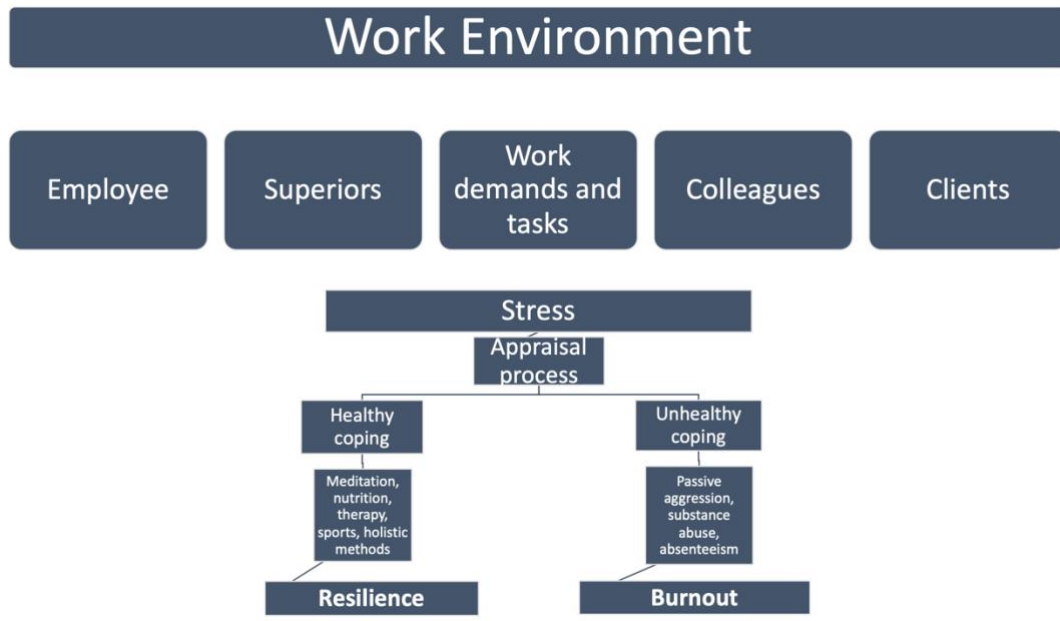
1.4.4 Resilience

The term resilience has varying meanings depending on the context. For the purpose of this thesis, resilience is connected with a person's ability to cope and/or recover from burnout. Strümpfer (2003, p. 70) reflects on what resilience means for people: "In the case of humans, it, firstly, refers to recuperation but it could also include constructive and growth-enhancing consequences of challenges or adversity". To summarize, resilience encompasses the recovery process and includes additional benefits that could help build up an opposition to burnout in future instances. These benefits include the following: higher engagement, a more meaningful relation to work, increased subjective well-being, influx of positive emotions, and an adoption of proactive coping (Strümpfer 2003, pp. 70-73). Resilience can be a tool that an individual already possesses, and can also be something which is learned as a skill after being improved upon from coping strategies (McAllister and McKinnon 2009, p. 374).

1.5 Approach & structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis begins with the question: What causes burnout and what can be done to mitigate, manage, and move past it? First, burnout must be defined and understood so that identifying it becomes easier and more accurate. Once the main drivers of burnout are determined, and the main assessment method is discussed in detail, we will see that stress is the ultimate factor in reaching an extremely exhausted state of being. This stress must be identified and appraised so that the individual can properly cope with it. Multiple theories will be analyzed to give insights into the process of proactively combatting burnout. Differentiating between positive and negative coping strategies will lead to a person triumphing over burnout and gaining resilience, or failing and falling deeper into burnout.

Figure 1: Structure of thesis (created by author and adapted from Park and Folkman 1997)



2 Literature review

2.1 Selection criteria of literature

The literature review took place over a series of weeks, and was constantly being revisited throughout the entire process. The main sources in which literature was found, were through online search engines such as Google Scholar, EBSCO, and other various academic hosting platforms. All sources are academic and have proved to be insightful and helpful in the execution of the empirical research. Narrowing down the search by using many keywords, was beneficial in finding the appropriate articles and papers. These keywords were relevant for the purpose of this thesis and are touched upon in the previous and following chapters. In the beginning of the process, a broad search was done to help gain an overall scope of the topic burnout.

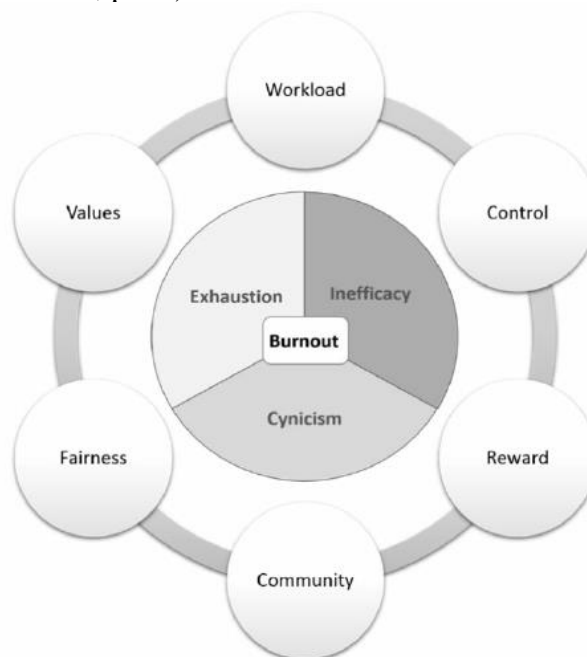
Shortly after the origin and historical backgrounds were comprehended, a more specific and narrow search took place. Using phrases and connected terms, such as “burnout pandemic” or “stress burnout”, to name a few, also helped find specifically targeted sources that delved deeper into the subject of interest. The titles and abstracts of these sources, when included, were helpful in differentiating a source that would be either useful and applicable, or not, for the thesis. There were many sources that were taken into consideration, however given their lack of relevance, were not included or used. In total, 73 sources were used and cited.

2.2 Burnout assessment methods

2.2.1 6 areas of worklife

Maslach and Leiter (2005, p. 44) address six difference areas that all are capable of contributing to someone reaching a level of burnout. The six areas are listed as follows: workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values (See Figure 1). Someone who arrives at the level of burnout does not necessarily have to have a misalignment with every area, however, it is important to look at each area to see where the misalignment is taking place. This will aid the employee and the organization when trying to correct and resolve the incongruencies. In the following sections, each area of burnout will be discussed in order to fully grasp and understand the different avenues in which someone could arrive in a state of such exhaustion. The 6 areas of worklife will also be closely tied to the quantitative research method completed, which will be methodically explained later in chapter 3.2.1.

Figure 2: 6 Areas of Worklife & characteristics of the 3 areas of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Compson 2015, p. 65)



2.2.1.1 Workload

Workloads can vary for multiple reasons. A few examples include, a person's position, the industry, seniority in the company and seasonality of tasks (i.e. busy season for accountants). Moreover, what is also important is a person's perception of workload and their individual ability to cope with stress. It makes sense that a high workload can have negative effects on an individual's performance and health. Miller (2001, pp. 6-

8) provides specific examples of how workload can influence physiological reactions, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, to name a couple.

Glaser, Tatum, Nebeker, Sorenson and Aiello (1999, p. 156) differentiate between two types of workloads. They make the argument that quantitative and qualitative workloads should be separated and looked at differently while analyzing someone's workload. The former refers to how much time tasks take to complete, while the latter is based on how intricate the tasks are (Glaser et al. 1999, p. 156). The authors go further and state that qualitative workload and specifically, complexity of tasks, can boost the overall outcome from an employee to a certain point. They write, "When task complexity reaches a certain critical level, the expectation is that performance will suffer" (p. 157).

Coluci and Alexandre (2012 p. 2518) provide specific examples that result from over-work in the nursing industry. Job factors such as overtime, repetition in day-to-day activities, lack of resources and unreasonable workloads resulted in issues such as insomnia, depression, burnout, and even physical deterioration (Coluci and Alexandre 2012, p. 2518).

Xiaoming, Ma, Chang and Shieh (2014, pp. 230) summarize the consequences that an unachievable workload can have on an organization. They conclude that companies are now expecting employees to take on more tasks and that is having a negative effect on the overall work environment and levels of output.

"...single items to multiple duties, and the risk of over-workload resulted in low emotion of employees, delaying work, low team atmosphere, and not obeying rules to further affect the organizational performance and the employee's centripetal force" (Xiaoming, Ma, Change and Shieh 2014, p. 230).

2.2.1.2 Control

The control category of burnout encompasses the style in which an employee is managed, in addition to the direct impact an employee can have on organization decision-making.

Kumar (2021, p. 42) analyzed results from their research regarding employee well-being in the time of Covid-19 and the migration of working in an office to working from home. They state that micromanagement and a strict controlled work setting had

a high impact on the physical and mental well-being of employees, often leading to employee burnout.

In a paper about executive derailment, McCormack, Abou-Hamdan and Joseph (2017, p. 13) discuss the short and long-term effects that poor management and micromanagement can have on an individual's experience at work. They include anecdotes from victims of ruthless behavior from executives to solidify and share the potential negative outcomes.

Additionally, job autonomy has been proven to have a negative effect on burnout rates, as well as employee turnover (Kim and Stoner 2008, p. 9). In *Fired up with passion: Investigating how job autonomy and passion predict burnout at career start in teachers*, the authors differentiate between "harmonious passion" and "obsessive passion" (Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand and Austin 2014, p. 271). The main variance between the two terms, is that the former creates positive feelings and attachment, while the latter can lead to negative psychological ties to the job (Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand and Austin 2014, pp. 272-273). In their research, they found that job autonomy led to harmonious passion, and consequently diminished the likelihood of burnout.

Jobs that require a high amount of energy, time and demands but also allow the employee to feel like they have some control, in the sense of decision making, will have a benefit for the employee and the organization (Bakker, Veldhoven and Xanthopoulou 2010, p. 3). Alternatively, a job with high demands and a low control element would have a negative impact on the employee's health, motivation and loyalty (de Jonge, Dollard, Dormann, Le Blanc and Houtman 2000, p. 270). The above statements can be supported by Karasek's Job Demand-Control Model. "This model theorizes that the range of control over one's environmental situation is a crucial dimension in determining health on the one hand, and active behavior/learning on the other" (de Jonge, Dollard, Dormann, Le Blanc & Houtman 2000, p. 270). Baillien, De Cuyper and De Witte (2011, p. 192) highlight the areas in which the Job Demand-Control Model has been able to uncover useful information. The three areas are: "work-related outcomes", "health related behavior" and "organizational outcomes" (p. 192).

2.2.1.3 Reward

The reward category is related to the perceived benefits (either physical or non-physical) the employee receives from the organization or their work. These can include, and are not limited to: remuneration, positive feedback and overall job fulfilment.

When specifically looking at the medial industry, Muriithi and Kariuki (2020, p.39) make the connection that inadequate remuneration contributes to burnout. When they arrived at the remuneration part of their research, they write "...majority of the respondents (69%) indicated that they don't consider themselves to be adequately remunerated" (Muriithi and Kariuki 2020, p, 42). Furthermore, the respondents suggested that their management include other benefits (monetary & non-monetary) to offset the dissatisfaction from poor remuneration.

Stoyanova and Harizanova (2014, p. 141) also found that remuneration and positive feedback were major contributors to job satisfaction. They come to the following sentiment:

"Despite the small number of studies focused on relationship between remuneration and burnout syndrome, researchers come to the conclusion that low pay is a stressful factor and influences the development of burnout syndrome" (Stoyanova and Harizanova 2014, p. 142).

There are also models that study the relationship between the effort exerted by employees and the rewards they receive. Specifically the Effort-Reward Model (ERM), "is based upon the premise that work-related benefits depend upon a reciprocal relationship between efforts and rewards at work" (van Vegchel, de Jonge, Bosma and Schaufeli 2005, p. 1117). The authors highlight some of the negative effects that an imbalance between effort and reward can have on a person, not just physically, but also mentally (pp. 1125-1126).

2.2.1.4 Community

The community category mainly is in relation to a person's feelings of connectiveness with their team and/or organization. It's about building and maintaining healthy relationships with colleagues and the organization providing an inclusive environment.

Lewandowski (2003, pp. 177-178) summarizes their research, and indicates that feelings of isolation is a main driver causing burnout. Moreover, tension and frequent disputes between colleagues also contributes to feelings of frustration, which can end up resulting in burnout (p. 177). In addition to overcoming feelings of isolation, it is imperative for organizations to focus on team building and trust within the team. Reminding employees of their individual role and how it fits in with the grand goal can empower employees and help them reconnect with their purpose; which shows to be a strong repellent to burnout (Bellieni, Righetti, Ciampa, Iacoponi, Coviello and Buonocore 2012, p. 2133).

2.2.1.5 Fairness

The fairness category is associated with the ethics of the organization or manager. It can include nepotism or any form of discriminatory behavior (Maslach and Leiter 2005, p. 44). Fairness is also related to how equitable decisions in the workplace are being made (Maslach and Leiter 2008, p. 500). Nepotism can be described as someone in a position of power giving privilege to another individual based on their relation to them (i.e. family or friend), typically in regard to job opportunities (Schneikat, Abubaker and Ilkan 2016, p.40). The authors defend that any form of favoritism among staff, including nepotism, can lead to an imbalance; specifically in the emotional exhaustion category of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. As a result, burnout of the employees who are not on the receiving end of it is also likely, especially if this occurrence is on a frequent and large scale (p. 45).

2.2.1.6 Values

The values category is about the alignment of values between the organization or manager and the employee. It can also include the alignment and fulfilment between tasks and the employee (Maslach and Leiter 2005, p. 44).

Aforementioned is the struggle that the medical industry faces with burnout rates. Ethics and moral alignment between practitioners and their organization has quite some tension and results in many unhappy medical professionals. In an article written by Dzung and Wachter (2020, p. 409), they call this experience “moral distress”. To highlight this danger, they write, “We see evidence of an insidious moral distress resulting from physicians’ inability to act in accord with their individual and

professional ethical values due to institutional and societal constraints” (Dzeng and Wachter 2020, p. 409).

Corporate ethics is another major source of research and has major implications for the organization as a whole, as well as every stakeholder involved. Models such as the Corporate Ethical Virtues Model (CEV) touch on the different dimensions that create an ethical, or unethical environment (Kaptein 2008, pp. 925-926). Although there are eight dimensions, two are of particular relevance to the values category of burnout. Congruency of management and congruency of supervisors both touch on the behavior of superiors and how it can affect the entire organizational structure (Mari, Asko, Saija and Taru 2015, p. 5). In summary, an employee which experiences either a gap between the values an organization states and what they do, or an employee who has a difference set of values than the organization they work for is at a higher risk of burnout due to potential elevated stress levels and overall job dissatisfaction (Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach 2009, p. 209).

2.2.2 Maslach Burnout Inventory

The Maslach Burnout Inventory, or MBI, is one of the most commonly applied burnout measures (Enzmann, Schaufeli, Janssen and Rozeman 1998, p. 331). The MBI has 3 different categories which all contribute to burnout. The 3 categories which have been previously mentioned are, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (See Figure 1). An article written by Maslach and Leiter (2021, p. 2) summarizes the main idea of each of the 3 categories.

1. ***Emotional exhaustion*** is described as “feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion”.
2. ***Depersonalization*** can be summarized as “increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job”.
3. ***Reduced personal accomplishment*** shows up as “reduced professional efficacy”.

Research has shown that the emotional exhaustion category is the main category in which burnout manifests for the vast majority of people (Taris 2005, p. 239). The emotional exhaustion group has to do with someone’s personal level of emotional stress and how it relates to their perception of work. Additionally, Lee and Ashforth

(1990, p. 744) concur with writing that "...emotional exhaustion was predicted to be associated with psychological and physiological strain". Coprazano, Rupp and Byrne (2003, p. 161) bridged the Social Exchange Theory to the emotional exhaustion category of the MBI. They found that any organization that leads their employees to experience emotional exhaustion will result in resentment toward the company, higher turnover, and a decrease in job performance to name just a few.

The depersonalization category of the MBI is highly rooted in cynicism and a protective mechanism of detachment from the individuals tasks and job (Leiter and Maslach 2003, p. 93). Depersonalization can result in negative attitudes at work and cause strain on the relationships between colleagues and clients (Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki and Fournier 2011, p. 411).

Reduced personal accomplishment is connected to the individual's perception of themselves in the role. Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki and Fournier (2011, p. 411) write, "Personal accomplishment represents individuals' confidence in their ability to accomplish jobs and meet goals". To expand on the previous sentiment, Leiter and Maslach (2003, p. 93) explain that reduced personal accomplishment "...refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity in work".

Like any framework or assessment method, there are issues that present themselves. The MBI is no different in this case. Many case studies and researchers have applied the MBI. When the MBI is applied in certain cases, some researchers tend to oversimplify the scoring, focus solely on one of the categories, divide results incorrectly, and/or make general modifications to the model (Maslach and Leiter 2021, pp. 3-4).

With all of the existing information and research using the MBI, why are organizations still misusing the tool? And why are they not placing a higher importance on using this data they gather to benefit the organization as a whole? Maslach and Leiter (2021, p. 5) write, "When the MBI is used correctly, and in strategic combination with other relevant information, the findings can help leaders design effective ways to build engagement and establish healthier workplaces in which employees will thrive".

2.3 Theoretical frameworks

2.3.1 The Biopsychosocial Model

The Biopsychosocial Model was created in 1977, by George Engel (Lindau, Laumann, Levinson and Waite 2003, p. 1). It is a scientific approach that includes more than just physical symptomatic diagnoses when dealing with an individual. Fava and Sonino (2008, p. 1) write “The biopsychosocial model allows illness to be viewed, as a result of interacting mechanisms at the cellular, tissue, organismic, interpersonal and environmental levels”. The model suggests that reaching a state of disease is a culmination of biological, psychological and sociological events (Engel 1981, p. 536). Havelka, Lučanin and Lučanin (2009, p. 306) discuss how important this model is in discovering what causes an illness, because of its big picture approach. They write,

“The role of biopsychosocial model is particularly important in the studies of how psychological stress affects the development of somatic diseases, since they have identified numerous facts about the interactions between the nervous, endocrine, immune and other organic systems in stressful situation” (p. 306).

This model nudged anyone that was responsible for diagnosing an illness, to look from a broader and fuller perspective, without leaving psychosomatic symptoms out (Fava and Sonino 2008, p. 1). Applying this model to burnout is useful, as often times work is not the only contributing factor to a person’s mental and/or physical exhaustion. Fava & Sonino (2008, p. 1) refer to the rising amount of research being done on the connection between illnesses and recurring or constant stressful events that takes place. Environmental stressors, such as the work environment, can also heavily impact a person’s physical and mental well-being if the stress that is experienced is chronic. It is therefore important to integrate an approach that keeps this model in mind when dealing with an employee experiencing burnout. The biopsychosocial model can also remind organizations that the environment they create for their employees will have a direct influence on their health and overall wellness (Oxenstierna, Widmark, Finnholm and Elofsson 2008, p. 151). This model has had major influences on different areas of study such as psychological and mental health as well (Havelka, Lučanin and Lučanin 2009, p. 307).

2.3.2 The Salutogenic Model

Organizations must consider offering their employees benefits to keep them in the best shape for the future. Of course, this is an investment, and a very worthy one. In 1979, Antonovsky presented a framework called the Salutogenic Model (Lindström and Eriksson 2005, p. 440). The model has since changed and been challenged to evolve

from its origins over the years. “According to Antonovsky’s original idea, it was more important to focus on peoples’ resources and capacity to create health than the classic focus on risks, ill health, and disease” (Lindström and Eriksson 2005, p. 440). The Salutogenic Model touches on the interplay between disease prevention and health promotion (Mittelmark and Bull 2013, p. 37). Instead of simply trying to rid employees of burnout, the most efficient thing to do would be to figure out what is causing it in the first place and what to do in the future to avoid it.

Over the last decade, companies have experimented with various benefits to offer their employees. Flexible working schedules, unlimited days off, monthly gym memberships, and free childcare for parents are just a few examples of perks that companies are willing to incorporate to help create a more balanced life for their employees (Stalmašeková, Genzorová and Čorejová 2017, p. 448). The benefits of the Salutogenic Model are two-fold. Antonovsky (1996, p. 12) writes that “It would, on the one hand, decrease the need for disease-care expenditures, and on the other hand, allow people to be more economically productive (less absenteeism, greater work efficiency, etc)”. Perhaps organizations can learn from the Salutogenic Model and apply its learnings when brainstorming how to keep employees healthy and satisfied. When creating this environment, Jenny, Bauer, Vinje, Vogt and Torp (2017, p. 205), wrote,

“Individual level interventions most commonly strengthen psychosocial resources with regard to appraisal of and coping with job demands, which corresponds with Antonovsky’s view of generalized resistance resources and sense of coherence as important factors in dealing with stressors and stressor-induced tension”.

On the other hand, the Salutogenic Model also touches on the coping strategies and capabilities of individuals, which in turn will affect their general health and well-being. Gambetta-Tessini, Mariño, Morgan and Anderson (2016, pp. 1-2) write,

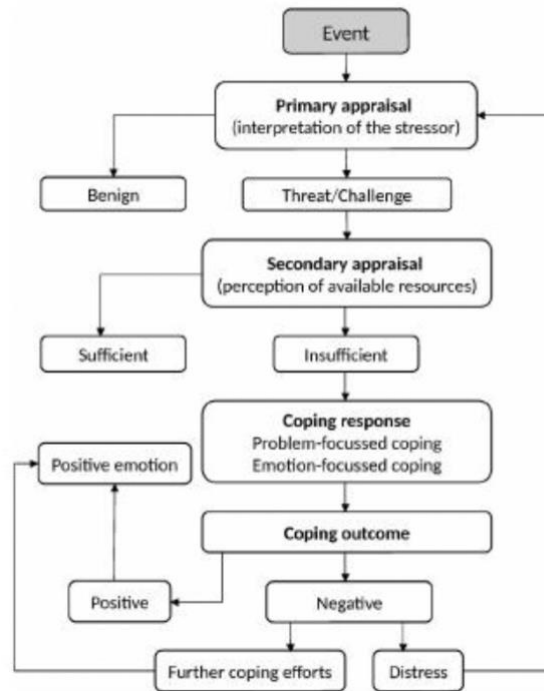
“In the SM, coping strategies help in shaping and increasing the person’s salutogenic potential; in other words, they can be protective against the damaging influences on health of psychological demands, such as psychological distress, depression, anxiety and burnout”.

Therefore, organizations could incorporate an outlook that uses this information and knowledge to better create their workplace well-being programs. If used correctly and specifically on individual employees, psychological stressors may be reduced or dealt with in a less drastic or negative manner.

2.3.3 The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

There are a number of ways that stress can arise. Data has shown that stress is one of the most common and dangerous risks in the workplace (Cooper and Dewe 2008, p. 522). Biggs, Brough and Drummond (2017, p. 351) mention the different ways in which stress shows up: as a stimulus, a response, an interaction, and/or a transaction. Within the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, stress is a process, and something that occurs based on an interaction (Folkman 2013, p. 901). The stressor must be looked at and appraised, to figure out in which way to cope with the stress best (See Figure 2). Porensky and Wells-Di Gregario (1984, p. 2) use a diagram of the stress process, which differentiates between primary and secondary appraisal processes and results in the coping mechanisms. Krohne identifies a very important labelling of what is included in each type of appraisal. Primary appraisal can be separated into three subcategories: “goal relevance”, “goal congruence” and “ego-involvement”. Secondary appraisal also includes three components: “blame or credit”, “coping potential”, and “future expectations” (Krohne 2002, p. 15166). Park and Folkman (1997, p. 122) state that there is a difference in appraisal for people who perceive themselves as more resilient to obstacles. Those who do see themselves as mentally capable of overcoming challenges and roadblocks are indeed more likely to do so. When coping with a stressful event, the individual will need to reappraise it to guarantee they have overcome it. “Reappraisal can decrease the threatening and harmful aspects of the appraised meaning of an event, and can sometimes increase its positive aspects” (Park and Folkman 1997, p. 125).

Figure 3: Depiction of the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Turner-Cobb and Hawken 2019, pp. 229).



Organizations can benefit from looking at their employees' stress levels and help them with learning new coping mechanisms for a variety of reasons, absenteeism being a main issue caused by stress (Cooper and Dewe 2008, p. 522). They provide the following statistic, which is proof that the mental health of employees needs to be addresses and protected. "Stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 13.8 million days lost or 46% of all reported illnesses making this the single largest cause of all absences attributable to work-related illnesses" (Cooper and Dewe 2008, p. 522). As the research in this field progresses, additional viewpoints and perspectives will continue to shape the way stress and coping is addressed. Lazarus (2000, p. 672) explains how researchers are getting better in this field:

"...they are examining psychological events more closely (microanalytically), in depth (relevant to levels of unconsciousness and defense), longitudinally, and more holistically as people cope with stress (as process), think (appraise and construct rational meanings), want, feel, and act in their struggle to advance their interests and adapt".

As can be seen in the aforementioned quote, researchers are starting to view stress with more holistic lenses. Together with the models previously mentioned, burnout and occupational health can be addressed more effectively and prevent others from this experience.

2.3.4 The Coping Reservoir

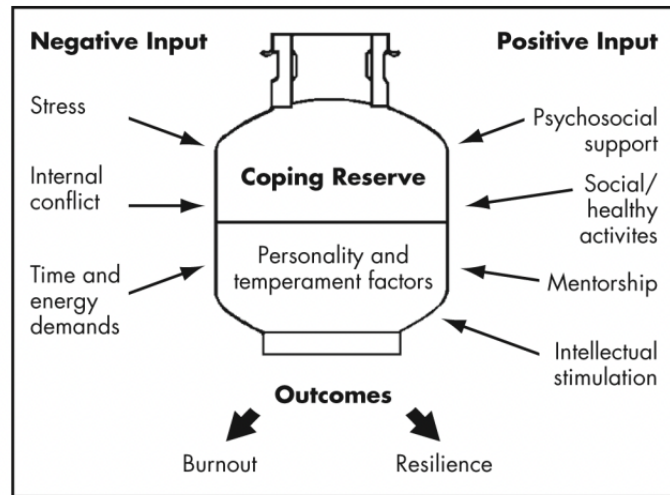
In an article which looked at medical students and the way they were affected by stress, Dunn, Iglewicz and Moutier (2008, p. 45) came up with a concept they invented called the “coping reservoir”. This concept shows the different types of contributions to either burnout or resilience (See Figure 4). These contributions can be either negative or positive (i.e. either stressors or positive coping mechanisms). The two types of inputs the authors above mention are listed below with their respective examples:

1. **Depleting factors:** *“Negative inputs include stress, internal conflict, and time and energy demands, all of which may diminish students’ coping reservoir for medical school challenges” (p. 45).*
2. **Replenishing factors:** *“The reservoir receives replenishment from multiple inputs, including psychological support, social activities, mentorship, and intellectual stimulation” (p.47).*

MacArthur and Sikorski (2020, p. 2) reference the Coping Reservoir in their own analysis of the model. They write,

“Whether burnout or resilience result depends on the strength of this reservoir as affected by these replenishing and depleting factors, which is also affected by the internal structure of the reservoir itself, including students’ personality traits, temperament, and coping style, such as obsessive-compulsiveness” (p. 2).

Figure 4: The Coping Reservoir (Dunn, Iglewicz and Moutier 2008, p. 45)



As can be seen in the figure above, the negative and positive contributions will only result in either burnout or resilience depending on the individual's personality traits and ability to cope with stressors. This model shows the importance of balance in one's life to offset any negative events taking place. Its purpose is to showcase how "...strengthening the internal structure, we promote resilience and personal growth" (p. 49). Although this model was originated while looking at medical students, this can be translated into the medical industry after university students enter their careers. Additionally, the model can also be applied to any industry with high stress environments and long hours.

3 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology and thought-processes of composing this thesis will be introduced and explained. Starting from the initial interest in the topic, to then discussing the research strategies, we will see how the process took place from start to finish. The reader will get a better understanding of the details regarding the data collection process and the empirical research methods that were chosen. At the end of this chapter, recommendations will be offered based off of the literature review and empirical findings.

3.1 Research approach

The entire research process was triggered by an intense curiosity and desire to help organizations understand how they can best help their employees maintain and even

boost their mental and physical health in the workplace, while also increasing their productivity and effectiveness. Especially after hearing so many poor experiences of people who had to move to work-from-home environments, while at the same time trying to cope with peak levels of stress. This research was valuable prior to the global Covid-19 pandemic, and now even more so. Employees are seeking out organizations that support and look after them.

The research process began with an extensive literature review to ensure a valuable and comprehensive understanding of burnout and other psychological issues that people face in the work environment. There were many topics that seemed valuable to the umbrella subject, however not all of these could be discussed in this thesis. The main topics and issues that were imperative to touch on included: burnout drivers, symptoms, management tactics and/or strategies, stress prevention, stress coping and resilience building.

It is important to highlight the two research questions that this thesis aimed to answer. Below, are the two questions posed that began the entire process:

1. *Out of the 6 areas of worklife, which area tends to be the most unsatisfactory for people?*
 - a. *H1: The majority of people are most unsatisfied with the reward area of worklife.*
2. *Are mental and physical well-being activities being offered to employees on a regular basis? To what extent do these activities play a role in stress reduction and coping?*
 - a. *H1: Companies are offering both physical and mental well-being activities to their employees. These activities help employees manage stress and also impact whether that stress results in burnout.*

3.2 Research design

In the following sections, the design methods of both the quantitative research, in the form of a survey, and the qualitative research, in the form of in-depth interviews, will be introduced and discussed. These methods were based off and devised according to the literature review, assessment methods, and the theoretical frameworks mentioned previously. All of the data collected and mentioned is primary data collected by the author.

3.2.1 Survey design

In order to answer the first research question, a combination of research tactics were incorporated in order to maximize the feedback and data that were collected. Firstly, quantitative research was acted out in the form of a 15 question self-reporting survey. These 15 questions were linked to the 6 categories of worklife which has been discussed thoroughly in chapter 2.2.1. The survey was split into two separate sections: section one was general personal questions and section two included work-related questions that were mirrored from Maslach and Leiter's 6 areas of worklife; a theoretical concept. In total, there were 57 respondents, and a sample size of 50 was taken for analysis. It was important to only consider responses from people who were working 30 or more hours per week. At the beginning of the survey, a definition of burnout was provided to the respondents so that they were informed of what the term accurately means.

Questions 1-7 were preliminary, and helped gauge a general understanding of the respondents' background. These questions were a combination of multiple choice, Likert scale (0-10) and open-ended question formats. Questions 1-7 are listed below:

1. *What gender do you identify as?*
2. *How many hours per week are you working?*
3. *Do you feel supported by the company you work for?*
4. *Does your company offer benefits that boost your mental well-being?*
 - a. *If yes, please write what the company offers.*
5. *Does your company offer benefits that boost your physical well-being?*
 - a. *If yes, please write what the company offers.*
6. *Have you experienced burnout in your professional career?*

7. *What could the company offer to make you feel more supported?*

a. *Comment:*

Questions 8-10 were related to the first area of worklife: workload. Question 8 was a Likert scale style, measuring the respondents perception of their workload. Question 9 was a simple multiple choice format to understand whether the respondent experienced stress from their workload. Question 10 used a rating scale format, to help identify clearly where the respondents' stress levels fell on the provided spectrum. Questions 8-10 are listed below:

8. *Do you consider your workload manageable?*
9. *Does your workload cause you stress?*
10. *How would you rate your work-related stress level?*

Question 11 was related to the second area of worklife: control. This question aimed to recognize the satisfaction level of the respondent, in regard to their superior's leadership style. Refer to question 11 below:

11. *Are you satisfied with the leadership style of your superior?*

Question 12 was related to the third area of worklife: reward. This question aimed to gauge the satisfaction level of the respondent, in regard to their job. The options ranged from 0 to 10, where 0 indicated "not fulfilled at all" and 10 meant "extremely fulfilled". Refer to question 12 below:

12. *Are you fulfilled by your job?*

Question 13 was related to the fourth area of worklife: community. The purpose of this question was to comprehend to what extend the respondent was satisfied with their

colleagues and the work environment that is created from being together as a team. Refer to question 13 below:

13. Are you satisfied with your working environment (people-related)?

Question 14 was related to the fifth area of worklife: fairness. The intention of this question was to find out whether the respondent felt that their superior, or the organization in general, operated with fairness and equal opportunities for everyone within the company or team. Refer to question 14 below:

14. Do you feel your employer treats every employee equally and/or fairly?

Question 15 was related to the sixth area of worklife: values. This question was designed to identify if the respondent perceived the organization they work for as ethical, and if they felt supported to follow their personal ethical guidelines. Refer to question 15 below:

15. Does your company create and encourage an ethical work environment?

3.2.2 Interview design and classification of questions

The in-depth interviews took place over four weeks and ranged from in-person meetings to video call interviews. Queirós, Faria and Almeida (2017) entail the purpose of qualitative in-depth interviews. They write, “In-depth interviews provide very rich information and it offers the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, probe additional information, justify previous answers, and establish a connection between several topics” (2017, p. 378). The selection process for interview candidates was well thought out and had to fit certain criteria. The main criteria which needed to be filled included: a full time working contract, working at a company with more than 25 employees, experience dealing with employees with burnout, and working either as a manager or in Human Resources. There were a total of 7 interviewees and each interview included 16 questions. The transcribed interviews can be found in Appendices III-IX. For privacy reasons, all interviewees’ names and the companies they work for have been anonymized. All interviewees received the questions

beforehand so they had an idea of what to expect and an opportunity to mention if any questions were inappropriate for them to answer. Every interview stayed under the allotted 60 minutes, and they ranged from 30-60 minutes, depending on how in-depth the interview was willing to go into detail.

The interview questions were split into three different sections. Section one included basic questions to get a background understanding of the interviewee. These questions didn't require much insight into the topic of burnout, however were intended to bring the interviewee at ease and slowly integrate them into the interviewing process. Listed below are the questions one to seven which comprised the entire section one.

1. *What is your name?*
2. *How old are you?*
3. *What company do you work for?*
4. *What is your job role?*
5. *How long have you been in this position?*
6. *How long have you been working in this field?*
7. *What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?*

Section two of the interview was focused on the interviewee's personal stress levels and their physical and mental coping mechanisms. Section two comprised of four questions, which are listed below:

1. *How would you rate your work-related stress levels?*
 - a. *0-10 (0 = not stressful at all, 10 = extremely stressful)*
2. *Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?*
 - a. *If yes, what?*
3. *Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?*
 - a. *If yes, what?*
4. *What activities help you cope with your stress levels?*

The third and final section of the interview switched the focus on what the organization is doing to support their employees; both physically and mentally. Section three contained 5 additional questions. It was imperative to ask what sort of

activities or initiatives the organization had in place to promote optimal health for their employees, and to find out what they were doing to prevent stress. The questions from section three are listed below:

1. *How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?*
2. *How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?*
3. *How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?*
4. *How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?*
5. *How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?*

3.3 Limitations

Throughout the process of conducting both quantitative and qualitative research methods, limitations, obstacles and barriers occurred. Although, the experience was mainly positive, a few setbacks transpired and had the potential to affect the data collection procedure.

The limitations experienced while collecting the quantitative data, in the form of a survey, started from the beginning, as this was an online survey. As the survey had personal questions related to stress levels and job satisfaction, there was potential that the respondent did not feel comfortable answering the questions. This could have prevented collecting a higher number of responses. It was important to take into consideration additional disadvantages of self-reporting surveys to help overcome them. Masood, Ahmed, Choi and Gutierrez-Osuna (2012, p. 4898) provide a few of the downsides of these surveys in the following statement: “The results of self-reporting surveys can be biased due to the varying subjective assessments performed by the subjects. The reasons include low self-confidence, self-biasing and memory recall”. In order to overcome these biases, keeping the survey results as anonymous was vital.

Moving on to the limitations that were faced during the qualitative research. As previously mentioned, 7 in-depth interviews comprising of 16 questions took place.

Of the 12 candidates contacted via social networking platforms, such as LinkedIn, as well as reaching out to a personal network, 9 responses were received. The 9 selected interviewees were all vetted prior to initial contact, to ensure their qualification and clout in the field and subject matter. 2 of the chosen individuals did not end up being interviewed for reasons beyond control: a family tragedy and lack of time. The interview questions were sent via email to each interviewee to avoid any discomfort or surprises during the interview. This helped create a safe space to answer the questions in full trust that the results would remain with the author. Additionally, the open-ended questions were intended to allow the interviewee to provide detailed accounts of their experiences and what the organization is doing. Allowing the space for the interviewee to detail everything that goes on was crucial to avoid impeding their thought process and potentially creating any bias in their answers. Although, as much was done to create a safe and confidential environment during the interview process, it will never be known whether or not the interviewees answered the questions fully and honestly. Just like bias was a limitation for the survey, it is also something that has the potential to disrupt the qualitative research as well. Queirós, Faria and Almeida (2017, p. 378) mention the following disadvantages of in-depth interviews: “time consuming and relatively high costly”, “longer verification process”, “participants should be carefully chosen to avoid bias” and “not generalizable”. Some of the listed above drawbacks were experienced, however not all of them created real barriers.

3.4 Results

In the following subsections, the results from the qualitative and quantitative research methods will be presented. The results from both the survey and interviewees will be analyzed later in chapter 4, which will feed into the recommendations and conclusion that follow.

3.4.1 Quantitative data

Beginning with the survey, the first section comprised of questions 1-7. The first question yielded the following results: 32 (64%) identified as female, 16 (32%) identified as male, and 2 (4%) identified as diverse.

The second question generated the following results: The majority of respondents (50% of the entire sample) worked 41-50 hours. The second largest share of the sample are working 31-40 hours per week (19 respondents or 38%). While 4 (8%) of the respondents said they are working between 51-60 hours, 2 (4%) are working 60+ hours per week.

The third question asked respondents to choose on a scale from 0 to 10 how supported they felt by the company they worked for. The results are as follows: the majority of respondents ranked their support at an 8 or above (26 respondents or 52%). Of the option, 8 was the most frequently chosen option (10 respondents or 20%). None of the respondents chose 0 on the scale and only 16% of the responses were between 1 and 4.

The results of the fourth question were that 30 (60%) of the respondents' companies did not offer benefits that boosted their mental well-being, while 20 (40%) said the company they work for did provide this. When asked to provide examples of the benefits they were provided, there were a few that presented themselves on more than one occasion. These included, the opportunity to speak with either a therapist or coach, yoga classes and meditation/ mindfulness practices.

The results of the fifth question were that 27 (54%) of the respondents' companies did not offer benefits that boosted their physical well-being, while 23 (46%) said the company they work for did provide this. Upon request for more details, the answers that appeared more than once, were gym memberships, sports classes, nutrition counselling, food, and medical coverage.

The sixth question yielded the following results: 25 (50%) of respondents said they have experience burnout in their professional career while the others were almost

evenly split between the options “no” and “maybe”. 14 respondents (28%) answered that they have not experienced burnout, while 11 (22%) were unsure.

The seventh, and final question of section 1, provided 4 options and a comment section to elaborate if they wished to. When asked what the company could do to make them feel more supported, 15 (30%) of respondents chose “ongoing professional training and development”, and another 15 (30%) chose “holistic health activities (i.e. meditation, nutrition counselling)”.

Moving on to section 2 of the survey, these questions were specific work-related questions. Section 2 comprised of questions 8-15. Questions 8 and 10-15 were all based on a Likert-scale format. The eighth question asked the respondent to rank how manageable their workload feels. The most respondents (10 respondents or 20%) answered 10, meaning they cope well with their workload. The majority of respondents (30 respondents or 60%) answered 7 and above on the scale. The lowest ranking on the scale was a 2, which was chosen only by 2 people (4%).

The ninth question asked the respondent whether their workload caused stress. 38 respondents (76%) answered yes, while the remaining 12 respondents (24%) answered no.

Following up on question nine, number ten asked respondents to rank their work related stress levels on a scale from 0-10. Every number on the scale was chosen at least once. The most frequently chosen number on the scale was 7 (12 respondents or 24%) and the numbers 0, 1 and 2 were only chosen once (1 respondent or 2% respectively). The majority of respondents answered 7 and above on the scale (30 respondents or 60%).

Question eleven asked whether the respondent was satisfied with the leadership style of their superior. The results were as follows: the most chosen number on the scale

again was 7 (11 respondents or 22%), numbers 1 and 6 were chosen once (1 respondent or 2% respectively), and the majority chose 7 and above (28 respondents or 56%).

Question twelve asked the respondent to rate their fulfilment level from their job. Numbers 7 and 10 on the scale were chosen the most (8 respondents or 16%). The lowest score was a 0, however this was just chosen by 1 respondent (2% of the sample size). The majority of respondents chose 7 and above on the scale (29 respondents or 58%)

Question thirteen aimed to understand how satisfied the respondent is with their working environment, specifically related to the people they work with. This could have been either superiors or colleagues. The most chosen number on the scale was an 8 (14 respondents or 28%). Numbers 0 and 1 were the lowest picked (1 respondent or 2% respectively). The majority of respondents chose 8 and above on the scale (28 respondents or 56%).

Question fourteen inquired about how the respondent would rank their superior's fairness and if they treat others equally. 10 was the most frequently chosen number (10 respondents or 20%). The number 1 on the scale was only chosen by one respondent (2%). The majority of respondents chose 7 and above on the scale (28 respondents or 56%).

Question fifteen asked the respondent to rank to what extent they felt the organization they worked for created and encouraged an ethical work environment. Numbers 9 and 10 were both chosen the most frequently (11 respondents or 22% respectively). Numbers 0 and 2 were not chosen and 3 was chosen the least (1 respondent or 2%).

3.4.2 Qualitative data

The complete transcribed interviews can be found in Appendices III-IX. The interviewees ranged from people working in HR, to managers who are leading teams. Interviewee 1, 2, 5 and 6 work in HR at their respective organization, while interviewee 3, 4 and 7 are managers who are leading their own teams. There was a noticeable difference in the way in which the people working in HR answered the questions versus how the managers answered in their interviews. In order to analyze the results of the interviews, this chapter will go through the answers of each of the 3 sections in the interview.

We will begin with section one, which comprised of questions 1-7. As mentioned in section 3.2.2, the first section was designed to get a background understanding of the interviewee and their experience on the topic of burnout. The interviewees ranged from 27 years old to 49 years old. The industries in which each interviewee's company is are listed in order: financial services, architecture and planning, pharmaceuticals, internet/food and beverage delivery services, E-commerce fashion, computer software and environmental services. The majority of interviewees were working in the HR field, while three interviewees were working in other departments overseeing and managing teams. The people working in HR had the following job roles: Senior Recruiter, Human Resources Generalist, Talent Acquisition Manager and Recruiter. The 3 working as managers had the following job titles: Managing Director of Global Compliance, Scrum Master/Delivery Manager and Enterprise Sales Manager. Nearly everyone had been working in their current role for at least one year, with the only exception being one woman who was in her role for just eight months. When asked about their personal experience with burnout, interviewee 2, 3, 4 and 7 said they had experienced burnout in their professional careers. Every interviewee disclosed that they have either dealt with team members who have experienced burnout or inexplicitly referred to their team members as being overworked and highly stressed. The varying responses for question seven were perspicacious on the reality of many employees. Some felt that they were not rewarded accordingly for their work, whether it was with a financial incentive or even felt that the work they were doing was not appreciated. Others mentioned the environment in which they worked drove them to burnout. For example, a competitive nature between colleagues which resulted in lack of knowledge sharing and collaboration.

The results from section two were quite varied between all of the interviewees, especially when it came to their work-related stress levels. The lowest score was a 1 and the highest was a 10. Out of the 7 interviewees, only 2 people said their stress levels were below a 5 on the scale. The other 5 people reported their work-related stress levels to be at a 5 or above, one even wanted to answer higher than what was on the scale. The answers for questions nine, ten and eleven will be put into three categories. The three categories are: movement, mindfulness, and social interaction. The answers of each interviewee sometimes were not solely one category, however included a combination of them. Refer to Table 1 to see the results from each interviewee.

Table 1: Breakdown of which category the interviewees do that aids their physical (P) or mental (M) well-being.

	Category	Movement	Mindfulness	Social Interaction
Interviewee				
1		P	M	
2		P	P, M	
3		P, M	P, M	
4		P	M	M
5		P	M	M
6		P	P	M
7		P	P	P

Section 3 comprised of questions twelve to sixteen. The focus of these questions were to understand what the company the interviewee works for is doing to help their employees on both a physical and mental level. Questions twelve to thirteen aimed to reveal the exact benefits organizations were offering their employees to boost their physical and mental well-being. Questions fourteen to sixteen in this section focused on stress coping strategies and activities, while others focused on the prevention of stress. The answers regarding what the organization was doing for employees will be

categorized into three sections as well: sports, holistic methods (i.e. mediation, deep breathing workshops) and health benefits (i.e. dental plans, therapy services). Refer to Table 2 below for the breakdown of answers.

Table 2: Breakdown of which category the organization offers for physical (P) or mental (M) well-being.

	Category	Sports	Holistic Methods	Health Benefits
Organization				
1		P	M	P, M
2		P	M	P, M
3		P		P, M
4		P		P, M
5		P		P, M
6			P	M
7		P		

4 Discussion and recommendations

This chapter will begin by comparing the most valuable information taken from the literature review, and compare it to the data assembled from the various research methods. After the comparison has been made, the research questions will be answered in section 4.2. Based off of the data and the knowledge gained from the literature review, recommendations will be given. These recommendations are useful for both organizations and employees to avoid any scenarios involving burnout, and ultimately boosting mental and physical well-being.

4.1 Comparison of the literature review and empirical findings

In this section, a discussion will take place in order to compare the information found from the literature review, to the empirical findings gathered as a result of both the quantitative and qualitative data.

To approach this with a clear structure, a cross-reference between the survey and literature will happen first, then the similarities of the interviews and the literature will take place.

Having a closer look at the results from the survey, there were interesting trends that were noticeable. Specifically, the respondents who answered below a 5 on question three, showed obvious signs that these feelings were linked to the organization not offering them benefits that made the individual feel appreciated, whether in the form of physical or mental well-being activities. From the survey, the results assembled from question seven were also valuable. When asked what the respondent would need from the company to feel more supported, the answers ranged from flexible work schedules (both time and geographically), trust, paid time off (PTO), further training and development to gain more skills and knowledge and less micromanaging behavior from superiors. These answers aligned with the literature review, especially highlighting the six areas of worklife and the three categories of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. What we were able to confirm from the various literature sources and the different empirical research is that there is a surplus of benefits from offering physical and mental benefits. Not only do they help the individual, but they also support the organization in regard to employability as well as employee productivity, a decrease in absenteeism, turnover rates, and in turn, financial costs.

During the interview process, one interview stood out particularly because of the tone and responses given. As mentioned earlier while discussing the MBI, depersonalization was characterized mainly by cynicism. Interviewee number 3 consistently gave pessimistic and cynical responses to the questions. This interviewee often was making light of the topic and made clear that her burnout and the burnout of the team they managed, was not taken seriously or considered by the organization. Although they did present information on what sort of benefits for physical and mental well-being the company offered, they emphasized her suspicion that it was ultimately to benefit the company by keeping their employees on-site as much as they could. Another similarity between the literature and the interviews, was the importance of

social connection. A few of the interviewees mentioned that time spent with friends was a main way in which they coped with their stress levels, while also letting their minds wander away from what was going on at work. This aligned with the findings of Oerlemans and Bakker's (2014, p. 311) study, which exposed common ways to prevent or recover from burnout.

4.2 Research questions answered

Below are the questions that were posed at the beginning of this thesis. The answers to both of these questions will be discussed and corroborated with the literature review and the empirical findings.

1. *Out of the 6 areas of worklife, which area tends to be the most unsatisfactory for people?*
2. *Are mental and physical well-being activities being offered to employees on a regular basis? To what extent do these activities play a role in stress reduction and coping?*

The first research question was related to Maslach and Leiter's (2005) 6 areas of worklife. Each question in section two of the survey was related to each of these areas. The intent was to find out in which of the 6 areas, people were the most unsatisfied. In order to answer this, we will look at each question's results to see which area had the most answers under the 5 on the scale. For the workload area, the majority of respondents considered their workloads to be manageable, yet still causing them stress (26% answered below 5). The majority of respondents' stress levels were above average, and leaned more toward the extremely stressful side of the spectrum. For the control area, the majority of respondents seemed to be satisfied with their superior's leadership style (34% answered below 5). For the reward area, the results were optimistic; mainly everyone felt fulfilled by their jobs (16% answered below 5). For the community area of worklife, again the majority was pleased with their colleagues (20% answered below 5). Moving on to the ethical area, the popular belief was that the organizations they worked for treated others equally and fairly (30% answered below 5). Lastly, the values area also had an unarguably positive response rate (22% answered below 5). Given these results, and based off of the data the most unsatisfactory area based off of the sample is the control area of worklife. The

hypothesis was that the reward area of worklife would be the most unsatisfactory, however this was proven to be incorrect.

The second research question deliberately set out to see what specifically was being offered to employees in regard to physical and mental well-being programs. Additionally, the purpose of this question was to also grasp if these activities were being used to build healthier coping mechanisms and/or prevent stress. Out of all 7 interviews, 6 interviewees provided details of both physical and mental well-being activities that were offered to the employees of the organization. The 7th interviewee detailed, that the company does not have any specific protocol or structure for boosting mental well-being, however they would address these issues individually and privately. Therefore the first part of the research question can be answered with a yes. From all of the interviews, it was discovered that each organization did have some sort of happenings going on either in an on-going or regular basis.

In regard to the second part of the question, the majority of interviewees referred to previously mentioned activities and benefits when asked how the organization was helping prevent stress, and how they were helping their employees cope with their stress. Based off the responses accumulated, the vast majority of interviewees credited these physical and mental well-being events as something the organization was doing to help learn coping strategies and reduce stress overall.

4.3 Recommendations

The empirical findings were helpful in understanding the practical implications of what organizations are doing to aid their employee's work experiences. Much of the data collected aligned with the information found from the literature review. As for the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis, the hypothesis were either confirmed or proven wrong based off of the data.

The main recommendations that come from this work are for organizations to review the 6 areas of worklife when creating benefits for their employees. Sending out employee surveys frequently to measure employees' satisfaction and stress levels would also benefit the organization. This way, appropriate action can be taken to

safeguard everyone's overall health. The Covid-19 global pandemic forced people around the world to change their lifestyles, dynamics and working environments. Organizations should focus on health promoting activities such as movement, mindfulness and continuous learning and development. Keeping a sharp eye on stress prevention strategies as well would benefit any organization to manage their employees' stress levels. Carod-Artal and Vázquez-Cabrera (2013, p. 28) provide great examples of prevention strategies that are segmented into two sections: primary and secondary prevention. These authors include activities such as the following: "Primary prevention measures include ergonomics, work and environmental design modifications, and organizational and management development. Secondary prevention to reduce work stress and burnout include worker education and training" (p. 28).

For managers, it is important to maintain empathy and actively support team members through stressful and non-stressful working experiences. As Bakker, Veldhoven and Xanthopolou (2010, p. 3) say,

"Most managers are aware that their role is to maximize the efforts of their employees toward achieving the organization's goals. Although a high workload may be needed to realize these goals, possible side effects include exhaustion and negative work attitudes".

Based off of their findings, a high workload does not have to result in low job satisfaction. If the resources that these employees have are enough and the tasks themselves are challenging and boost creativity then the employees will have an increase in overall job satisfaction. Managers therefore should shift their focus on reducing mundane and repetitive tasks while also seeking out plentiful resources for their team.

In terms of employee engagement, it can be seen from the research that a combination of workshops and benefits are beneficial and appreciated by employees. Balancing the right mixture of physical and mental well-being programs or benefits with further training and career development will push the people working for the organization

toward their best selves, while also adding to their skills and expertise. Ultimately this will also benefit the organization.

Since the control area of worklife has proven to be the most unsatisfactory among the sample of employees, recommendations to improve this area shall be highlighted. As mentioned earlier in detail, the control area of worklife has to do with the style the employee is managed and the extent to which they feel their opinions are heard and honored regarding organizational decision making. This was the section with the lowest scores when asked about the leadership style of superiors. Managers and executives should be given on-going training and education for not only their role but also on management best practices. Avoiding things such as micromanagement and monotonous task delegation are just a couple of recommendations to avoid unhappy employees and team members.

5 Conclusion

For many years, burnout has been studied and researched in an attempt to reduce cases and help people avoid it in the future. After much time and energy has been invested in understanding what burnout is, the symptoms and drivers, coping strategies and pathway to recovery, the literature and the empirical data has shown the undeniable benefits that both physical and mental well-being activities have and how they have helped people manage and boost their overall health.

We began with the recognition of the evolution of burnout and how its meaning has changed over time. There was a clear distinction made between normal every day stress and accumulated stress that results in chronic illness and burnout. There are two main burnout assessment methods that we looked at in detail. Of course, the 6 areas of worklife and the Maslach Burnout Inventory are not perfect, however they are commonly used in many organizations and cover a wide range of symptoms and common signs of burnout. Moreover, there are models such as the Biopsychosocial Model and the Salutogenic Model both point to a more holistic approach to health and disease, which leads us to the crux of the subject of this thesis. Organizations need to

support their employees with not only work-related activities, but with physical and mental stimulation to keep satisfaction and motivation high within each individual and their team. To build on the aforementioned methods and models, the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping and the Coping Reservoir both blatantly point to the role that stress and coping strategies has in a person's ability to overcome adverse experiences. Reaching a state of burnout or building on one's personal skill of resilience is an individual case by case scenario.

Through the self-reporting survey and the in-depth interviews, insights showed the reality of people's work situations and experiences, and how content the employees were with the support they were offered. It was discovered that the control area of worklife was the most unsatisfactory amongst the sample of respondents. We also acquired firsthand experiences from a few managers who are in charge of their teams, and got a deeper understanding of the strategies they follow to keep their own and their team's health optimal. For the most part, organizations are already offering activities that support the employees' physical and mental well-being, however, there is always room for improvement and further development. Many of the interviewees confessed that the same activities used are also how the organization helps with stress prevention and coping strategies. It would be advantageous to both parties to find different ways to help with stress prevention and building healthier coping strategies in order to differentiate the benefits so that there are more options for their employees to choose from. These insights were significant in creating reasonable and actionable recommendations for organizations and individuals to implement in their future processes.

Supported by the main findings from the empirical research, it is important for organizations to remember that every employee will need support at some point in their career, and that support will be different for each person based off of their personality and ability to cope with their stress. The results from the survey showed that the majority of people did feel supported by the company they worked for, and offered insight into what else would be beneficial to them while making them feel even more supported. Some of these ideas would be eliminating extra stress for them, such

as flexible working schedules or more paid time off so they can enjoy other hobbies and family time. As previously discussed, stress is common in everyone's lives, and if companies can combine the power of stress prevention and health promotion, while also giving employees ample resources and knowledge on positive coping strategies, then the rise of burnout cases would significantly drop. The key takeaway from this research is to keep employee well-being as a pivotal goal to not only encourage and motivate employees, but to also keep the organization working efficiently and effectively. The challenge lies in convincing decision makers to invest in these programs, and also getting employees to engage with the benefits they are being offered. If these two obstacles can be surpassed, the organization and its stakeholders can reduce burnout and go about their business with optimal well-being.

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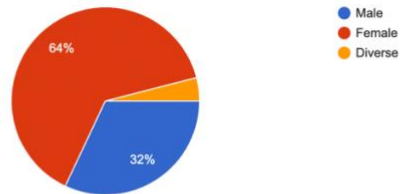
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Appendix I

Self-reporting survey results

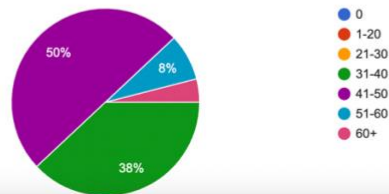
What gender do you identify as?

50 responses



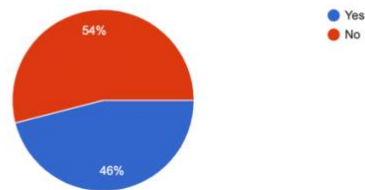
How many hours per week are you working?

50 responses



Does your company offer benefits that boost your physical well-being?

50 responses



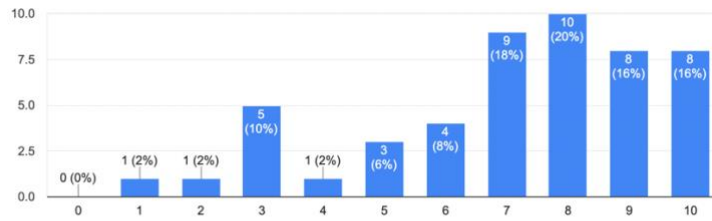
If yes, please write what the company offers.

22 responses

Pays for meditation classes
Yoga / Workshops
Meditation, Mindful leadership
Events, get together, food and drinks
therapists
Mindful meditation 3 x per week
Offers gift cards for exercising and keeping good mental health, besides all the other basic corporate benefits.
25 free annual visits with a mental health clinician and digital stress support resources,
Extra trainings, Meditation rounds, flexible hours

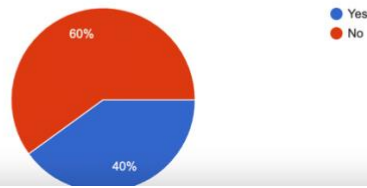
Do you feel supported by the company you work for?

50 responses



Does your company offer benefits that boost your mental well-being?

50 responses



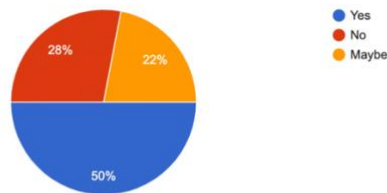
If yes, please write what the company offers.

24 responses

- Free fitness courses
- Extra food vouchers
- Box /Yoga/ gym
- back training
- Weekly yoga classes
- Food and drinks
- A free 30 minute workout class twice a week
- Vitality program offering incentives for fitness, diet and well checks
- Rally is the outfit that manages employees

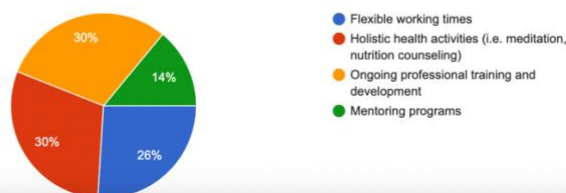
Have you experienced burnout in your professional career?

50 responses



What could the company offer to make you feel more supported?

50 responses



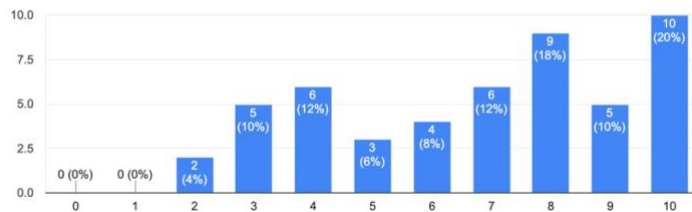
Comment:

12 responses

- „Sides“ benefits are nice to have, but if basics are not fulfilled its worth less.. I would be more keane on genuine work consideration then a yoga workshop
- I would feel more supported if we could have remote work options.
- I think burnout escalates with lack of trust. If they hired you, they should trust you to make a huge difference. Micro managing begs for employees to under perform. Giving flexibility to employees tells them they are valued. From there customer experience with the company improves when employees feel empowered.
- All of the above would show they cared about our mental wellbeing
- Honestly my company offers neither benefits for mental or physical well being. I don't know if thats harder having a headquarters on East coast, but having sales force in all the states. Our home is our office if we're not out in front of customers. They are however very understanding and flexible with work days, personal situations, vacation etc.
- More worker support

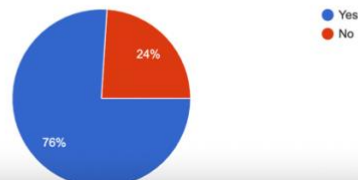
Do you consider your workload manageable?

50 responses



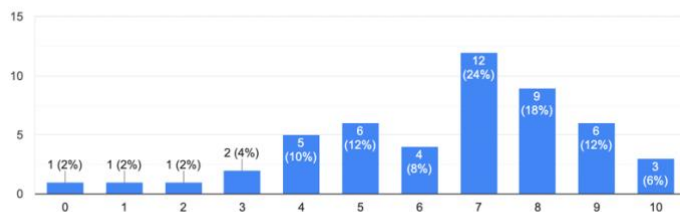
Does your workload cause you stress?

50 responses



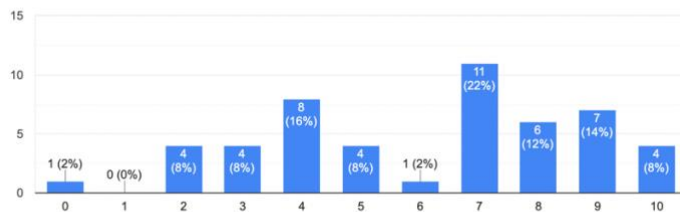
How would you rate your work-related stress level?

50 responses



Are you satisfied with the leadership style of your superior?

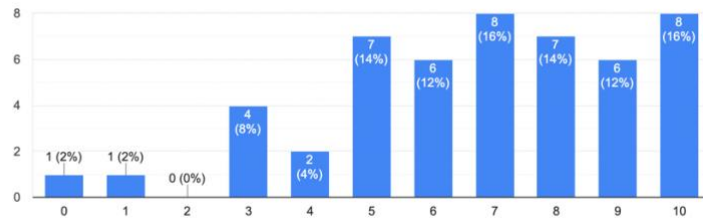
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Are you fulfilled by your job?



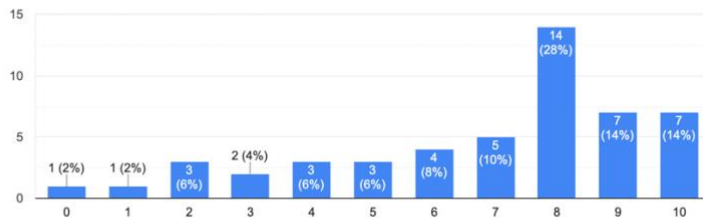
50 responses



Are you satisfied with your working environment (people related)?



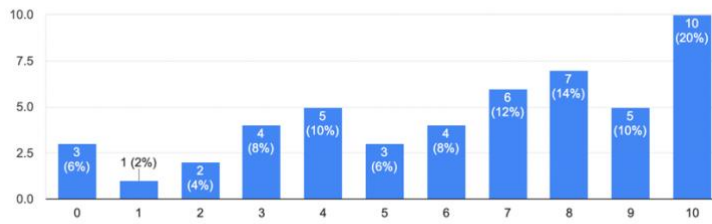
50 responses



Do you feel your employer treats every employee equally and/or fairly?



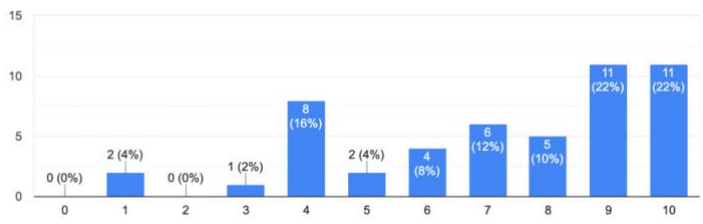
50 responses



Does your company create and encourage an ethical work environment?



50 responses



Appendix II

Interview questions

- 1.** What is your name?
- 2.** How old are you?
- 3.** What company do you work for?
- 4.** What is your job role?
- 5.** How long have you been in this position?
- 6.** How long have you been working in this field?
- 7.** What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?
- 8.** How would you rate your work-related stress levels?
- 9.** Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?
 - a)** If yes, what?
- 10.** Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?
 - a)** If yes, what?
- 11.** What activities help you cope with your stress levels?
- 12.** How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?
- 13.** How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?
- 14.** How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?
- 15.** How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?
- 16.** How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

Appendix III

Interview 1

General Information

Date: 30.11.21

Duration of interview: 50 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee I

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee I

2. How old are you?

I am 27 years old.

3. What company do you work for?

I work at Company A. It's a fintech company based in New York.

4. What is your job role?

I am a senior recruiter.

5. How long have you been in this position?

I've been working for the company in this role for 2.5 years.

6. How long have you been working in this field?

In total it's been about 5 years.

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

My experience of dealing with burnout has been quite extensive over the past couple of years. As a member of my company's HR team and having the ability to work closely with our internal promotion process, I have gotten many notes from colleagues expressing their feelings of burnout. The serious cases have resulted in employees leaving our company, which is a huge loss for the organization and one that organizations should try to avoid at all costs. On a personal note, I've felt overwhelmed at work when there is less collaboration and information sharing. The times I've felt the best at work are when there is evenly shared responsibility across the team and there is a space to effectively communicate and collaborate, that way we can avoid roadblocks that others on the team have experienced, share what has worked best, etc. Another big contributor is when employees don't take ample breaks in the day/week. An hour break each day, or multiple smaller breaks, are necessary in my opinion. Our HR team encourages employees to take small breaks throughout the day and to routinely take vacation throughout the year to reduce burnout.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

I would rate my work-related stress at a 5. My team has been great at communicating and helping each other cross the finish line with our projects. I've also been actively using my company's offered therapy service and have been taking Friday's off for longer weekend trips.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Taking a break and going for a walk has always helped me calm down and destress.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Meditation and therapy are regular activities I participate in to support my well-being.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

Moving my body and getting outside helps tremendously when I'm stressed at work. I've also incorporated deep breathing exercises, meditation and therapy, which have all had a positive effect on my stress levels.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

My organization does a lot to support physical well-being. They offer unlimited and free access to a fitness platform with thousands of online workout classes. It also has access to 1:1 trainings. They also cover health, dental and vision benefits. On top of all that, leadership encourages employees to get outside and take regular breaks throughout the day, and they encourage this by doing it themselves.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

My organization supports mental wellbeing by offering 12 free therapy sessions a year and subsidizing the rest. They offer a free subscription to a meditation app and encourage employees to take ample vacation time by offering unlimited paid time off. They also offer a third party life/professional coaching service to all employees in case any employees don't feel comfortable going to a member of HR in house.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

Each month the company offers a training session or information session on how to cope with stress. Some things I've learned in past sessions are breathing techniques and meditation. It's been really helpful.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

Company A tries to get ahead of the stress by focusing on development and offering training resources routinely so employees have the support they need to grow in their careers and master their responsibilities in their current workflows. Aside from the third party professional coaching services the organization offers, we try to have ample training resources in house for employees to go to such as our development website, development team, and Guru app, which is an app that houses all questions that have been asked by former and current employees.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

The first thing that comes to mind that I've already mentioned a few times is our leadership team encouraging their direct reports to take ample time off. We have found that the more freedom our employees have, like unlimited PTO, they feel they have more control over their lives and don't feel as overwhelmed with work. We send a culture check survey each month and employees have said that their unlimited PTO makes them feel secure with taking time off and makes them feel like they have more power over their lives.

Appendix IV

Interview 2

General Information

Date: 06.12.21

Duration of interview: 30 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee II

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee II

2. How old are you?

I am 30 years old

3. What company do you work for?

Company B

4. What is your job role?

Human Resources Generalist

5. How long have you been in this position?

7 years

6. How long have you been working in this field?

Also 7 years

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

My experience with burnout is both personal and dealing with other team members.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

In my role, and given the high workload I have, I would place my work-related stress at an 8.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

- a) If yes, what?

Yes, I workout when I have time either before or after work. It typically tends to be after the long work day and I've found that strength conditioning and cardio help me a lot.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

- a) If yes, what?

I do. As previously mentioned, I like to do sports which doesn't just have physical benefits, but also helps my mental health. Additionally, I practice meditation and prefer styles that focus on deep breathing and remaining in the present moment.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

Going for longer walks during my break has helped me let my thoughts go, especially when I'm feeling stressed. It is very important to give myself that time to process my feelings and anything that is going on at work.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

We are constantly encouraging employees to take breaks and go for walks around the office or building. We also encourage employees to take walking meetings to allow them to get up and move and get outside, but still be productive and have meetings. Our medical benefit plan has discounts on gym memberships, so we encourage staff to join local gyms at a discounted rate.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

We brought in our Benefit Advisor to share with our employees the benefits RRM offers. An example of this would be the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) allows employees and their families to talk with a counselor for free for 6 sessions per individual. Also, one of our employees is trained in meditation and breathing to help with coping with stress, so we had the employee give a staff wide zoom training on the art of breathing. Another example would be that we brought in a massage therapist to all of our offices to provide 10-minute massages to staff which was paid by the company.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

Our Human Resources team will meet with staff to learn more about where the stress is coming from. Some instances in the past have been a result from too many projects at once or some team members who felt they were managing or coordinating too much staff, etc. After learning more, Human Resources, the Manager and the employee dealing with stress will meet to discuss ways to take workload or people off of that employee. We always try to remind the employees of the benefits offered to them as well, such as EAP.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

We train the managers to keep workload in mind as they review employee timecards and to notice patterns of staff working more than their scheduled hours and talk with that staff member to check-in on how they are doing and feeling. We frequently create and schedule social events throughout the week to get employees up and out of their desks, away from their computers. Our staff loves food, so we always incorporate some sort of food with our events. It's important to have our managers during their manager meetings when they schedule staff for the following week to keep giving the same employees a lot of work but to spread out the work amongst other employees as well. Something else that has helped is sending out staff surveys to get the pulse on how our people, departments and offices are feeling. Most importantly, we try and reduce stress before it happens or gets too heightened.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

We are always encouraging staff to use their Paid Time Off (PTO) and take time off. We also stay quite flexible, so if an employee worked a lot of hours earlier in the week, we allow them to leave early later in the week. Actually listening to

employees when they say they are stressed out or are working a lot of hours is something all of us in HR take seriously. Again with flexibility, we allow employees to work from home when needed and especially if that helps them feel less stressed.

Appendix V

Interview 3

General Information

Date: 08.12.21

Duration of interview: 50 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee III

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee III

2. How old are you?

49 years old.

3. What company do you work for?

I worked at Company C. I was in investment banking for 9 years and then at Company C for 14.

4. What is your job role?

I had a job progression from Manager of Compensation to Managing Director of Global Compliance.

5. How long have you been in this position?

3 years

6. How long have you been working in this field?

23 years

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

It was me, it was my team, it was, I mean it was pervasive. So, this is the problem, I was experiencing my own burnout, as was my team because we were asked always to do more with less and you know, the company outsourced HR, and the HR that was left was meant to protect the company. So basically, it results in layoffs, so I before I was laid off, was able to reassign a good portion of my junior team to other roles within Company C or help the get jobs outside of Company C. The more senior and the more money you made, there was no saving any of us and that was by design. So, burnout, they don't care. It was blatantly ignored. And if you couldn't keep up then you were out the door, and that was really what it was. As a manager, my perspective was you hire the best of the best, and you created an environment where they can thrive, so for the people's whose jobs I was able to save and place elsewhere, that was a win. For the rest of us, it was honestly networking, nepotism, finding good lawyers so we could lawyer up and get the best packages we could, because no one was trying to help us, they were just trying to push us out.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

I'm gonna go with 12, because I was actually losing my hair.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Yeah, I always have gone to the gym to save myself so that was something I made time to do for myself every day. It was also me going to the gym at like 7 or 8 o'clock at night and then going back to my desk or working from home. It was a pause I chose to take in the day for myself. Closer to the end of my career, I started doing yoga and meditation, at the urging of my acupuncturist, who I was seeing for my hair loss. I did start incorporating meditation and yoga into my day as well.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Yes, for me it was the gym, it was yoga, it was definitely meditation. I did a lot of meditating in between meetings, or like the lunch hours that you never take. I had the luxury of having a private office, so I was able to shut my door and meditate for like 2-3 minutes. A lot of my staff would go into the bathroom to do it because not everybody had a private office, mainly it was open-floor plans. So, that's what I did for myself. I always made sure to take time for my friends when I wasn't working. That's pretty much how I maintained some semblance of sanity.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

The best one was meditation, because it was just like taking yourself out of a situation, even if it was just for 2 or 3 minutes to let yourself get your breathing under control and to settle your mind. That was the best thing that I was able to do with limited time. I mean, I had meetings where I was triple booked and if you're running from one to the next, you don't have time. So sometimes you have to do a walking meditation as you're walking from one meeting to the next meeting. That was the best thing to incorporate into the situation that I was in.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

At Company C, at least there was a gym at corporate headquarters. So that was at least an option. However, none of us ever took lunches or took the time to do it, but if you wanted to go before you started your workday or take an hour out after the workday, that was at least a really nice facility that we were able to take advantage of. In addition to the gym, we also had a medical center on site, so if you wanted to get your flu vaccination or if you were feeling unwell and needed medication we could go right down there. It was definitely great from an employee perspective, but also keep in mind those things on site also kept us on site. It was also a little self-serving to have those things at headquarters because that was one less reason for us to leave the building.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

They were not. This is a very easy question. There was really nothing for people's mental health, I mean, from an outsourced HR perspective, of course there were hotlines for suicide or depression, or if you needed therapists. Those things were available to us for free. Again, that portion of HR was outsourced, but those resources were available to us. That was the extent of it, the rest was something you had to initiate yourself. But at least we had it, a lot of companies don't.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

They fire you. It's really hard, you really have to manage it on your own and as a manager, you can try to create a space and an environment for people to succeed. But also as a manager you're not really given those resources, because they're constantly downsizing, they're constantly asking more of you, they're constantly outsourcing, so you know, a lot of people, the joke was "are you getting promoted this year" "are you getting a bonus this year?" and it was like "no, you get to keep your job". There wasn't a lot of support, there really wasn't. It was a very much sink or swim situation. As a manager, you try to continue to create a cohesive team, you try to be empathetic and let people recognize that they are in a challenging situation, and that you recognize it and that you appreciate it. And even if that's the line that you're towing for your team, that wasn't the support you were getting as a manager. What I was given as guidance and protocol is not something I would ever pass on to my team because I would probably give them all a stroke, so I tried to be very cognizant of like not sending emails at 2 in the morning. I had my email setup to blast out emails at 8 in the morning. It was a very fine balance of managing corporate instructions and actually being a human-being to your team.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

It's definitely not proactive. It's extremely passive. Again, HR was outsourced, especially those type of roles. Human interest roles are definitely outsourced, and again, making the hotlines available, it's a robust online system. There were 800 numbers that you can call. They were easy to find, so that was good. But it was very passive. There was no proactive. All my coping mechanisms were self-taught. I had to figure that out for myself because nobody was offering that to me. I just knew that if I'm physical that was working for me. And if I'm talking to other people that I was managing, that's when yoga and meditation were suggested but that wasn't something that I could have found being offered or available through the company.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

They are not. From my experience, either from my vendors or my team, or other colleagues is that corporate is a very fear-based hierarchy and there was very much a threat that you'll lose your job if you don't keep up with the pace. So rather than helping people with the stress, they added to the stress because you just have to keep up or you don't have a job anymore.

Appendix VI

Interview 4

General Information

Date: 09.12.21

Duration of interview: 40 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee IV

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee IV

2. How old are you?

29 years old

3. What company do you work for?

Company D

4. What is your job role?

My official title is Scrum master / Delivery Manager

5. How long have you been in this position?

I started working at Company D during January 2020. It's been pretty much 2 years now.

6. How long have you been working in this field?

I've been working in tech for 2 years. Before my experience was in Telecommunications.

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

I've experienced periods of burnout in my previous job. There were a number of factors that contributed to my burnout such as the competitive working nature between colleagues to outshine one another, the overall company culture and department sub-culture of typically unrealistic expectations for output and productivity. I ended up leaving the company to pursue a different life abroad.

In my current role, burnout is something that I try to observe and ensure its caught early with the teams I support. It can be observed through different cues, behaviors and moods. It's also something I try to encourage employees to bring up verbally if they're feeling themselves reaching a limit of mental exhaustion.

If there is a satisfactory level of psychological safety and trust existing within the team or department. Employees are more likely to share how they're feeling in regards to burnout. If burnout is identified, we'll look into ways to mitigate

additional stress such as prioritization techniques, off-loading and suggesting to schedule some vacation.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

I'm pretty lucky in my current job. I would say that I experience a 6 with my stress levels from work. In my previous role it was much higher.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

a) If yes, what?

I've always found sports to be the most effective way to support my physical health. I do exercises that range anywhere from running to weight lifting. I workout about 6 days per week.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

a) If yes, what?

I do occasionally. It's usually not built into my routine, however when I am experiencing higher workloads, many deadlines, or just when I am experiencing more stress, I will resort to some mindfulness apps like Headspace.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

All of the things I just mentioned help me cope with my stress levels. Spending time with my friends and enjoying hobbies such as music and dancing also help.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

The company has provided all employees with a working from home allowance to spend on ergonomic office equipment. They also offer regular virtual Pilates, HIIT and yoga sessions. This spring we also have a company ski trip to Switzerland which everyone is looking forward to.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

When someone in my team is experiencing an overwhelming amount of stress we take the time to sit and talk with them and figure out how we can take some of the stress away. It's not always stress from the job that is trickling into their work lives and sometimes getting them to acknowledge that helps them separate the two. The company also offers coaching sessions through a third party where employees can book a session with a qualified individual to discuss anything that the employee has on their mind. On top of that, the company also offers all-expenses paid trips to European countries in the winter and summer periods, like the ski trip I mentioned a moment ago.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

The company provides internal guides, knowledge sharing opportunities and learning tools that are aimed at preventing high levels of stress for employees. Like I mentioned before, we always try to sit down with the employee and figure out what is the root cause of the stress to better understand how we may help them cope with it. We also send out frequent surveys to assess employees stress levels to ensure no one is reaching burnout.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

Personally, I think the best way the company is proactively helping employees cope with their stress is by offering different outlets and services for them to talk with a trained professional. At the end of the day, the people in HR and myself are not educated or trained to deal with someone experiencing really low points in their lives. We try to be there for them and listen, however if the issue is something very serious or deep, sometimes we can't tackle it on our own.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

Stress prevention strategies such as the benefits listed above which help physical and mental well-being have proven to keep employees healthy and happy. There are also workshops and seminars from time to time which aim to train us in specific techniques such as breathwork and time management.

Appendix VII

Interview 5

General Information

Date: 13.12.21

Duration of interview: 60 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee V

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee V

2. How old are you?

I am 29 years old.

3. What company do you work for?

Company E

4. What is your job role?

I work as a Talent Acquisition Manager

5. How long have you been in this position?

I just started this role about 8 months ago.

6. How long have you been working in this field?

I've been working in HR for 2.5 years now.

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

We are used to experiencing high peaks of workload. The team capacity is usually overstretched and that led to several colleagues leaving on 3 to 6 months sick leave due to burnout. This is one of the reasons why we have big attrition numbers since the pandemic started. Home office is also damaging the team spirit, the little social interaction face to face and the overall positive mindset.

On a personal level, there are periods when the work is that much that it's overwhelming. It's a fast paced growing company and it's expected to be at that level. On the positive side, we are learning fast and building a great career behind all that stress.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

Currently it is very stressful because we are understaffed. Instead of 5 people on the team, we are only 2. And it will take months to build up the team again and bring the newbies up to speed, plus the holiday season. Simultaneously the business expectations are very high and we have very demanding stakeholders and goals. This is very frustrating and demotivating. That being said, I would rate my work-related stress levels at a 9 or 10.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

a) If yes, what?

In this current position there is a constant fight with one self to find the balance and the time to do some physical activity. I realise I'm doing less sport and physical activity than ever before in my life due to my current work. I try to do stretching trainings regularly, and a long walk a day (10.000 steps). I suffer from strong back pain due to long working hours so keep moving my body and changing positions usually helps. My new goal is to introduce a routine back in and really prioritise my hobbies, my free time and physical activity.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

a) If yes, what?

No not particularly. I tried mindfulness and meditation but ended up leaving those activities as they didn't really resonate with me.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

Any activity that involves serotonin or endorphins. I'm always gravitating toward the same kind of activities, mostly around friends, dancing, clubbing if there's a good DJ in town, cooking a nice recipe for someone, wine tasting with a friend, having a long bath, watching my favourite show or read my favorite book. I love reading and learning about aesthetics: fashion, interior design, art, photography, it really helps to relax on a day with a lot of work. I also tried counselling with a company psychologist but did not continue after some sessions.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

The company's doctor includes regular check-ups for us employees. Company D also provides free training and other gym activities.

- **Eye Check-up | The G37 examination is an occupational health check-up for workstations with computer screens. The company doctor shows you how to make your workstation ergonomic and conducts an eye test to check your vision.**
- **Open consultation | During an open clinic you can ask the company doctor any questions about your health in the workplace, physical complaints and also any private concerns.**
- **Ergonomic advice | The company doctor gives you tips on how to set up your table, chair and monitor ergonomically. This improves your posture and avoids pain.**
- **Travel medical | If business travel is undertaken in countries with extreme climate conditions and infection risk, an occupational health check-up by a tropical medicine specialist or company doctor is required. The company doctor will advise you of all vaccinations you need and provide you with information about the destination country during a G35 consultation.**

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

The Health Team at Company D is committed to helping employees maximize their well-being, prevent illnesses and get the support they need when they experience physical or mental health issues.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

We offer sessions with therapists, psychologists and counsellors to help with these topics. Our internal Employee Assistance Service (EAS) and our external Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offer holistic interventions for our employees in any state of physical and mental health. Both services include an assessment and short-term consultation with professional consultants. They will advise you on how to circumvent a crisis and identify opportunities inside and outside of Company D.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress? Apart from the previously mentioned, there are different initiatives and sessions throughout the year. On a weekly basis we have some focus time blockers, avoiding meetings, interviews and other kinds of appointments. Additionally, we have a weekly session called Mastermind where we have 2 rounds of 40 min of focus time for certain tasks of our choice, followed by 20 min stretching session and 5 min of meditation. I experienced great results in those sessions and I achieved sometimes more tasks than in one whole day.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress? We proactively talk about workload and stress with our leads, trying to find support in resources, external support, freelancing work, etc. Unfortunately, it's very slow, by the time we get approval, and eventually get the support, it's sometimes too late.

Appendix VIII

Interview 6

General Information

Date: 15.12.21

Duration of interview: 30 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee VI

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee VI

2. How old are you?

I am 27 years old.

3. What company do you work for?

I work at a company called Company F. We are a computer software company specializing in digital events.

4. What is your job role?

I work as a recruiter.

5. How long have you been in this position?

I have been in this position for about a year.

6. How long have you been working in this field?

I've been working in HR for 3 years.

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

I don't have personal experience being burnt out, however in my role, I have dealt with team members who have reached distressed states due to many reasons. I can't go too into detail about what has happened, but we have had some experiences with mental health that needed urgent attention.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

I'm not really a person who gets stressed in general, so for me my work-related stress is around a 1 or 2.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

- a) If yes, what?

I enjoy working out during my free time. Specifically weight lifting has made me a lot stronger, both physically and mentally. I even made a home gym during the pandemic to make sure I could continue it.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

- a) If yes, what?

Weight lifting. Working out allows me to focus on something else than stressful things happening in my life. I'm focused on a goal, I'm always working out with friends, and group emulation motivates way more. During a pandemic, it's easy to feel guilty after going to a party and risking getting or spreading covid. But to work out in the fresh air, I wouldn't feel guilty to take this risk. This helps me mentally to feel good about myself.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

Socializing, sport, parties, making music. Previously mentioned working out also helps me vacate my mind.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

There isn't too much the organization is doing actually. They offer us weekly back wellness sessions and that's it.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

There is a hotline we can call to talk to a professional. It's anonymous, the HR department receives an invoice but there is no name on it.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

Usually employees will get time off if they work overtime. So if the employee is experiencing high stress levels because of a high workload, then they will be rewarded with the time off in the end.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

Mindful leadership trainings for leaders to make sure their team members are staying healthy and happy. We all see the importance that proper leadership has on the rest of the team and company overall.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

It's kind of similar to the previous answer. By ensuring the leadership is acting accordingly and motivating the employees, we hope that this will take away the stress from occurring.

Appendix IX

Interview 7

General Information

Date: 19.12.21

Duration of interview: 40 minutes

Interviewee: Interviewee VII

Interviewer: Gavin Trudeau

1. What is your name?

Interviewee VII

2. How old are you?

38 years old

3. What company do you work for?

Company G

4. What is your job role?

I work as an Enterprise Sales Manager.

5. How long have you been in this position?

I've been in this position for 3 years.

6. How long have you been working in this field?

It's been 9 years since I've been working in this field.

7. What is your experience with burnout (personal or dealing with team members/colleagues)?

From a personal perspective, I have experienced different degrees of burnout throughout my career. The times where I have felt the most significant burnout were due to a combination of components which left me feeling stuck in a particular role or company. These factors included a lack of support from leadership, little to no recognition for achievements (either in the form of gratitude or financial incentives), environments where peer relationships were purely competitive rather than collaborative, along with a lack of vertical mobility or career growth opportunities.

As a manager for a number of years, we have looked to combat burnout by creating a workspace that is collaborative, celebrates individual and team achievements, and incorporates personal growth goals as elements of a person's annual and quarterly targets. People Leaders are expected to hold weekly one-on-one meetings with each of their team members and create an environment

where employees can openly talk through topics affecting their day to day work life.

8. How would you rate your work-related stress levels?

Right now, I'd say my work-related stress would fall at a 3 on that scale.

9. Do you do any activities to support your physical well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Yes, some employees engage in lunchtime activities such as running/exercise groups; I meet at a minimum weekly with a colleague to surf before going into work.

10. Do you do any activities to support your mental well-being?

a) If yes, what?

Yes, I work a hybrid schedule where I am in the office 3 days a week and 2 days from home. When working from home, I periodically take breaks to walk my dogs or do other activities to relieve stress.

11. What activities help you cope with your stress levels?

Daily walks, lunch outside of the office with colleagues and exercise before or after work are a few of the most important things that help me cope with any elevated stress levels.

12. How is the organization supporting the physical well-being of employees?

My current company does not have a formalized plan relating to physical exercise, etc. however they do provide flexibility to pursue outside activities which support physical well-being. For example, they allowed flexibility with my schedule so I could volunteer as water safety for a Paralympic-style surfing competition recently. In previous companies that I've worked at, the company provided a monthly stipend specifically for physical activities such as monthly gym membership, yoga classes, ski or snowboard lift tickets, etc.

13. How is the organization supporting the mental well-being of employees?

As a startup we don't have any formal policies, however the company is very flexible to support people based on their individual needs or pursuits outside of work.

14. How does the organization support employees that experience high levels of stress?

If we began to notice someone on the team who was experiencing an abnormal amount of stress, and we could tell that it was damaging their psychological well-being, we would address these scenarios on a person-by-person basis.

15. How does the organization proactively help employees cope with their stress?

We try to facilitate as many social interactions throughout the office after work to encourage the employees to mingle and have that social interaction. During Covid it was really tough for us to do this, but we always had something available via Zoom.

16. How is the organization supporting employees to reduce stress?

Like I said earlier, we don't have a formal plan in place for physical activities, however we do allow flexible working times which has been shown to reduce some of the stress of our employees. Many colleagues have families so having the flexible working times is useful for them

Statutory Declaration

I declare on oath that I completed this work on my own and that information which has been directly or indirectly taken from other sources has been noted as such. Neither this, nor a similar work, has been published or presented to an examination committee.

San Luis Obispo, 29.12.21

Harvin Trudeau

First name, name

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The usage rights to empirical data collected by me in the course of this academic paper are transferred to Munich Business School: Researchers of Munich Business School may use these empirical data for work based on this paper. They are obliged to name in their research papers by whom the data was collected. Any transfer of the data on my part requires the prior consent of Munich Business School.

San Luis Obispo, 29.12.21

Harvin Trudeau

First name, name