

Factors Contributing to a Burnout and Coping Strategies of Administrative Personnel of a State University

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses on the factors that contribute to burnout and the coping strategies of administrative personnel of a state university. The study examines employees lived experiences using a qualitative phenomenological approach in order to understand the social, organizational, and psychological aspects of burnout in higher education settings. Applying Creswell's (2013) phenomenological methodology, data were gathered by conducting in-depths interviews with participants who were specifically chosen and they were then examined using thematic assessment. The study showed that the main causes of burnout were heavy workloads, poor of administrative assistance and lack of rewards and recognition. These variables were further impacted by demographic factors such years of experience, employment position, sex, and age. Participants experiencing role overload, diminished motivation, and emotional fatigue. Despite these challenges, they employed a ranged of coping strategies categorized into problem-focused coping, emotion focused coping and social support. The study underlines the significance of employee centered mental health program, work life balance and institutional appreciation. In order to improve well-being and job satisfaction, it suggests putting into practice focused treatments that recognize both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating demands and cultivate a positive work environment.

KEYWORDS: Burnout, coping strategies, administrative personnel, work-life balance, phenomenology, qualitative research

I. INTRODUCTION

Job burnout was first identified in the 1970s as a career crisis of professionals working with people in some capacity. Subsequent research has established that burnout was neither a passing phase of baby boomers' entry into the workforce nor a minor problem easily resolved. Instead, burnout has persisted (Leiter, Bakker, & Maslach 2014). Despite a considerable body of knowledge about the nature of job burnout, its causes, and its consequences, burnout continues as a major career crisis in the twenty-first century (Leiter, Bakker, & Maslach 2014).

The persistence of burnout over time and its prevalence around the world support the idea that burnout reflects a fundamental challenge of working life (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2008; Leiter et al., 2014). People do not simply shrug off frustrations at work, but react in ways that are reflected in their energy (exhaustion), involvement (cynicism), and efficacy. That quality of people was not specific to late twentieth-century America, but was a pervasive, widespread phenomenon (Leiter et al., 2014). A lot of people work in environments that can lead to burnout. Some find it difficult to meet high demands with insufficient resources. Some people feel cut off from the high ideals that their bosses profess but show little real dedication to. For inadequate pay, some people perform boring, and unenjoyed. These and other changes in the nature of work have implications for employees' vulnerability to burnout (Ten Brummelhuis et. al., 2012' Leiter et al., 2014).

In the Philippines is similar to global trends, it is made more difficult by problems like understaffing, political appointments, little opportunity for career advancement, and insufficient institutional support Aquinaldo & Rungduin, (2021). State university administrative staff frequently perform a variety of tasks, from clerical work to coordination, without receiving proper pay or recognition. The Civil Service Commission (CSE, 2016), in their national report, they acknowledged these issues, emphasizing that many workers in the public sector, especially those in education, deal with heavy workloads, a lack of clear promotion procedures, and limited mental health support. It is crucial to comprehend how administrative employees manage stress at work in order to enhance their well-being, lower attrition, and guarantee institutional sustainability and efficiency—particularly in light of the education sector's growing demands for digital and bureaucratic solutions.

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This study aims to close this gap by investigating the causes of burnout and the coping mechanisms used by state university administrative staff. The study intends to offer evidence-based suggestions that can guide organizational changes, policy improvements, and mental health initiatives at the institutional and national levels, by focusing on both problem-focused and emotion focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological technique, to investigate administrative staff members' lived experiences with burnout and coping strategies. According to Creswell (2013) that phenomenology is appropriate for this study as it seeks to understand the essence of experiences as perceived by individuals in their natural settings. It enables the researcher to examine in depth how participants personally perceive stress, workload, organizational culture, and the methods they use to cope with psychological and emotional strain.

B. Research Setting and Participants

Administrative personnel/staff from several departments will be carried out at the State University of Northern Negros. In 2015, Palinkas et al., a purposive sampling used to select participants who have at least two (2) years of experience in administrative roles, on which under the assumption that they have had sufficient exposure to potential burnout and coping mechanisms in their work environment. According to Guest, Bounce, & Johnson (2006) the target sample size of the participant it should be 15-20, a number deemed adequate for reaching a data saturation in phenomenological studies. This study it will involves the coordination of human resource and with department heads and dissemination of invitation via email or hand in personally.

C. Data Collection Methods

Kyale & Brinkman (2009) that through semi structured in depth interviews, data will be collected. This method it allows for flexibility in probing deeper into responses while maintaining the consistency of the participants. With this approach an interview guide will be developed based on identified in the literature, that includes workload, emotional fatigue, perceived support, and coping strategies (Mashlach & Leiter, 2016; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2024).

Depending on participant preferences each interview will be conducted in-person or through a secure video conferencing platform, with a duration of approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews will be audio recorded and verbatim transcribed for analysis with the participants' permission.

D. Ethical Considerations

The university's Research Ethics Committee will grant ethical clearance. An informed consent form outlining the goals, methods, confidentiality, and the freedom to discontinue participation at any moment without repercussions will be given to participants. To maintain confidentiality and adhere to ethical standards, data will be anonymized and stored safely. (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

E. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six main steps of this approach are:

- 1) getting to know the data;
- 2) creating preliminary codes;
- 3) looking for themes;
- 4) evaluating themes;
- 5) defining and labeling themes; and
- 6) creating the report. Both inductive and deductive coding will be used; themes will be drawn from the data and theoretical frameworks from the literature on coping and burnout.

The study employs Lincoln and Guba's 1985, to guarantee reliability. Criteria: dependability (by audit trail), confirmability (by reflexive journaling), transferability (by thick description), and credibility (by member checking).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Workloads

Several administrative staff regularly work beyond official hours and are often assigned tasks outside their job description, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. Employees described their workloads as excessive, overlapping, and often undefined, especially during enrollment, budgeting, and compliance periods.

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In 2003, Winefield et al., identifies workload as a primary contributor to burnout among university employees, and according to Mashlach et al., (1996), excessive demands without corresponding support or autonomy can lead to emotional exhaustion, one of the core dimensions of burnout. In addition, Kinman and Wray's (2018) mentions that chronic overload and role conflict are pervasive stressors in higher education administration. In 2011, according to Tarwaka; Soelton et al., 2020, there are several dimensions and indicators in workload, namely

- 1) Time load, shows the amount of time available in planning, implementation and monitoring tasks, too much overtime and there is almost no free time.
- 2) Mental effort load, which means the amount of mental effort in carrying out a job. Very little mental effort is needed with full awareness or very little concentration needed, enough mental effort is needed with awareness or sufficient concentration is needed, very necessary mental effort and high concentration of activities that are very complex so that full attention is needed.

B. Administrative Support

In Rothman & Barkhuizen's (2008), said that limited communication and poor supervisory relationships burnout among the university staff. Further, according to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), emphasize that lack of supportive leadership weakens job resources, thereby increasing job strains. Lack of a solid support system can lower morale and make workers feel alone, particularly in highly bureaucratic settings.

According to Smith (2020), that administrative support it encompasses a wide range of tasks, including communication, facilitation, documentation, scheduling, and overall operational assistance, which collectively contribute to a well-functioning workplace. Administrative support plays a critical role in enhancing organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction. Further, in 2018, Aderson, administrative personnel/staff often act as the backbone of institutional operations, ensuring compliance, coordination, and resource management. 2019, Johnson & Rivera, mentioned that strong administrative backing enables smoother workflow and reduces the cognitive load on professionals, allowing them to focus on core tasks. Brown 2021, add that effective administrative support is directly linked to increased productivity and morale within organizations, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, and government services.

According to Brown 2021, research has shown that administrative officials who engaged in supportive practices – providing access to mental health resources, providing flexible schedules and recognizing the employee contributions can significantly reduce burnout. In the end, creating a more resilient and healthy workforce requires administrative support that places a high value on efficiency, empathy, and open communication.

C. Recognition and Rewards

According to Herzberg, 2019, for his theory two-factor theory, recognition is a significant motivator that contributes to higher levels of staff performance and retention. In 2017, Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, modern research reinforces this idea that indicating both monetary and non-monetary rewards can influence employee attitudes and behaviors of the employee positively.

According to Brun & Dugas (2008), it emphasizes that personnel who feel recognized are more engaged and committed to their job or work. In 2012, Nelson add that timely and meaningful recognition is often more impactful than financial incentives alone. According to Deci & Ryan (2000), excessive reliance on extrinsic rewards without proper recognition can reduce intrinsic motivation over time. Further, that tangible benefits such as bonuses, salary increases, and promotions shown a significantly affect performance. These have shown a significantly affect performance - especially when they perceived a fair and linked to clear performance metrics, Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson (2013).

In 2024, according to Leiter & Maslach, identified that lack of recognition as a critical mismatch in the workplace/organization that contributes to burnout. Additionally, in 2014 Barkhuizen et al., discuss that inadequate rewards both extrinsic and intrinsic can reduce employee motivation and job satisfaction in the university.

D. Work-life Balance

In 2017, according to Greenhaus et al. in Putri; Soelton et al., 2020, balance is generally seen as a lack of conflict. But if it is connected and incorporated into the understanding of work life balance, balance or balance here comes from effectiveness (functioning well, productively, success) and positive (satisfying, happy) effects both for work and family roles. Greenhaus et al in Putri, defines work life balance as the degree to which an individual aligns involvement and satisfaction in work roles and family roles.

According to F. Moore, 2027; Soelton et al., 2020, Work Life Balance is well defined as a situation where workers feel able to balance work and personal life or other commitments. Schermerhorn, Hunt and Obsorn also defines work life balance as a person's ability to balance work demands with their personal and family needs, Soelton et al., 2020 and as for Hudson, 2005, he defines

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the work balance in the broad sense is defined as the level of satisfaction of involvement or compatibility between multiple roles in one's life

According to Kinman & Wray (2018), administrative personnel in higher education was reported that a significant work encroachment on personal life. In 2021, Gillespie et al., discuss when organization demands consistently interfere with personal time, it leads to reduced psychological recovery and role conflict, both of which are precursors to burnout. To add, Schaufeli & Baker (2004), lack of support for well-being initiatives or policies promoting flexibility exacerbates this problem.

According to Hill & Hawkins et al., (2001), work life balance refers to the extent to which individuals can simultaneously balance emotions, demands behavior and time from paid work, family and personal duties.

IV. LEVELS OF COPING STRATEGIES

Lazarus & Folkman (1984), defined coping as 'those changing cognitive and behavioral efforts developed for managing the specific external and/or internal demands judged as exceeding or surpassing the individual's own resources' (p. 164). According to Lazarus & Folkman, strategies have two broad categories, first, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping represents an attempt to respond directly to the stressful situation, while emotion-focused coping consists of attempts to alter the emotional response to stressful events. Additionally, avoidance coping represents the refusal to face problematic or stressful situations (Billings AG & Moos RH, 1981; Demerouti, E. 2015).

This interrelatedness of problem- and emotion-focused coping makes it more useful to think of the two as complementary coping functions rather than two completely distinct, independent categories of coping (Lazarus 2006; T. Mayordomo-Rodríguez et al., 2014). In 1989, Carver et al., and Lazarus and Folkman (1984), argue that active forms of coping—coping with the problem event directly—are successful because they positively impact adaptation, mental health, and well-being; and that passive forms of coping—avoiding confrontation, avoidance behavior in general, and denial—are less successful.

A. Problem-Focused Coping

In 200, Williams and McGillicuddy-De Lisi, indicated that problem-focused coping styles and strategies are linked to high well-being, while emotion-focused coping is associated with low well-being in men and women alike. Problem-focused coping actively tackling the source of stress by looking for answers, establishing objectives, and acting constructively. According to Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, (1989), strategy is more likely to be used when individual perceives the stressor as controllable.

In the workplace, administrative personnel often apply problem-focused strategies through task management, prioritization, seeking support, and organizational planning to reduce workload-related pressure (Kinman & Wray, 2018). Research shows that high levels of problem-focused coping are associated with lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Individuals who utilize this strategy tend to feel more competent and in control, which mitigates emotional exhaustion and increases resilience (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

B. Emotion-Focused Coping

According to Lazarus & Folkman, (1984), emotion-focused coping, in contrast, involves strategies that aim to manage emotional responses to stress rather than changing the stressor itself. This includes venting, denial, avoidance, acceptance, and seeking emotional support. Further, Barkhuizen et al., 2014, administrative personnel may resort to emotion-focused strategies when they feel they have limited control over institutional policies, workload distribution, or recognition systems. In addition, emotion-focused coping can provide temporary emotional relief, excessive reliance on it—especially avoidance or denial—can lead to greater psychological distress over time (Carver et al., 1989). However, positive forms of emotion-focused coping, such as seeking social support or reframing challenges, can contribute to long-term well-being (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

C. Social Support

The role of social support in mitigating the effects of occupational stress has been a well-researched area of organizational psychology for almost four decades, Martha Knox Haly (2009). Social support acts as a buffer against the negative psychological effects of stress and is particularly effective in high demand environments like the academic workplace, Cohen & Wills (1985). According to, Folkman & Moskowitz (2004) that social support not only aids in emotional regulation but also facilitate the implementation of coping strategies such as problem solving and reframing stressors.

According to recent research, social support helps mitigate the negative effects of occupational stress and burnout. Halbesleben (2006) highlighted that employees with higher levels of perceived organizational and co-worker support reportedly significant lower emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In addition, administrative employees in higher education who felt supported by supervisors and peers exhibited better psychological resilience and job satisfaction, Kinman & Wray (2018).

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Furthermore, social support improves coping strategies that are problem-focused as well as emotion-focused. According to, Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) seeking advice from colleagues can reduce ambiguity and workload stress, while emotional encouragement may strengthen one's sense of belonging and competence. Barkhuizen et al., (2014) believe that social supports play a crucial role in preventing burnout, especially when institutional mechanisms are in place to foster a collaborative and communicative work environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study concludes that administrative employee/personnel in a public or state university experience burnout as a result of several interconnected factors, particularly excessive workloads, poor administrative support and insufficient or lack recognition and rewards. Limited professional growth possibilities and organizational rigidity exacerbate these concerns. The degree of burnout varies according to demographic factors like age, sex, job title, and years of experience, showing that individual views and response to work-related stress or burnout are influenced by their personal and professional backgrounds.

Through employing a variety of coping mechanisms, the individuals showed resilience in the face of these difficulties. This involves problem-focused coping strategies like setting priorities for tasks and making plans; emotion-focused coping strategies like venting, reframing, and introspection; and asking friends, family, and coworkers for social support. Although these techniques aid in lessening the impacts of burnout, several individuals nonetheless expressed feelings of emotional weariness and decreased job satisfaction, indicating that institutional intervention is necessary.

This study emphasizes the significance of empowering staff members with adaptive coping strategies in addition to addressing the systemic causes of burnout. For the university administration to improve organizational performance and employee well-being, a comprehensive and proactive approach is necessary.

DISCLAIMER

The author thus certifies that the use of generative AI technologies, such as ChatGPT and Quillbot, was limited to editing, rewording, and modifying certain sections of this manuscript.

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COMPETING INTEREST

Author has declared that no competing interest exist.

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