

3

A Multidimensional Theory of Burnout

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Introduction

Job burnout is a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion; feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job; and a sense of ineffectiveness and failure (Maslach, 1982a; Maslach and Jackson, 1981b; Maslach and Leiter, 1997). The experience can impair both personal and social functioning. While some people may quit the job as a result of burnout, others will stay on, but will only do the bare minimum rather than their very best. This decline in the quality of work and in both physical and psychological health can be costly—not just for the individual worker, but for everyone affected by that person.

For many years, burnout has been recognized as an occupational hazard for various people-oriented professions, such as human services, education, and health care. The therapeutic or service relationships that such providers develop with recipients require an ongoing and intense level of personal, emotional contact. Although such relationships can be rewarding and engaging, they can also be quite stressful. Within such occupations, the prevailing norms are to be selfless and put others' needs first; to work long hours and do whatever it takes to help a client or patient or student; to go the extra mile and to give one's all. Moreover, the organizational environments for these jobs are shaped by various social, political, and economic factors (such as funding cutbacks or policy restrictions) that result in work settings that are high in demands and low in resources. Recently, as other occupations have become more oriented to 'high-touch' customer service, the phenomenon of burnout has become relevant for these jobs as well (Maslach and Leiter, 1997).

Despite the fact that practitioners had identified burnout as an important social problem in the workplace, it was a long time before it became a focus of systematic study by researchers (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). Thus, the development of a model of burnout was more of a grass-roots, 'bottom-up' process, grounded in the realities of people's experiences in the workplace, rather than a 'top-down' derivation

from a scholarly theory. The term itself illustrates this point: 'burnout' had popular origins, not academic ones. However, despite its evocative imagery and popular usage, burnout was initially a very slippery concept—there was no standard definition of it, although there was a wide variety of opinions about what it was and what could be done about it. Different people used the term to mean very different things, and so there did not always exist a basis for constructive communication about the problem and solutions for it (Maslach, 1982b). However, there was actually an underlying consensus about three core dimensions of the burnout experience, and subsequent research on this issue led to the development of a multidimensional theory of burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1981b; Maslach, 1993).

A Description of the Multidimensional Theory

Unlike unidimensional models of stress, the multidimensional theory conceptualizes burnout in terms of its three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993; Maslach and Jackson, 1981a, 1986). According to this theory, burnout is an individual stress experience embedded in a context of complex social relationships, and it involves the person's conception of both self and others.

Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. The major sources of this exhaustion are work overload and personal conflict at work. Workers feel drained and used up, without any source of replenishment. They lack enough energy to face another day or another person in need. The emotional exhaustion component represents the basic individual stress dimension of burnout.

Depersonalization refers to a negative, cynical, or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism. It usually develops in response to the overload of emotional exhaustion, and is self-protective at first—an emotional barrier of 'detached concern'. But the risk is that the detachment can turn into dehumanization. The depersonalization component represents the interpersonal dimension of burnout.

Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work. This lowered sense of self-efficacy has been linked to depression and an inability to cope with the demands of the job, and it can be exacerbated by a lack of social support and of opportunities to develop professionally. Workers experience a growing sense of inadequacy about their ability to help clients, and this may result in a self-imposed verdict of failure. The personal accomplishment component represents the self-evaluation dimension of burnout.

The significance of this three-dimensional model is that it clearly places the individual stress experience within a social context. What has been distinctive about burnout (as opposed to other kinds of stress reactions) is the interpersonal framework of the phenomenon. The centrality of relationships at work—whether it be relationships with clients, colleagues or supervisors—has always been at the heart of descriptions of burnout. These relationships are the source of both emotional strains

and rewards, they can be a resource for coping with job stress, and they often bear the brunt of the negative effects of burnout. Thus, if one were to look at burnout out of context, and simply focus on the individual exhaustion component, one would lose sight of the phenomenon entirely.

In this regard, the multidimensional theory is a distinct improvement over prior unidimensional models of burnout (e.g. Freudenberg and Richelson, 1980; Pines *et al.*, 1981) because it both incorporates the single dimension (exhaustion), and extends it by adding two other dimensions: response toward others (depersonalization) and response toward self (reduced personal accomplishment). The inclusion of these two dimensions adds something over and above the notion of an individual stress response and makes burnout much broader than established ideas of occupational stress.

Interestingly, these three components have actually appeared within most of the various discussions of burnout, even if they have not been considered explicitly within a multidimensional framework. For example, exhaustion has also been described as wearing out, loss of energy, depletion, debilitation, and fatigue; depersonalization has been described as negative or inappropriate attitudes towards clients, loss of idealism, and irritability; and reduced personal accomplishment has been described as reduced productivity or capability, low morale, withdrawal, and an inability to cope (for a more extensive analysis of these definitional issues, see Maslach, 1982b).

Development of the Theory

The initial work on burnout did not begin with a clearly-defined phenomenon or a particular theoretical model. Indeed, the research did not even begin with a focus on burnout at all. Rather, it emerged out of a program of research on emotion—how people understand their feelings and how they cope with these when they become especially intense (Maslach, 1993). There was very little in the way of relevant theory for addressing these issues. However, two constructs in the medical literature seemed germane. One of these was 'detached concern' (Lief and Fox, 1963), which referred to the medical profession's ideal of blending compassion with emotional distance. Although the practitioner is concerned about the patient's well-being, he or she recognizes that it is necessary to avoid over-involvement with the patient and to maintain a more detached objectivity. The second relevant concept was 'dehumanization in self-defense' (Zimbardo, 1970), which referred to the process of protecting oneself from overwhelming emotional feelings by responding to other people more as objects than as persons. For example, if a patient has a condition that is upsetting to see or otherwise difficult to work with, it may be easier for the practitioner to provide the necessary care if he or she thinks of the patient as a particular 'case' or 'symptom' rather than as a human being who is suffering. Both of these concepts seemed to shed some theoretical light on the issue of how people cope with strong emotional arousal.

Given that the two guiding concepts had their origins in the medical professions, the initial, exploratory interviews were with physicians and nurses. Subsequent interviews were conducted with people working in the area of mental health, includ-

ing psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, and hospice counselors. As a result of various referrals and serendipitous events, the interviews were expanded to professions in the human services and education, including social workers, ministers, teachers, prison guards, probation officers, and poverty lawyers. It was the latter group that described the experience as 'burnout', as did staff members in alternative therapeutic institutions (Freudenberger, 1975).¹ What seemed to link all these occupations was the focus on providing aid and service to people in need—in other words, the core of the job was the relationship between provider and recipient.

Similar themes emerged from these interviews, although the specific content differed as a function of the type of occupation. This evidence of a parallel pattern suggested that burnout was not just some idiosyncratic response to stress, but was a syndrome with some identifiable regularities (Maslach, 1976). First, it was clear that the provision of service or care can be a very demanding and involving occupation, and that emotional exhaustion is not an uncommon response to such job overload. The second component of depersonalization also emerged from these interviews, as people described how they tried to cope with the emotional stresses of their work. Moderating one's compassion for clients by maintaining an emotional distance from them ('detached concern') was viewed as a way of protecting oneself from intense emotional arousal that could interfere with the ability to function effectively on the job. However, an imbalance of excessive detachment and little concern seemed to lead staff to respond to clients in negative, callous, and dehumanized ways. Thus, excessive detachment, or depersonalization, could impair performance and be detrimental to the quality of care.

In addition to the interviews, on-site field observations began to provide a better feel for the situational context of the provider-recipient relationship. It was possible to see first-hand some of the job factors that had been described in earlier interviews, such as the high number of clients (caseload), prevalence of negative client feedback, and scarcity of resources. It was also possible to observe other, unreported aspects of the interaction between provider and client, such as non-verbal 'distancing' behaviors. The focus on both sides of the helping relationship (as opposed to just the one perspective of the provider) led to the development of some ideas about the role of the client in the burnout process (Maslach, 1978).

The next phase of the research involved a series of questionnaire survey studies that were designed to be a more standardized assessment, with larger samples, of the ideas that had emerged from the interviews. The initial surveys, which were more exploratory in nature, were conducted with staff of mental health institutions (Pines and Maslach, 1978) and day-care centers (Maslach and Pines, 1977; Pines and Maslach, 1980). The surveys focused on providers' emotional states and reactions to their clients (the two burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) and investigated whether these dimensions were correlated with certain job factors.

¹ This was not the first mention of burnout in print, however. The most famous citation is Graham Greene's *A Burnt Out Case* (1960), in which a spiritually tormented and disillusioned architect quits his job and withdraws into the African jungle. There are earlier cases as well, both fictional and non-fictional, that did not use the term 'burnout' but are judged to be describing a similar phenomenon (Bunisch, 1993; Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993).

The next set of survey studies was more systematic in its assessment of burnout because it was part of a psychometric research program to develop a standardized measurement tool. In addition to generating needed psychometric data, each study was designed to test some specific ideas about burnout. For example, a study of police officers and their spouses (Jackson and Maslach, 1982) obtained independent spouse ratings, which provided evidence of convergent validity for the measure; however, it also tested some hypotheses about the relationship between burnout and home life. Other studies combined useful psychometric data with investigations of how burnout is related to critical job factors, demographic variables, and coping strategies (Maslach and Jackson, 1982, 1984b, 1985).

At this point in the development of the theory, the key issues were to develop a more precise definition of burnout and to develop a standardized measure of it. The working definition of burnout, based on the interview data, consisted of two dimensions: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. For the next few years, Susan Jackson and I conducted an extensive program of psychometric research, collecting systematic data from hundreds of people in a wide range of health, social service, and teaching occupations (Maslach and Jackson, 1981b). Our findings confirmed the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but also revealed a third, separate dimension of feelings of reduced personal accomplishment. This empirically derived component was not inconsistent with the results of our earlier studies, but we had expected that such feelings would be one aspect of the other components and thus highly correlated with them. However, as a separate dimension, a feeling of reduced personal accomplishment is related conceptually to such phenomena as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982) and learned helplessness (Abramson *et al.*, 1978).

This psychometric research led to the development of a measure called the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which assesses all three of the burnout dimensions (Maslach and Jackson, 1981a). The MBI is now considered to be the standard tool for research in this field. The three-dimensional structure has been found consistently across a wide range of occupational samples in many different countries (e.g. Enzmann *et al.*, 1995; Leiter and Schaufeli, 1996). More psychometric research has been done on the MBI than on any other burnout measure, and its multidimensional conceptualization of burnout has made it particularly appropriate for theory-driven research.

There are now three versions of the MBI, designed for use with different occupations, which reflects the developing interest in this phenomenon (see Maslach *et al.*, 1996 for information and relevant psychometric research on all three forms of the MBI). The original version of the MBI (now known as the MBI-Human Services Survey, or MBI-HSS) was designed for use with people working in the human services, as it was these occupations that had the greatest continuing concern about burnout. A second version of the MBI (the MBI-Educators Survey, or MBI-ES) was developed for use by people working in educational settings.

Given the increasing interest in burnout within occupations that are not so clearly people-oriented, a third, more generic version of the MBI (the MBI-General Survey, or the MBI-GS) has now been developed. Here, the three components of the burnout construct are conceptualized in slightly broader terms, with respect to the

general job, and not just to the personal relationships that may be a part of that job. Thus, the three components are: Exhaustion, Cynicism (a distant attitude toward the job), and reduced Professional Efficacy.

New Theoretical Developments

At this stage of work on the phenomenon of burnout, there are two areas in which new theorizing, and subsequent empirical research, is taking place. The first of these areas is focusing on the contrasting, or opposite, state from burnout, namely *job engagement*. The second development involves a new framework for conceptualizing the key causal factors in burnout.

Engagement Burnout is one end of a continuum in the relationship people establish with their jobs. As a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness, it stands in contrast to the energetic, involved, and effective state of engagement with work. Recently, the multidimensional theory of burnout has been expanded to this other end of the continuum (Leiter and Maslach, 1998). Engagement is defined in terms of the same three dimensions as burnout, but the positive end of those dimensions rather than the negative. Thus, engagement consists of a state of high energy (rather than exhaustion), strong involvement (rather than cynicism), and a sense of efficacy (rather than a reduced sense of accomplishment).

This state is distinct from established constructs in organizational psychology such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, or job involvement. Organizational commitment focuses on an employee's allegiance to the organization that provides employment, while engagement focuses on the work itself. Job satisfaction is the extent to which the job is a source of need fulfillment and contentment, or a means of freeing employees from hassles or dissatisfiers; it does not encompass the person's relationship with the work itself. Job involvement is similar to the involvement aspect of engagement with work, but does not include the energy and effectiveness dimensions. Engagement with work provides a more complex and thorough perspective on an individual's relationship with work.

The extensive research on burnout has consistently found linear relationships of workplace conditions across the full range of the MBI subscales. Just as high levels of personal conflict are associated with high levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of conflict are strong predictors of low exhaustion. Conversely, high personal accomplishment is associated with supportive personal relationships, the enhancement of job-related skills at work and active participation in shared decision making. These patterns indicate that the opposite of burnout is not a neutral state, but a definite state of mental health and social functioning within the occupational domain. While the burnout concept describes a syndrome of distress that may arise from enduring problems with work, engagement describes a positive state of fulfillment.

The concept of a burnout-to-engagement continuum enhances our understanding of how the organizational context of work can affect workers' well-being. It recognizes the variety of reactions that employees can have to the organizational environment, ranging from the intense involvement and satisfaction of engagement, through indifference to the exhausted, distant, and discouraged state of burnout.

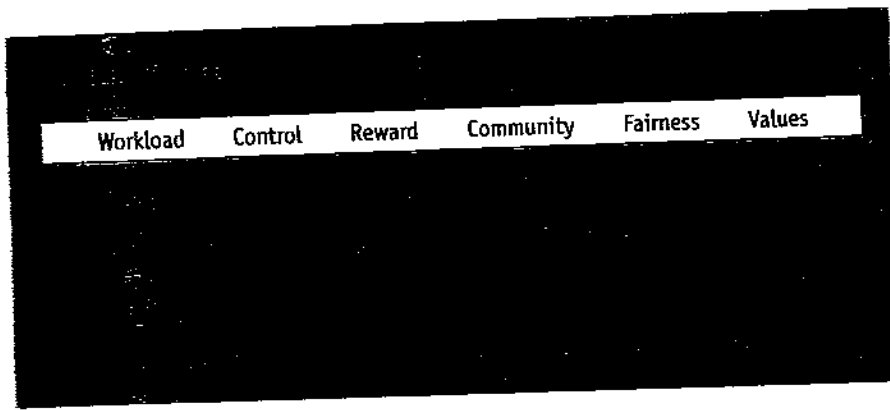
One important implication of the burnout–engagement continuum is that strategies to promote engagement may be just as important for burnout prevention as strategies to reduce the risk of burnout. A work setting that is designed to support the positive development of the three core qualities of energy, involvement, and effectiveness should be successful in promoting the well-being and productivity of its employees.

Job–person Mismatches Inherent to the fundamental concept of stress is the problematic relationship between the individual and the situation. In the case of job stress, the basic idea is that it is the result of a misfit between the person and the job. Some of the earliest models of organizational stress focused on this notion of job–person fit (French and Kahn, 1962; French *et al.*, 1982), and subsequent theorizing continues to highlight the importance of both individual and contextual factors (see Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). This basic approach would seem to be relevant for a theory of burnout, given that the research shows that burnout is largely a product of the organizational context, even if it is expressed on an individual level (Maslach and Leiter, 1997).

However, prior conceptualizations of job–person fit are limited in terms of their application to burnout. For example, the ‘person’ is usually framed in terms of personality or an accurate understanding of the job, rather than in terms of emotions or motivations or stress responses, and the ‘job’ is often defined in terms of specific tasks, and not the larger situation or organizational context. The notion of ‘fit’ is often presumed to predict such outcomes as choice of job/occupation or of organization (entry issues), or adjustment to the job (newcomer issues); in contrast, burnout involves a later point in the process, when the person has been working for a while and is experiencing a more chronic misfit between the self and the job. Thus, the theoretical challenge is to extend the job–person paradigm to a broader conceptualization of both person and job, and to combine that with models of job stress.

This challenge is beginning to be addressed by a new model of the causes of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). It proposes that the greater the gap, or mismatch, between the person and the job, the greater the likelihood of burnout. One new aspect of this approach is that the notion of mismatch (or misfit) is framed in terms of several constructs that are comparable between the worker and the workplace (e.g. values, job expectations) and thus allow a better evaluation of the individual within an organizational context. Secondly, whereas prior models of job–person fit predict that such fit produces certain outcomes (such as commitment, satisfaction, performance, and job tenure), this new model hypothesizes that burnout is an important mediator of this causal link. In other words, the mismatches lead to burnout, which in turn leads to various outcomes.

A third new aspect of this model is that it specifies not one, but six areas in which this mismatch can take place. In each area, the nature of the job is not in harmony with the nature of people, and the result is the increased exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy of burnout. On the other hand, when a better fit exists in these six areas, then engagement with work is the likely outcome. The six areas in which mismatches can occur are: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values



(see Figure 3.1). Each area of mismatch has a distinct relationship with burnout and engagement, as reflected in the extant research literature.

A brief summary of these six mismatches follows (see Maslach and Leiter, 1997, for a more complete presentation):

- *Work overload* occurs when job demands exceed human limits. People have to do too much in too little time with too few resources. When overload is a chronic job condition, not an occasional emergency, there is little opportunity to rest, recover, and restore balance.
- *Lack of control* occurs when people have little control over the work they do, either because of rigid policies and tight monitoring, or because of chaotic job conditions. Such lack of control prevents people from being able to solve problems, make choices, and have some input into the achievement of the outcomes for which they will be held accountable.
- *Insufficient reward* involves a lack of appropriate rewards for the work people do. This lack of recognition devalues both the work and the workers. Prominent among these rewards are external ones such as salary and benefits, but the loss of internal rewards (such as pride in doing something of importance and doing it well) can also be a critical part of this mismatch.
- *Breakdown of community* occurs when people lose a sense of positive connection with others in the workplace. Some jobs isolate people from each other, or make social contact impersonal. However, what is most destructive of community is chronic and unresolved conflict with others on the job. Such conflict produces constant negative feelings of frustration and hostility, and reduces the likelihood of social support.
- *Absence of fairness* occurs when there is a lack of a system of justice and fair procedures which maintain mutual respect in the workplace. Unfairness can occur when there is inequity of workload or pay, or when there is cheating, or when evaluations and promotions are handled inappropriately. If procedures for grievance or dispute resolution do not allow for both parties to have voice, then those will be judged as unfair.

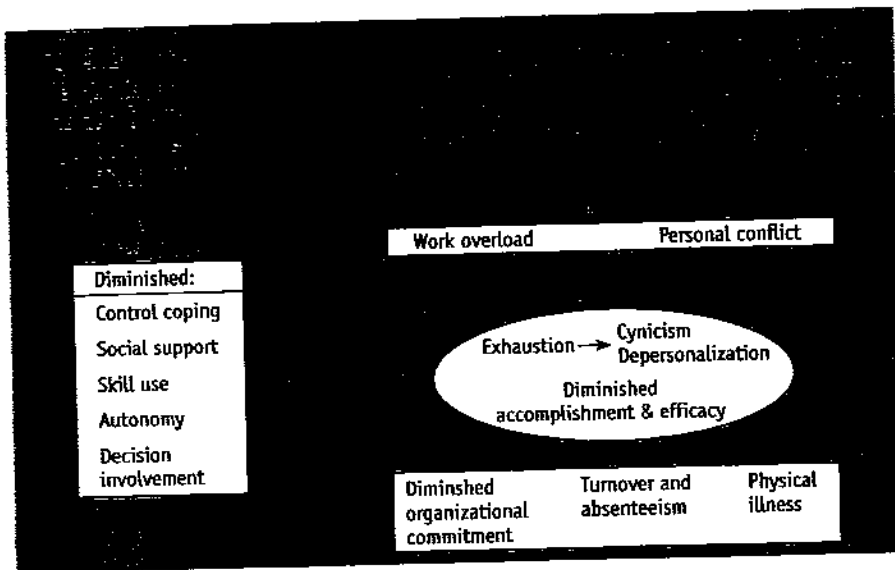
- *Value conflict* occurs when there is a mismatch between the requirements of the job and people's personal principles. In some cases, people might feel constrained by the job to do things that are unethical and not in accord with their own values. For example, they might have to tell a lie or be otherwise deceptive or not forthcoming with the truth. In other instances, people may be caught between conflicting values of the organization, as when there is a discrepancy between the lofty mission statement and actual practice, or when the organization undergoes major changes.

These six types of mismatches are not totally independent, but can be interrelated. For example, a mismatch in excessive workload may be linked to a mismatch in lack of control over the job. Currently, it is unclear whether some job-person mismatches are more important than others, although there is some initial speculation that values may be an important mediator of the relationship of the other five mismatches to burnout (Leiter and Maslach, in press). It is also an open question whether there is some minimum number of mismatches, or size of mismatch that will be more likely to produce burnout, and future research will need to address these and related issues.

The mismatches in these six critical areas of organizational life are not simply a list summarizing research findings from burnout studies. Rather, they provide a conceptual framework for the crises that disrupt the relationships people develop with their work. This approach emphasizes the social quality of burnout—it has more to do with the organizational context of the job than simply with the unique characteristics of an individual.

Research Linked to this General Theory

The empirical research on contributing factors has found that situational variables are more strongly predictive of burnout than are personal ones. In terms of antecedents of burnout, both job demands and a lack of key resources are particularly important. Work overload and personal conflict are the major demands, while the lack of such resources as control coping, social support, skill use, autonomy, and decision involvement seem to be especially critical. The consequences of burnout are seen most consistently in various forms of job withdrawal (decreased commitment, job dissatisfaction, turnover, and absenteeism), with the implication of a deterioration in the quality of care or service provided to clients or patients. Burnout is also linked to personal dysfunction, primarily in terms of impaired physical and mental health, although there is some evidence for increased substance abuse as well as marital and family conflicts. Figure 3.2 presents a diagrammatic summary of these major research findings, which have been discussed in a number of recent reviews (see Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Leiter and Maslach, 1998; Maslach *et al.*, 1996; and Schaufeli *et al.*, 1993). Rather than repeat these reviews, this section will focus on a number of important themes within the research literature.



Interrelationship of the Three Dimensions

The relative importance of the three dimensions of burnout, and their interrelationships, have been the subject of much theorizing and research. For example, in the early years of research using the newly-developed MBI, a common question had to do with whether MBI scores on the three dimensions could be combined to form a single overall index of burnout. This question was largely an attempt to simplify both the theory and the measure by reframing them in unidimensional terms. A related, but different question has focused on whether some dimensions are more important than others. Again, the thrust of this approach has been to argue for a unidimensional model, but this time in terms of the primacy of the exhaustion dimension, rather than an additive combination of the three. Such questions are no longer predominant in the field, as the superiority of the multidimensional theory has been well established. One of the main reasons for this is that the prior problems of analyzing a three-dimensional theory of burnout have been alleviated by the availability of statistical packages for structural analyses, such as LISREL (e.g. Joreskog and Sorbom, 1989). These analyses simultaneously consider distinct predictors for each of the three interrelated dimensions in the context of the interrelationships among them.

Of the three aspects of burnout, exhaustion is the most widely reported and the most thoroughly analyzed. Exhaustion is the central quality of burnout and the most obvious manifestation of this complex syndrome. When people describe themselves as experiencing burnout, they are most often referring to the experience of exhaustion. In fact, nurses who responded to an advertisement about burnout scored much higher than the average on exhaustion but only moderately higher on the other two aspects of the syndrome (Pick and Leiter, 1991). The notion of exhaustion presupposes a prior state of high arousal or overload, rather than one of low arousal

or underload. Thus, this definitional component of emotional exhaustion stands in contrast to some other conceptualizations, which have viewed burnout as a response to tedious, boring, and monotonous work.

The strong identification of exhaustion with burnout has led some to argue that the other two aspects of the syndrome are incidental or unnecessary (Shirom, 1989). However, the fact that exhaustion is a necessary criterion for burnout does not mean it is a *sufficient* one. Of the three burnout dimensions, emotional exhaustion is the closest to an orthodox stress variable. The factors hypothesized to relate to emotional exhaustion are very similar to those in the general literature on stress, and so the similar findings are not unexpected. Although this similarity validates the location of the burnout phenomenon within the stress domain, it can also be the cause for some skepticism (Jackson *et al.*, 1986). If burnout is simply a synonym for 'exhaustion', then nothing new has been learned from the burnout research—it has simply replicated what was previously known under the guise of a new label (a charge that has been made by some critics). Thus, to limit the concept of burnout to just the dimension of emotional exhaustion is to define it simply as exhaustion and nothing more.

Although exhaustion reflects the individual stress dimension of burnout, it fails to capture a critical aspect of the relationship people have with their work. Chronic exhaustion can lead people to distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work, so that they are less involved with, or responsive to, the needs of other people or the demands of the task. In various people-oriented professions, this distancing takes the form of depersonalizing others, while outside of the human services, it is reflected in a cynical attitude towards the job. Distancing is such an immediate reaction to exhaustion that a strong relationship from exhaustion to depersonalization or cynicism is found consistently in burnout research, across a wide range of organizational and occupational settings (Maslach *et al.*, 1996). This sequential relationship is indicated by the arrow from Exhaustion to Cynicism/Depersonalization in Figure 3.2. The relationship of reduced personal accomplishment to the other two aspects of burnout is somewhat more complex. In some instances, reduced personal accomplishment appears to be a function, to some degree, of either exhaustion, cynicism, or a combination of the two (Byrne, 1994; Lee and Ashforth, 1996). A work situation with chronic, overwhelming demands that contribute to exhaustion or cynicism is likely to erode one's sense of accomplishment or effectiveness. Further, the experience of exhaustion or depersonalization interferes with effectiveness: it is difficult to gain a sense of accomplishment when feeling exhausted or when helping people toward whom one is hostile. However, in other settings, reduced accomplishment appears to develop in parallel with the other two burnout aspects, rather than sequentially (Leiter, 1993). Here the lack of efficacy seems to arise more clearly from a lack of relevant resources, while exhaustion and cynicism emerge from the presence of work overload and social conflict.

This current model of the dimensional interrelationships succeeds prior theorizing about the developmental sequence of the burnout dimensions. One earlier proposal had been that the different dimensions developed simultaneously but independently, and thus could result in eight different patterns, or phases, of burnout

(Golembiewski *et al.*, 1986). Another proposal had argued for a sequential progression over time, in which the occurrence of one dimension precipitates the development of another. The phase model (Golembiewski and Munzenrider, 1988) hypothesized that depersonalization is the first phase of burnout, followed by reduced personal accomplishment, and finally by emotional exhaustion. An alternative model had been suggested by Leiter and Maslach (1988), in which emotional exhaustion occurs first, leading to the development of depersonalization, which leads subsequently to reduced personal accomplishment. The data currently support an amended version of the latter model, rather than the former. However, it should be noted that these data come from studies utilizing statistical causal models, and not from longitudinal studies that directly track the developmental progress of burnout.

Burnout and Related Concepts

Some of the early discussion about burnout focused on issues of discriminant validity—that is, was burnout truly a distinctly different phenomenon from other established constructs? A variety of such constructs were considered, but the primary focus was on two: depression and job satisfaction. Speculation on these issues was often more frequent than empirical data.

Research conducted during the development of the MBI found burnout to be distinct from, but related to, anxiety and depression (Maslach and Jackson, 1981a, 1986). A subsequent analysis (Leiter and Durup, 1994) demonstrated the distinction between burnout and depression in a confirmatory factor analysis of the MBI and the Beck Depression Inventory. This analysis established that burnout is a problem that is specific to the work context, in contrast to depression that tends to pervade every domain of a person's life. These findings lent empirical support to earlier claims that burnout is job-related and situation-specific, as opposed to depression which is general and context-free (Freudenberger, 1983; Warr, 1987).

Further support for this distinction comes from an analysis of various conceptualizations of burnout, which notes five common elements of the burnout phenomenon (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). First, there is a predominance of dysphoric symptoms such as mental or emotional exhaustion, fatigue, and depression. Second, the emphasis is on mental and behavioral symptoms more than physical ones. Third, burnout symptoms are work-related. Fourth, the symptoms manifest themselves in 'normal' persons who did not suffer from psychopathology before. Fifth, decreased effectiveness and work performance occur because of negative attitudes and behaviors.

In the case of job satisfaction and burnout, the issue concerns the interpretation of the commonly found negative correlation between these two constructs. Although the correlation is not large enough to conclude that the constructs are actually identical, the overall pattern of the research findings has led some researchers to conclude that burnout and job dissatisfaction are clearly linked (Zedeck *et al.*, 1988). However, the specific nature of that link is still a matter of speculation. Does burnout cause people to be dissatisfied with their job? Or does a drop in satisfaction serve as the precursor to burnout? Alternatively, both burnout and job dissatisfaction may be caused by another factor, such as poor working conditions.

Correlates and Causes

The issue of correlation and causality is as familiar for burnout as it is for other research literatures. Just because one interpretation is plausible does not mean that it is the correct one. This point is illustrated not only by the previous example on job satisfaction, but by the research on burnout and coping styles. These studies often find a correlation between the different components of burnout and specific coping techniques, such as problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping. But which comes first, coping or burnout? Is it that the experience of burnout or engagement causes one to cope differently with stressors? Or does the use of different coping styles lead one to be more or less burned out? Or is there some critical third variable that mediates this relationship? The implications of these alternative answers are important both theoretically and practically.

Related to the prior discussion about the relationship of burnout to depression has been the issue of the relation of mental dysfunction to burnout. It is often presumed that burnout precipitates negative effects in terms of mental health, such as anxiety, depression, drops in self-esteem, etc. But another possibility is that people who are mentally healthy are better able to cope with chronic stressors and thus less likely to experience burnout. Although not assessing burnout directly, one study addressed this question by analyzing archival longitudinal data of people who worked in interpersonally demanding jobs (Jenkins and Maslach, 1994). The results showed that people who were psychologically healthier in adolescence and early adulthood were more likely to enter, and remain in, such jobs, and they showed greater involvement and satisfaction with their work. Given this longitudinal data set, this study was better able to establish possible causal relationships than is true for the typical correlational studies.

Individual Factors in Burnout

Although there has been a long-standing interest in identifying some key individual predictors of burnout, so far no major ones have emerged. There are no critical personality variables that are predictive of burnout. Although there was considerable speculation about gender differences in burnout, the empirical data do not support that conclusion (Maslach and Jackson, 1985). Part of the reason for the discrepancy between the perception and the reality is that the variable of sex is often confounded with occupation and/or status. For example, if there were differences between female nurses and male doctors, would they be due to sex or to occupational position? When occupational differences are controlled for, any sex difference tends to diminish or disappear. Other demographic variables also do not show any strong relationship to burnout. In some instances the lack of effect may reflect the paucity of research on these issues. For example, there is not yet a good database on racial or ethnic differences in burnout, even though other studies suggest that cultural or cross-national differences may be important (see Maslach *et al.*, 1996).

However, another possible reason for the absence of definite associations between burnout and personal characteristics is a lack of relevant theory. Too often, there has

been no a good conceptual model for hypothesizing which individual variables should be most predictive of burnout, and why. A notable exception is the approach taken by Buunk and Schaufeli (1993), because their integration of the multidimensional theory within a social comparison theory framework enables them to specify individual differences that are truly meaningful in terms of each of the burnout dimensions.

Another individual difference issue has centered around the potential clinical (as opposed to research) use of the MBI for diagnostic purposes. That is, is there a particular level or pattern of MBI scores that can serve as a meaningful cut-off score for problematic levels of burnout or for other dysfunctional patterns of response? Unfortunately, the necessary research to address this issue has not been done. The development of such a diagnostic tool is an important research goal for the near future.

Implications of the Theory for the Diagnosis and Management of Stress

The multidimensional theory provides a better understanding of burnout (and engagement) than does any kind of unidimensional 'stress' approach, because it more clearly recognizes the complexity of the phenomenon and its location within a situational context. Various levels of experience are not simply a function of individual variables but reflect the differential impact of organizational factors on the three dimensions. For example, certain job characteristics influence the sources of emotional stress—and thus emotional exhaustion or energy. Other job characteristics affect the resources available to handle the job successfully—and thus levels of personal accomplishment and efficacy. This implies that interventions should be planned and designed explicitly in terms of the three dimensions of burnout. That is, how will a particular strategy reduce the likelihood of emotional exhaustion, or prevent the tendency to depersonalize, or enhance one's sense of accomplishment? Framing an intervention in terms of these three dimensions will ensure that the proposed strategy is indeed addressing the phenomenon of burnout and establishing relevant criteria for determining its effectiveness. In other words, the theory provides a means for analyzing the more precise links between the job situation and personal experience. The advantage of such a framework is that it requires a clearer articulation of the sources of the problem and of the proposed solutions, and this may help in designing more effective intervention strategies.

The implication of the burnout–engagement continuum is that strategies to promote engagement may be just as important for burnout prevention as strategies to reduce the risk of burnout. A work setting that is designed to support the positive development of the three core qualities of energy, involvement, and effectiveness should be successful in promoting the well-being and productivity of its employees. A focus on what would constitute a more engaging workplace could be a better way of developing strategies to change the job situation, as opposed to a focus on reducing stress, which tends to lead to strategies of changing the person.

This general issue of the locus of intervention—the person or the situation—is a particularly important one in the literature on burnout prevention (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998). The emphasis is primarily on individual strategies to prevent burnout, rather than social or organizational ones. This is particularly paradoxical given that the vast bulk of the research has found that situational and organizational factors play a far bigger role in burnout than individual ones. Moreover, other research has found that individual strategies are relatively ineffective—and particularly in the workplace, where the person has much less control over stressors than in other domains of his or her life (Heaney and Van Ryn, 1990). There are both philosophical and pragmatic reasons underlying the predominant focus on the individual, including notions of individual causality and responsibility, and the assumption that it is easier and cheaper to change people instead of organizations. But the implication of the research is that this focus may be seriously in error—and that any progress in dealing with burnout will depend on the development of strategies that focus on the job context and its impact on the people who work within it.

All of this suggests that the six mismatch model may be a particularly useful framework for developing interventions, because it focuses attention on the *relationship* between the person and the situation, rather than either one or the other in isolation. It thus provides an alternative way of identifying the sources of burnout in any particular job context, and of designing interventions that will actually incorporate situational changes along with personal ones. Furthermore, the recognition of six areas of job–person mismatch expands the range of options for intervention. Rather than concentrating on the area of work overload for interventions (such as teaching people how to cope with overload, or how to cut back on work, or how to relax), a focus on some of the other mismatches may be more effective. For example, people may be able to tolerate greater workload if they value the work and feel they are doing something important, or if they feel well-rewarded for their efforts, and so interventions could target these areas of value and reward. The potential of this approach is very promising as a means of dealing with individual burnout in its situational context.

Conclusion

Significant progress in understanding burnout has been based on the development of new, rather than traditional, theoretical perspectives. What is unique about the burnout syndrome, and what distinguishes it from other types of job stress, is what has been, and needs to be, emphasized in theoretical formulations. Future progress will rest on the further elaboration of all three dimensions of burnout (rather than just the one of exhaustion) and on their relationship to the six areas of mismatch between worker and workplace. This theoretical elaboration should generate better hypotheses about the causes and consequences linked to each of these dimensions, and should guide a more informed search for solutions to this important social problem.

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A multidimensional theory of burnout

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