Burnout and Job Engagement Among Business Librarians

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Abstract

Stress and burnout among librarians and library employees has been the focus of a number of studies over the years. Results have varied considerably, especially regarding the incidence of burnout. New developments in understanding about job engagement shed light on employees' response to stress, the dynamics of burnout and a range of inner health. This paper will describe a study of the incidence of burnout and job engagement among a sample of business librarians. Implications for library employers will also be addressed.

Introduction

Studies of stress and burnout among librarians over the years have reached varied conclusions in trying to characterize or quantify the issues. Burnout – a term that is often used in a casual way to describe one's perceived stress level – is more formally appreciated as a work-life imbalance issue whose understanding has been refined by careful research for about thirty years. Job engagement is a more recently described and studied relationship with work that reflects a healthy, balanced, and emotionally present connection.

Understanding Burnout

As defined by Christina Maslach, "job burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace. Specifically, it involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job."[1] The cumulative effect of chronic exposure to job related stress can take its toll. Without adequate replenishment of mental and emotional resources, tension, fatigue, repetitive tasks, and other stressors can wear us down. Exhaustion is a key component of burnout, but there are additional components that characterize it as a syndrome distinctive from other disorders. Maslach and a host of other researchers have developed a clinical conceptualization of burnout based on more than thirty years of investigation. Accordingly, burnout is a patterned response to chronic job stress characterized by three dimensions of response: "overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of

cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment." [2]

Cynicism and detachment are often referred to as depersonalization or dehumanization. Service employees may regard the customer as an object rather than as a human being.[3] In the library, patrons might be regarded as queries, questions, or cases, rather than people. A detached library employee may frequently retreat to an office or cubicle to avoid others. They may habitually offer a plastered-on smile rather than engage in a genuine interaction. If a worker habitually treats patrons with callousness, makes derogatory remarks, or deals with situations strictly "by the book" rather than tailoring effective solutions for patrons, this may be an indication of depersonalization. [4]

Sometimes we create distance between ourselves and patrons for appropriate reasons. We place limits on our involvement with patrons in keeping with professional standards for specialized information services, such as legal, medical and business information.[5] A library patron who seeks such information may have a critical need that is best addressed by a person with appropriate qualifications, training and experience. We also distance ourselves from some patrons to stay focused on our responsibilities. Getting too involved in one patron's issues can create shortages for other patrons and other duties. However, distancing ourselves becomes problematic when a library employee is chronically unable to provide quality service to patrons within the expectations of the profession and the library.

A tendency to evaluate one's own performance negatively is the third key characteristic. [6] This characteristic is sometimes referred to as inefficacy or diminished personal accomplishment. Findings of Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter suggest that "a work situation with chronic, overwhelming demands that contribute to exhaustion or cynicism is likely to erode one's sense of effectiveness. Further, 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 indifferent." [7]

Areas of Work Life and Burnout

Individuals experience burnout in the context of work. It differs in this respect from depression, a condition which encompasses many areas of a person's life. Individuals who are prone to depression are more likely to experience burnout than others are, but burnout also visits many who are not depressed. Certain job characteristics are known to contribute to burnout. These include high workload; time pressure; conflicting demands on the job; lack of adequate information to do the job well; lack of social support, especially from supervisors; and lack of feedback. Individuals who have little influence on decision-making tend to experience burnout more often than those who have more influence. Maslach and others have developed a useful theoretical model that considers how well or poorly a person fits their job with regard for six areas of work

life – sometimes referred to as sometimes referred to as "job-person fit." Each of these conditions is manifest along a continuum of possibilities. The more doubtful the fit, the more likely the person will experience burnout. A strong fit in these areas indicates a greater likelihood that the person is engaged in work. [8]

A person's *workload* can be excessive or sustainable. If excessive, they may feel that they are overloaded. They may lack basic skills, sufficient time, emotional authenticity, or other resources to complete assigned tasks effectively. An excess of workload compared with a shortage of resources, especially with insufficient opportunity for recovery, can deplete energy and lead to exhaustion.

They may have sufficient *control* of key processes, resources, or choices needed for success or a lack of control of one or more of these requirements. Control in this sense includes adequate authority to pursue tasks in an efficient manner. Lacking control to meet one's responsibilities may create a sense of loss of effectiveness.

Financial, social or intrinsic *rewards* and recognitions may be appropriate or insufficient to match the work people do. Lack of appropriate reward or recognition can manifest itself in feelings of inefficacy.

The work *community* may be supportive or non-supportive. A supportive community reaffirms a person's membership in the organization or work unit through appropriate emotional exchanges with coworkers and supervisors. Supportive colleagues assist each other. They share values. Organizations in which there is chronic, unresolved conflict, isolation, frustration or hostility are non-supportive.

Fairness, as a condition relating to respect and self-worth, is lacking in inequitable workload or pay situations, places where cheating for resources or attention is allowed, or where evaluations are not handled appropriately.

Values relate to ethics, aspirations and the mission of the organization and are expressed in official policy and statements, but validated in actual practice.[9]

An advantage for current monitoring of burnout is that a good, easy to use instrument for assessment is available for this purpose. The Maslach Burnout Inventory has been extensively utilized and systematically refined into a reliable tool for researchers and administrators. The sixteen question survey can be completed in ten to fifteen minutes. Scoring the surveys is straightforward. Copyright and use of the MBI is currently managed by Mind Garden, Inc., of Menlo Park, California.[10]

Job Engagement

Gaining interest and attention in the general stress and burnout discussion is the concept of job engagement. Some librarians and staff are fortunate in that they have both personal resources and institutional supports to meet the demands of their work and remain focused and motivated. The concept of job engagement emerged from

burnout research in the light of more recent developments in occupational health psychology and its focus on employee wellness. In contrast to people who are burned out, some are energetic, fully connected with their work activities and able to deal well with the demands of their job. They experience high levels of alertness and pleasure. Initially, engagement was described as the opposite of burnout. Engaged persons were thought to be energetic, involved and efficient, as opposed to the burnout characteristics of exhausted, cynical and ineffectual.[11]

Maslach, Leiter, and Schaufeli assert connections between burnout and job engagement in that in work situations where the six conditions of job-person fit fall on the positive, desirable side, there is more job engagement and satisfaction and less burnout. [12]   Additional investigations over time resolved the understanding of job engagement as a persistent, positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is determined by occurrence of three factors: vigor, dedication, and absorption.[13]

Vigor is described as high energy levels, mental resilience, willingness to invest effort, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication is an attitude of having strong involvement in one's work, feelings of enthusiasm and significance, and a sense of pride and inspiration. Absorption is a pleasant state in which one is fully concentration and happily engrossed in work. Time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching from work. Engagement is much like "flow," however, flow is a more complex, short-term "peak" experience. Engagement is a more pervasive and persistent state of mind.

Two of these factors are in opposition to similar factors for burnout. Vigor contrasts directly with exhaustion. Dedication contrasts with cynicism.   The vigor and exhaustion items can be paired together into an "energy" dimension of work and well-being. While these paired items are in direct contrast to each other, they are not opposite ends of a linear relationship. Someone can have an energy level that is both not exhaustion and not one of vigor. Likewise dedication and cynicism can be thought of as an "identification" pairing. Again, although these two are in opposition, they are not in a linear continuum. In both pairings, other factors come into play. Nonetheless, contrasts in energy and identification form a rich context for understanding the difference between burnout and engagement.[14]

People who are committed, determined workers are sometimes confused with workaholics, but they are actually quite different. "Workaholic," a portmanteau of "work" and "alcoholic," describes a person whose need to work is so excessive that it resembled an addiction. People who work hard and people who work compulsively are often described as workaholics, but there is a difference between someone who works hard and is engaged, and someone who, due to stress, obsessive thinking, compulsive behavior, or other problems, pour themselves into long, hard hours of work. They may use long hours at work as a refuge from problems or situations they want to or cannot avoid. The obsession to work interferes with healthy relationships, outside interests and

taking care of oneself. An engaged person may think about the beach once in a while at work, and may actually go to the beach while on vacation. A workaholic is likely to be obsessed about work while at the beach among others who are enjoying themselves. "Workaholics work harder than their job prescriptions require and they put much more effort into their jobs than is expected by the people with whom or for whom they work, and in doing so they neglect their life outside their job." [15]

In contrast, engaged employees are able to maintain a healthy balance between work and other activities. They respond appropriately to changes in environmental demands and new surroundings. They are not inclined to become overwhelmed by fearfulness, depression and frustrations, tending rather toward cheerfulness and sociability.

Schaufeli and Bakker have developed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which is a brief, but effective instrument for assessing engagement in the workplace.[16] It features several questionnaire items about each of the three characteristics of engagement. Participants are asked to respond to each item on a six-point Likert scale relating to the frequency with which they experience specific feelings in relation to work. The UWES has been used in a large number of studies in European countries, focusing on a wide array of professions. This instrument has been carefully refined through use in extant occupational groups. Factor analysis has shown this to be a useful tool for assessing engagement, yielding meaningful comparisons across divergent groups. Use of UWES in the United States has been limited, probably due to lack of awareness and familiarity among researchers studying U.S. occupational groups. No examples have been found of studies that utilize the UWES among librarians. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is available for non-commercial educational or research purposes from Wilmar Schaufeli, provided that users are willing to share some of the data.[17] It is available in seventeen-, fifteen- and nine-question formats. It is also easy to administer and score.

Literature Review

A recurring topic of investigation in library literature is whether, and to what extent, librarians are excessively stressed and burned out. More than twenty years ago, David Fisher examined available published research on librarians and burnout in a 1990 article for the *Journal of Librarianship*.[18] He found that a number of articles consisted of anecdotes and ideological assertions that stress and burnout were commonplace among librarians. Of five empirical investigations, he suspected that two of the studies were done by researchers predisposed to believing that librarians frequently suffer from stress and burnout. Three remaining extant studies showed varying levels of stress and burnout.[19] Smith and Nelson found that five of 262 academic reference librarians (2%) scored in the "mild burnout" range. Their ultimate assessment was that "Academic reference librarians do not seem to be especially prone to burnout." [20] Haack, Jones and Roose found that of 92 librarians who volunteered at a conference 42 percent were

at or near burnout, an alarming result. [21] In their study of 547 reference librarians using a precursor to the present Maslach Burnout Inventory, Birch, Marchant and Smith reported the following: high levels of emotional exhaustion (21%), high levels of low regard for personal accomplishment (30%), and high levels of depersonalization (30%).[22]

During the time since the Fisher review, Affleck studied a sample of 142 New England bibliographic instruction librarians and found 8.5% showed high levels of burnout in all three dimensions that characterize the syndrome. Furthermore, 52.8% demonstrated high levels in at least one of the burnout dimensions, including 35.2% who scored high in exhaustion.[23] Ray demonstrated that the MBI-Human Services Survey could be a reliable tool for assessing burnout among academic librarians. She studied two samples of 301 librarians and 69 librarians and found that 2% and 6% of librarian samples, respectively, were experiencing burnout, demonstrated by high levels across all three characteristics. Between 23 and 32% of librarians reported high levels of exhaustion. This study described academic librarianship as a low stress profession.[24]

In anticipation of the present study additional articles were reviewed which identified a number of issues that librarians found stressful. They are presented here in an approximation of how they relate to the six areas of work life. Note that some issues may apply to multiple areas.

- *Workload* issues: work overload, responsibilities not matched to support systems, working nights and weekends, increasing amounts of time doing clerical tasks, insufficient help, frequent technological change, obnoxious patrons, and lack of closure on ongoing projects.
- *Control* issues: powerlessness to affect change, lack of adequate responsibility, budget cuts, imposed service reductions, bureaucratic inertia and red tape, poor management and supervision, lack of voice in goal setting or decision making, role conflict, role ambiguity, and lack of autonomy.
- Issues with regard to *rewards and recognitions*: underpaid and undervalued respective of qualifications and working conditions, lack of adequate recognition, lack of opportunity for advancement, increased competition for few positions.
- *Community* issues: "boundary crossing" when assignments have too many major tasks that cross departmental lines, ambiguous authority structures, blurred roles between professionals and paraprofessionals, poor public image of librarians, and layoffs.
- *Fairness* issues: job discrimination and lack of private work space.
- *Values* issues: expectations that librarians should be helpful and pleasant, and frequently shifting priorities.

These qualitative contributions help to frame the discussion into the context of the day to day work of librarians.[25]

Twenty years after Fisher and eight years after Ray, another assessment of library employees may well be in order. A study of librarians using both the MBI and the UWES has not been done. Combining these instruments in a study of an appropriate sample of librarians is likely to yield informative results, in terms of burnout and engagement. It would also be informative to analyze the results in terms of the separate components of burnout – exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy – and the components of engagement – vigor, dedication and absorption.

The existing studies suggest that library workers may or may not be actually burning out at a significant rate, however, that's not to say that burnout is not significant nor that stress is not taking its toll. If the number of affected employees is relatively small, burnout is still a significant factor for those individuals. Among a staff of twenty-five employees, two or three individuals who are coping with burnout manifestations – mental weariness, cynicism/depersonalization, and feelings of inefficacy – may have a negative impact on the workforce. "Research has linked burnout to negative outcomes such as health problems, reductions in job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and reduced productivity, as well as absenteeism, turnover intentions, and actual turnover. At the organizational level, research has linked burnout to financial losses, accidents, and reductions in the quality of patient care in health care organizations"[26]

Stress does not need to devolve into burnout to have detrimental effects on librarians and staff. Exhaustion, alone, visits more librarians than full blown burnout. This is borne out in the existing studies. The work-related stress discussed earlier is likely to expend resources at a high rate. Most of the studies do not provide comparisons to other occupations.

Methodology

The present study was developed to assess burnout and job engagement among business librarians. The author received a research grant award from Emerald Group, administered by the Business Reference and Services Section of ALA for his proposal to conduct a survey of public and academic business librarians relating to burnout and job engagement. Business information is a specialty within the profession. Information needs of businesspersons, students and researchers are both similar to and unlike patrons in other subject areas. A business librarian must master a large number of varied and constantly changing information resources. The need for precision and promptness in responding to queries is very high. Unlike medical information, few lives are at risk when answering a business question, but the stakes can be high in terms of costs, return on investment, delivery of goods and services, employment and other factors. The impact of these demands on business librarians warranted a special study.

Three tools were incorporated into one questionnaire instrument: (1) Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS), (2) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) –

nine question version, and (3) demographic questions specific to this study of business librarians.[27]

The MBI-GS is a variation of the MBI developed for use with occupational groups for which burnout is a crisis in one's relationships with people at work. Other variations – MBI-Human Services Survey and MBI-Educators Survey - were developed for staff members in human services and educational institutions who "are often required to spend considerable time in intense involvement with other people. Frequently, the staff-client interaction is centered on the client's current problems (psychological, social or physical) and is therefore charged with feelings of anger, embarrassment, fear, or despair."[28] Arguably, reference librarianship involves interaction with other people. Infrequently, or perhaps even occasionally, such interactions may be laced with intense emotions, but this author believes that such interactions are not on the same scale for our profession as they might be for nursing, law enforcement, social work, teaching and similar professions.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES) is a more recently developed instrument. The UWES instrument was developed to assess job engagement across three measures: vigor, dedication and absorption. It has been subject to rigorous research in European countries across numerous occupations. Although 17- and 15- item UWES versions have been used to measure engagement successfully, research and testing has shown that internal consistencies are good for a shortened, nine-question version of the UWES instrument which utilizes three survey items for each of the three factors which identify work engagement. Since the present study combined MBI, UWES and demographic questions – a potentially lengthy combined instrument – the nine-question version was selected for brevity.

This study also asked for demographic information such as age, gender, type of library (public or academic), time in employment, and faculty or administrative status for academic librarians. The combined questionnaire included the MBI-GS instrument, the nine-question UWES instrument and demographic questions for a total of 40 survey items. Preliminary testing demonstrated that the resulting questionnaire could be completed by volunteers in about ten minutes.
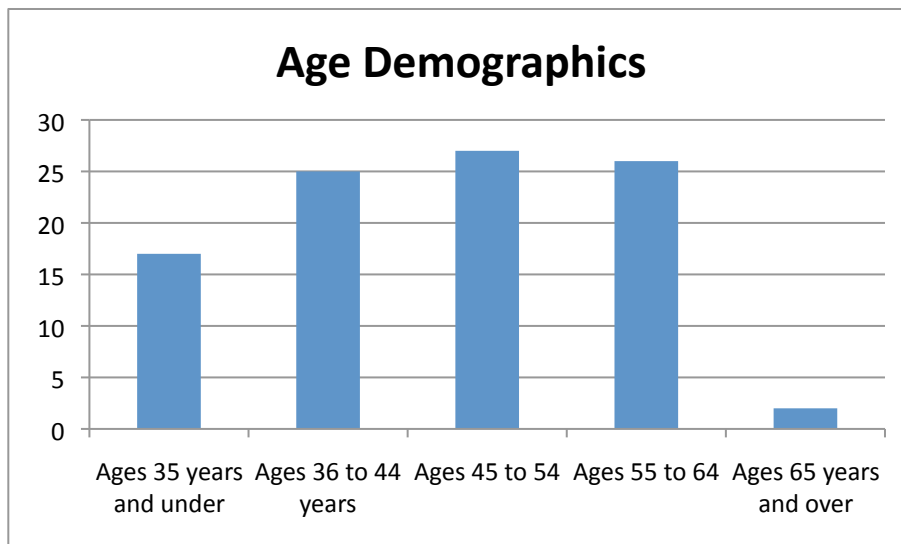
Volunteers were recruited from among public and academic business librarians throughout the United States. Initial recruitment was accomplished by means of invitation messages distributed via BRASS-L, an email discussion list for the Business Reference and Services Section of the Reference and User Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. Additional invitations were distributed via BUSLIB-L, an email discussion list for business librarians which has no restrictions on membership, and via SLA-DBF, a similar list for members of the Business and Finance Division of the Special Libraries Association. Permission to utilize each of these lists

was obtained from the list managers prior to posting invitations to participate. All volunteers self-identified as business librarians.

Results

Of 115 surveys sent to volunteers, 97 valid, completed surveys were returned, from 67 females and 30 males. Five age categories were used to collect demographics. As shown in the chart below, the age category distribution was fairly uniform, considering that librarians generally enter the profession following a graduate degree and many librarians retire around age 65.

Chart 1. Age Demographics

Age Demographics

Age Category	Count
Ages 35 years and under	17
Ages 36 to 44 years	25
Ages 45 to 54	27
Ages 55 to 64	26
Ages 65 years and over	2

All respondents had earned an advanced degree, with 96 possessing an MLS. Twenty-one had earned an MBA degree. Twenty-three had earned at least one advanced degree other than an MLS or an MBA.

Respondents' employment as librarians ranged from one to 40 years. Employment in their current positions ranged from zero to twenty-five years. Ninety librarians identified "reference or public service" as the type of work they do most of the time. Three identified "technical service". Nine identified "administrative/managerial." A few librarians selected two categories in response to this survey item. All respondents selected either public (20) or academic (77) for the type of library in which they work. Of the 77 academic librarians, twenty-five librarians said that they had earned tenure. The number of years since earning tenure ranged from one to 16 years, with a mean of about 7.5 years and median of 6. Seventeen librarians said that they were on the tenure track, but had not year earned tenure.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Schaufeli and Bakker provide comparison data – mean, standard error and standard deviation values – for vigor, dedication and absorption in *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Preliminary Manual*.[29] One set of data was gathered from surveys of numerous occupational groups in The Netherlands. The manual refers to this set as the "Dutch norms." A second set of published data – referred to as the "other languages" set – was similarly derived from UWES studies administered in other countries, using translated and vetted versions of the nine-question instrument.[30] Calculated values for mean, standard error and standard deviation were computed from responses to the questionnaire and compared with similar values published for "Dutch norms" and "other languages" data sets. All comparisons were accomplished using the Student's T Test for independent samples with different sample sizes.

The data showed no significant difference between the mean for vigor in present study and either the Dutch language data or the other languages data. These findings suggest that the frequency of experiencing vigor – which averaged about once a week – is similar for the business librarians in the present study.

This study found a significant difference between the mean for dedication in the present sample and the Dutch language data. The mean value for business librarians was between "once a week" and "a few times a week." Respondents in the Dutch language data reported experiencing vigor less often, but the data exhibited more variability than was found for business librarians. This study found no significant difference in frequency responses to the dedication mean for the other languages data.
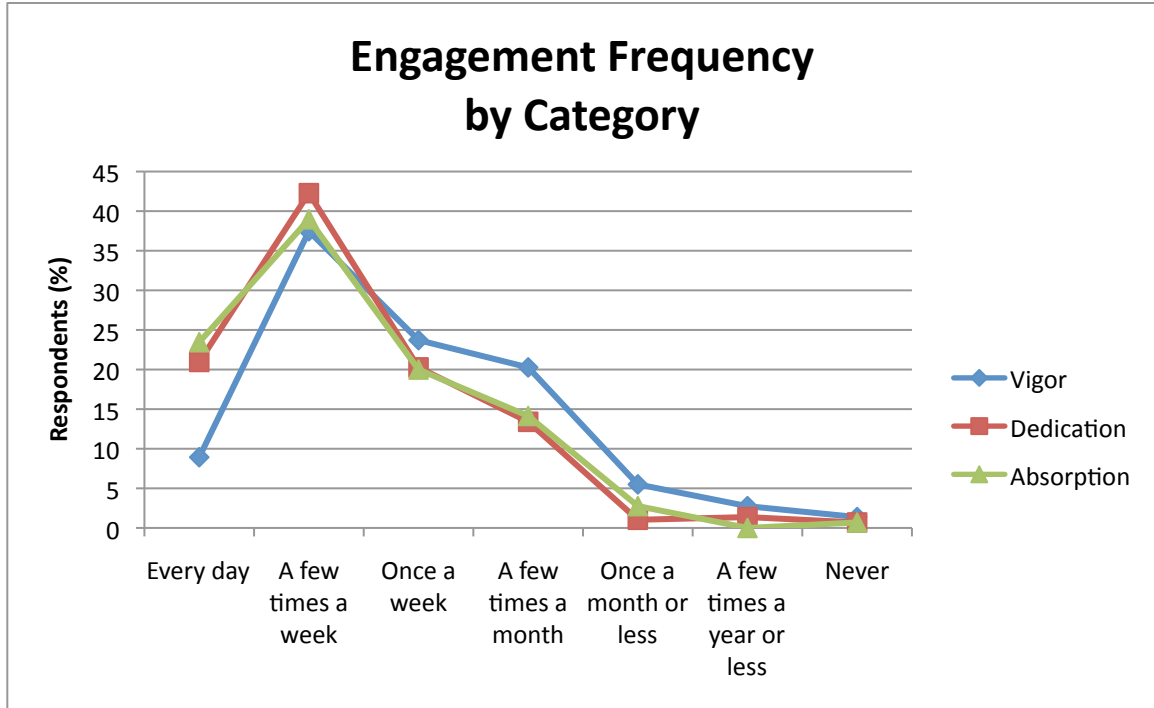
This study found significant differences between the mean for absorption in the present sample and both the Dutch language data and the other languages data. Business librarians reported experiencing absorption on average between "once a week" and "a few times a week." Published data show that the mean score for both data sets was between a few times a month and once a week, with greater variability than shown in the data for the business librarians.

Thus far, the discussion has only served to verify that the data from the present study qualifies it as valid in comparison to other studies. However, the data also shows useful information about how often the participants reported experiencing factors of job engagement or burnout. Chart 2 shows the percentage distribution of category scores by factor.

A notable quantitative outcome of this study is that among the business librarian participants, 22 (22.68%) scored either "a few times a week" or "every day" on all three

factors, which is the fully qualified determination of engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

Chart 2.

Engagement Frequency by Category

A line chart titled "Engagement Frequency by Category" with the y-axis labeled "Respondents (%)" ranging from 0 to 45, and the x-axis showing categories: Every day, A few times a week, Once a week, A few times a month, Once a month or less, A few times a year or less, Never. Three lines are plotted: Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption.
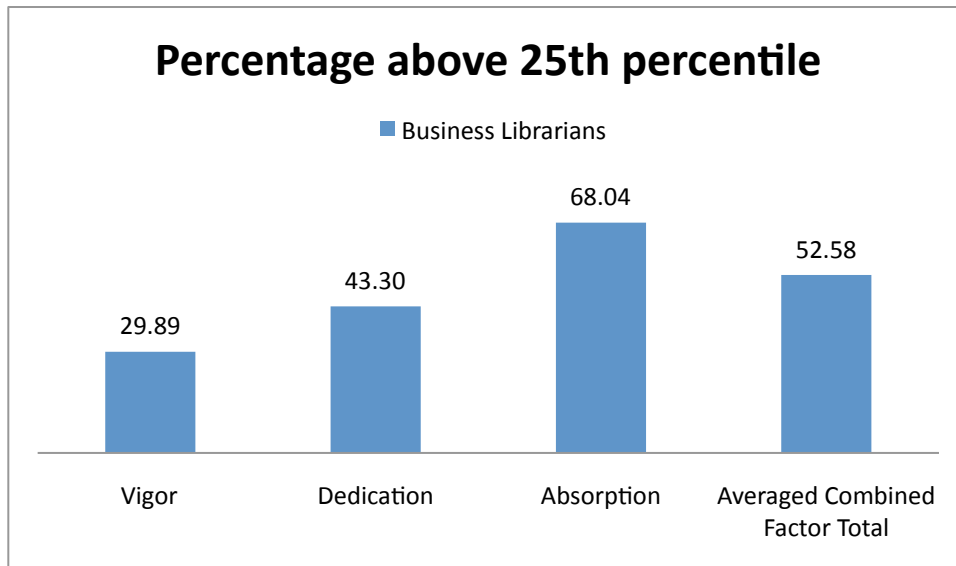
To establish statistical norms, the UWES developers averaged individual factor scores from a large, vetted research data set (N=9,679), then ranked the average scores to establish the percentiles shown in Table 1. In this situation, percentiles allow researchers to understand the relative variability among responses somewhat removed from any artifact variability created by the survey items themselves.

Table 1: Percentile ranges for UWES norms[31]

	Greater than or equal to (≥)	Less than (<)
Very high	95th	
High	75th	95th
Average	25th	75th
Low	5th	25th
Very low		5th

Established percentile-based score breaks were applied to ranked average factor scores in the present study. The result is a distribution of present study scores based on the statistical norms rather than the raw Likert scale averages. Combined "high" and "very high" factor averages for the established data are found at the 25th percentile. The following chart shows the distributions, by factor, of business librarians who scored above the 25th percentile.

Chart 3.

Percentage above 25th percentile

■ Business Librarians

Factor	Percentage
Vigor	29.89
Dedication	43.30
Absorption	68.04
Averaged Combined Factor Total	52.58

Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey

To recap, burnout is characterized by three factors: high levels of exhaustion, high levels of cynicism and low levels of professional efficacy. The MBI-GS instrument provides five items each for exhaustion and cynicism, and six items for professional efficacy. Likert scale categories are the same for this instrument as it is for the UWES.

Results comparing the present study to published MBI-GS data were complete by calculating the mean for each factor by adding all respondent's scores from all survey items relating to each factor. All comparisons were accomplished using the Student's T Test for independent samples with different sample sizes.

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual* provides published comparison data – mean, standard error, and standard deviation values – for several occupational data sets. These sets represent nine occupational groups from three countries. The occupational groups are: Dutch civil servants, Dutch rural workers, Finnish computer workers, Canadian military, Canadian clerical, Canadian technologists, Canadian nurses, Canadian managers, and Canadian psychiatric workers. [32]

For each of the above occupational groups, the difference in the means was significant for at least one of the factors. Writing a meaningful summary of these findings is quite challenging.

Starting with the Dutch civil servants, no significant difference was found when the means for cynicism were compared. However, means for exhaustion and professional efficacy were significantly different. For both factors, the mean score for the librarians was higher. Compared to the Dutch rural workers and Finnish computer workers, librarians scored higher on exhaustion and cynicism. No significant difference in means for professional efficacy was found comparing librarians to these two groups.

Interestingly, librarians scored higher on exhaustion than did Canadian military; however, means for cynicism and professional efficacy were not significantly different. The means for Canadian clerical group with regard to exhaustion and cynicism were higher than similar means for librarians. For professional efficacy, no significant difference in means was found. Canadian technologists' mean scores for exhaustion and cynicism were not significantly different from that of librarians; however, their mean score for professional efficacy was lower than that of librarians.

Mean scores for respondents in the Canadian nursing group were significantly different from librarians' scores for exhaustion and professional efficacy. Nurses scored higher for exhaustion and lower for professional efficacy. Scores between the two groups for cynicism were not significantly different. Canadian management mean scores for exhaustion and professional efficacy were not significantly different from librarians, but management scored lower on cynicism. Interestingly, mean scores for the Canadian psychiatric workers group were not significantly different for exhaustion, but they were higher for cynicism and lower for professional efficacy.

Overall, these mean comparisons suggest that the incidence of burnout factors, as expressed by business librarians, is in line with the incidence of factors expressed by people in other occupations.

The following chart shows how frequently, as a percentage of respondents, each Likert scale choice within each factor was selected by business librarians. Due to the wording of each MBI survey item, burnout is indicated by higher scores (more often experienced) for exhaustion and cynicism, and lower scores (less often experienced) for professional efficacy. This reflects the characteristic of this factor as marked by a diminished sense of professional efficacy.

Chart 4.


Burnout Frequency by Category
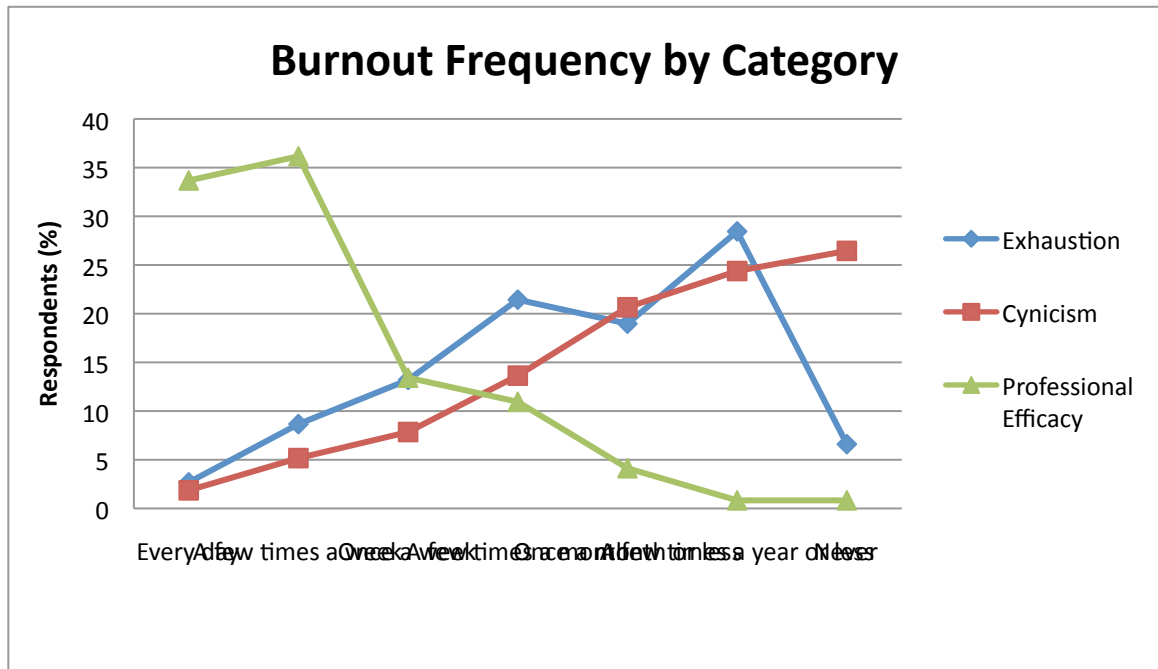
In a manner similar to the statistical norms published in the UWES Manual, the MBI Manual provides thresholds for upper, middle and lower thirds using composite data from surveys involving North American occupational groups.[33] Table 2 shows the distribution of scores from the business librarian sample, based on this norm group data. In this representation, the professional efficacy percentiles are flipped, such that higher percentile values represent diminished sense of professional efficacy.

Table 2. Distributions of present study average factor scores by categories established by published North American Sample (N=3727)

	Low (lower third)	Average (middle third)	High (upper third)
Exhaustion	47.42	23.71	28.87
Cynicism	46.39	23.71	29.90
Professional Efficacy	49.48	30.93	19.59

The following chart illustrates the percentage of business librarians whose individual factor means scored in the upper third of the statistical norms for burnout.

Chart 5.

Percentage in upper third

■ Business Librarians

	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
	28.87	29.9	19.59
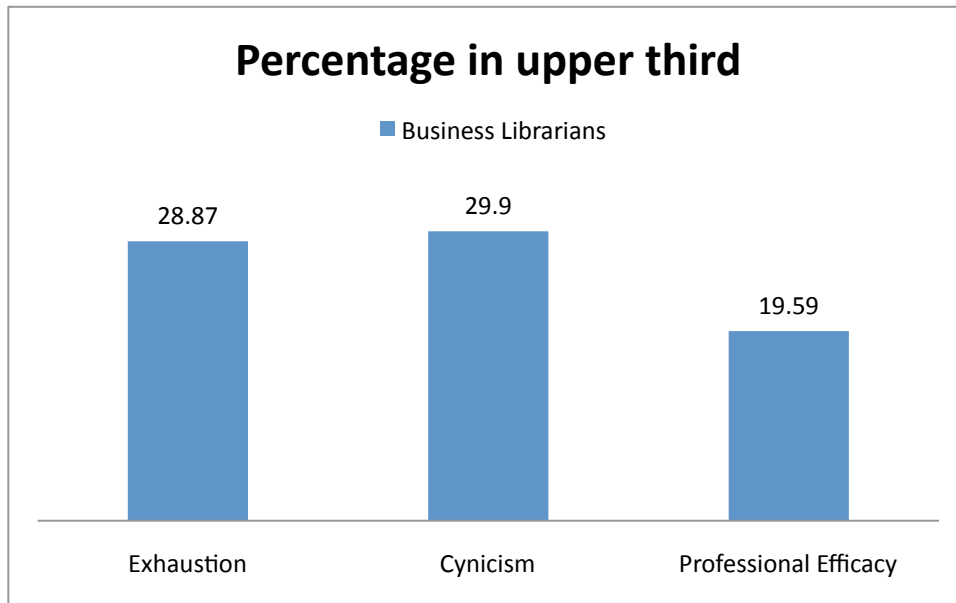
Of the business librarians who participated in the present study, 28.87% scored as high as or higher on exhaustion than the upper third of the published North American sample. Some 29.90% scored as high as or higher on cynicism, and 19.59% scored as high as or higher on professional efficacy than the upper third of the published North American sample.

Burnout is a construct of combined factors. Business librarians who scored in the upper third on exhaustion and in the upper third on cynicism accounted for 19.59% of the total sample. Of those, thirteen individuals, or 13.40% scored in the upper third on all three factors.

Implications for Libraries

If the 13.40% burnout incidence found in the present sample is representative of burnout in libraries on a larger scale, then libraries have a significant problem: between one in seven and one in eight librarians may be burned out. Regarding burnout in the business world, Christina Maslach said, "The costs to individuals, enterprises and society are staggering. Consider the cost of frequent use of health facilities to treat alcoholism and stress-related illnesses. Then there is absenteeism, high employee turnover, new hiring, training and re-training. And when employees are error-prone the quality of the product or service provided is going to suffer, and this is certain to hit the company's bottom line. . . . Employers are entitled to expect their employees to be hard-working, dedicated, creative and conscientious. But the same employers need to ask themselves what kind of work environment best supports such dedication from the employees."[34]

The implications of burnout for libraries must be very similar. Salaries and compensation comprise a large portion of the budget for most libraries, making the workforce the most expensive and most valuable asset of the library's operations. Poor service quality, imprecision in processing materials, and carelessness in handling patron interactions increase workload, add to stress levels and allow the library's good will to fade. Appropriately, employers should watch for manifestations of the three characteristics of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy. They should become concerned about burnout when they observe an employee who seems to have developed uncharacteristic, but persistently low energy levels or emotional flatness. Such employees may acquire a cynical attitude toward others or their job. They may develop a low regard for their own capabilities. Employers should also be aware that medical conditions, grief, and other issues may present themselves at the workplace in ways that bear some similarities to burnout characteristics. Serious illnesses, clinical depression, substance abuse and similar wellness challenges are well beyond the scope of this article. Burnout, on the other hand, is about an employee's relationship with work. It affects work performance, which is a realm that should be addressed.

Prevention of and recovery from burnout is not a burden the employee must bear alone. Employers should watch out for mismatches between individuals and their job or work environment, specifically along the lines of the six areas of work life: workload, control, rewards, community, fairness and values. Research has demonstrated that a good match predicts that the incidence of job engagement is likely to be high and burnout low. Mismatches are predictive of high burnout and low engagement.[35] Although more research needs to be done with regard to burnout interventions, it is likely that addressing these six areas may play a role in revitalizing a burned out employee. An employer should assess the need for appropriate workload adjustments, meaningful reward systems and attention to fairness and integrity in the organizational culture. These and other mismatch corrections are very difficult for an employee to overcome using personal resources alone.

Employees should not depend entirely on employers for burnout intervention. They also shoulder some of the responsibility for taking action. Some conditions are improved by enhancing personal resources – i.e., attention to physical, social, and emotional health. For example, coffee breaks, good rest at night, weekend breathers, and occasional extended vacations provide recovery time to recharge energy in varying degrees. However, astute employers are aware that employees who are also caregivers or who have other high demands away from work may be especially challenged to recover significant energy away from the library.

Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen recently found a causal relationship in which increases in job demands - specifically work overload, emotional demands, and work-home

interference - and decreases in job resources - job control, feedback, social support, and opportunities for learning - were predictive of future increase in burnout incidence.[36] They also found that when job resources increase, work engagement increases. Conversely, when work engagement increases, employees are able to increase their job resources. This study suggests that burnout can be reduced by reducing work overload, emotional demands and work-home interference and by increasing job autonomy, learning opportunities, social support and performance feedback.

Fortunately, this study also suggests that a significant proportion of librarians are already engaged in their work: vigorous, dedicated and absorbed. It is worthwhile to take note of these individuals, too, to avoid losing sight of the workload that could get out of hand, the recognitions that could be missed, and the fairness and values that they observe that could slip.

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