Burnout and Job Engagement among Business Librarians

Kevin Harwell
Penn State University Libraries

Introduction

Librarians operate within public and academic institutions that are under constant stress and have been for years. Restrictive budgets and the changing technological environment have created major challenges to library work at every level from daily front-line operations to administrative planning and development.

Stress and challenge leave their impact on librarians. Some individuals gladly meet stresses head-on and use challenges to remarkable advantage for the mission of their institution and professional advancement. We might regard these persons as having high job engagement. On the other hand, stress wears some people down. Shortages in operational, professional and personal resources can undermine a person's energy and lead to burnout. While job engagement and burnout are measured on different factors, engagement is regarded as the antithesis of burnout. Between the extremes of burnout and job engagement are a variety of individual responses. Business librarianship is a specialty within the profession. Information needs of businesspersons, students and researchers are unlike most other subject areas. The information resources a librarian must master are varied, constantly changing and great in number. The need for precision and promptness in responding to queries is very high. Unlike medical information, few lives are at stake 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 warrants a special study. This study will survey public and academic business librarians with regard to burnout and job engagement.

Research Methodology

Two separate instruments will be utilized for this research. They will be administered to volunteers who are business librarians who are currently employed in public and academic libraries. Since each survey measures distinctive factors in the responses to work stress, each volunteer participant will be asked to complete both surveys.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was developed over the last 25 years to assess burnout in terms of three measures: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. This portion of my research stems from an article I wrote for the *Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship* in 2008.[1] Burnout has been the subject of several library investigations, but these have focused on other narrow segments of the profession, such as instruction or media librarians, or examined vary broad samples, such as public librarians (see Bibliography, below). Burnout among business librarians has not been investigated.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES) is a more recently developed instrument. The job engagement concept and the UWES instrument were developed from emerging research in positive psychology, especially Occupational Health Psychology, which looks beyond employee performance to employee health and well-being. This survey assesses job engagement across three measures: vigor, dedication and absorption. It has been subject to rigorous research in European countries across numerous occupations. Use of the UWES instrument in the U.S. has been very limited.

Demographic information will also be sought from participants, such as age, gender, type of library (public or academic), time in employment, and faculty status for academic librarians. Demographic information will be correlated with data from both surveys

Projected Outcomes

A response of completed surveys from at least 125 librarians is anticipated. Such response is likely to yield a statistically valid profile of the business librarian participants with regard to job engagement and burnout. Some questions to address include the following. Do differences exist with regard to burnout/engagement response comparing public and academic librarians? Do the number of years of service make a difference? Does burnout tend to resolve to later job engagement, or vice versa? Do faculty librarians typically experience burnout and engagement in a different pattern from other librarians?

Benefits

This research will provide helpful information about the experience of burnout and job engagement among business librarians in public and academic libraries. This information may be useful to librarians, supervisors and administrators with regard to the impact and effects of the challenges and stress that librarians face.

Selective Bibliography: Burnout in Libraries

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[1] Harwell, K. (2008). Burnout strategies for librarians. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship, 13*(3), 379-390.