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Toxin handling in human resources (HR) and its impact on burnout

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TOXIN HANDLING IN HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)

AND ITS IMPACT ON BURNOUT

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Master of Science

in

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By

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This research project, completed by

CECILIA LEE

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Abstract

These are challenging times for HR professionals. The world of work has experienced

unprecedented levels of change since the pandemic. Now on the horizon is the

transformative influence of generative AI on the future of work and HR sits at the center

of these changes in organizations. Business executives need healthy and productive HR

professionals to effectively support organizations in the future. Unfortunately, recent

industry studies paint a sobering picture of waning well-being and high levels of burnout

in HR. Burnout is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, experienced by

individuals and caused by systemic organizational imbalances. This study was the first to

address the HR Manager's occupational characteristics of toxin handling and its

correlation to burnout and other work dimensions, including values alignment, fairness,

autonomy, and belonging. This study confirmed the occupational characteristics'

significant positive relationship with exhaustion and cynicism and that values alignment,

fairness, autonomy, and belonging seem to buffer the impact. There is a strong case for

organizations to invest in efforts to improve HR well-being and reduce burnout and this

study yielded practical recommendations to improve outcomes for HR Managers.

Keywords: generative AI, burnout, toxin, values, cynicism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Human Resources (HR) professionals face a whirlwind of change in today's dynamic business landscape. From persistent burnout, low engagement, and talent shortages to business restructuring and evolving employee expectations, HR professionals are grappling with many challenges, exacerbated by an ever-shifting political and economic environment.

The role of HR has grown increasingly complex, with over 80 specializations within the function. A 2023 survey by Gartner revealed that 80% of HR leaders are encountering challenges distinct from pre-pandemic ones, leading to obstacles in effectiveness and a surge in burnout among HR staff. CEOs are turning to HR professionals to navigate large-scale organizational changes, uphold accountability for engagement and well-being, and simultaneously overhaul their functions. The burden on HR professionals is evident. A survey conducted by The Sage Group (2023) found that 84% of HR professionals report regular stress, 81% experience personal burnout, and a staggering 62% are contemplating leaving the field altogether. A survey focused on HR professional well-being found that rates of depression were almost three times higher than in the general population, rates of anxiety two-and-a-half times higher, and 78% rated their mental well-being support at work as insufficient (Burrell et al., 2024).

The disruptive force of COVID-19 took a toll on HR departments. HR professionals found themselves making critical decisions in an environment of uncertainty while supporting employees through personal tragedies and the pandemic's isolating effects, which remained years later. Emerging from the pandemic, HR professionals face a new reality characterized by an increased cost-of-living crisis, hybrid

working, shifting employee-employer relationship dynamics, mental health challenges, disengagement, and turnover, presenting formidable new hurdles for HR to address.

Burnout, resulting from persistent work-related stress, manifests in three key attributes: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal effectiveness (Koutsimani et al., 2019). The consequences of burnout extend beyond individual well-being, posing high costs to companies and society at large. Research links burnout to depression and anxiety, with the World Health Organization (WHO) reporting a staggering 581 million cases of depression and anxiety in 2019 (Koutsimani et al., 2019; World Health Organization, 2022). Moreover, organizations with high levels of employee burnout incur elevated costs related to absenteeism, turnover, health expenses, and diminished productivity (Moss, 2019).

While burnout impacts individuals, research indicates its roots lie in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2001). McKinsey Health Institute (2022) found that while individuals experience burnout, it is caused by systemic organizational imbalances such as workload, job demands, and culture. While many organizations invest in wellness programs to treat the symptoms, the effectiveness of such initiatives in combating burnout remains questionable (Weiss, 2020). Addressing burnout necessitates focusing on the cause with organizational-level strategies, not treating the symptoms.

So, how can HR professionals tackle these intricate challenges for others while experiencing waning well-being and high levels of burnout themselves? Business leaders must recognize HR's critical role in effectively navigating turbulent times. The implications of HR burnout cannot be understated, particularly given HR's responsibility for safeguarding an organization's most valuable asset: its people.

The road ahead for HR professionals is fraught with challenges but also ripe with opportunities for innovation and transformation. An organization's employees are one of its competitive advantages. Given the importance of HR in looking after the people in organizations, it is vital to discover if HR professionals are prone to burnout due to the occupational characteristics of the profession, and if they are, determine the organizational-level strategies that promote HR staff well-being.

For these reasons, additional research on burnout in HR is critical. Research questions that support the purpose include:

- Are occupational characteristics associated with burnout in HR managers?

- What do HR managers' report as the key drivers of burnout?

- What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest to promote engagement and reduce burnout?

The HR profession has many specialization areas. The research questions will focus on HR employees who provide broad-based HR services across employee populations. These employees are often referred to as HR Generalists, HR Business Partners, or HR Managers. For simplicity, the study population will be referred to as HR Management or HR Manager.

This chapter reviewed the study's importance and research purpose. Chapter 2 reviews prior research and literature on Burnout in the HR Profession. Chapter 3 covers the research design, methodology, and process. Chapter 4 reports the study results. Chapter 5 discusses the study findings, conclusions, and implications for research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Previous research has extensively explored burnout across various professions (Maslach et al., 2011). Yet, based on a review of the research, a notable gap exists in understanding burnout, specifically within HR. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the drivers of burnout among HR Management professionals. Drawing upon the literature, several key concepts emerge that are pertinent to understanding burnout in this context. The key concepts include occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue, burnout in HR, and frameworks for addressing burnout and promoting engagement.

Occupational Characteristics: Compassion Fatigue & Toxin Handling

The HR profession, regarded as a helping profession akin to healthcare and education, faces unique occupational characteristics, such as the emotional stress of people-related work, that may predispose HR managers to burnout (Bhatla, 2019). Studies have identified occupational characteristics such as compassion fatigue and toxin handling as factors contributing to burnout among HR professionals (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Stosic et al., 2022). Compassion fatigue, resulting from exposure to the emotional trauma of others, and toxin handling, involving the management of organizational pain and stress, are inherent aspects of the HR role (Daniel, 2020; Kulick et al., 2009).

Research indicates that HR professionals are frequently exposed to emotionally demanding situations, including managing employee conflicts, investigations, terminations, and restructuring efforts (Daniel, 2017). These responsibilities often entail supporting employees facing personal and sensitive issues while maintaining confidentiality and showing empathy (Zapf et al., 2010). Consequently, HR managers must engage in significant emotional labor, displaying empathy, understanding, and

professionalism amidst highly charged circumstances (Zapf et al., 2010). Furthermore, HR professionals may experience compassion fatigue, a type of secondary trauma resulting from prolonged exposure to others' emotional distress (Villarreal, 2021). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in caregiving professions and is increasingly recognized as a significant risk factor for burnout among HR professionals (Coetzee et al., 2010; Stosic et al., 2022). Additionally, HR managers often serve as *toxin handlers*, individuals within organizations who absorb and manage organizational pain and stress caused by an organization's policies and practices, such as unreasonable performance targets or a toxic culture, downsizing, or constant change (Frost & Robinson, 1999). This role involves listening empathetically, suggesting solutions, and reframing difficult messages to alleviate organizational pain (Frost & Robinson, 1999). Recent studies have highlighted the prevalence of toxin handling in HR roles and its association with psychological and professional burnout (Daniel, 2020; Kulick et al., 2009).

Burnout in HR

Understanding the interplay between HR Manager occupational characteristics such as compassion fatigue and toxin handling, as well as other job characteristics known to lead to burnout, is essential for comprehensively addressing burnout among HR professionals. Twenty-five years of research exist on the phenomenon of burnout, including a recent focus on engagement, which is considered the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

There is a consensus on the three core dimensions of the burnout experience. The three core dimensions in this theoretical framework include exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Exhaustion reflects the stress dimension of burnout and is characterized by

chronic job stress, heavy workload, and time pressure but does not capture people's relationship with their work. That is where cynicism comes in. Cynicism is an outcome of exhaustion used to cope with work overload. Cynicism is characterized by depersonalization, which is distancing oneself emotionally and cognitively to cope. Inefficacy is characterized by reduced personal accomplishment and appears to be an outcome of either (or both) of the other two dimensions (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout strongly correlates to chronic job stress, such as a heavy workload, time pressure, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, lack of flexibility, and organizational and management characteristics, such as structure, hierarchies, operating rules, physical environment, and cultural aspects (Bakker et al., 2004; Maslach et al., 2001; Melamed et al., 2006). An organizational climate with heavy workloads and high role conflict levels, characterized by competing demands in which employees feel they cannot finish necessary tasks, can lead to increased levels of burnout (Green et al., 2015). Finally, there is a hypothesis that the emotional stressors of people-work correlate to burnout (Melamed et al., 2006) and that these factors account for an additional increase in burnout rates (Zapf et al., 2001).

In one study on toxin handling and HR managers, the Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R) was used to evaluate the job demand toxin handling impact on emotional exhaustion and HR effectiveness (Kulic et al., 2009). The JD-R is an occupational stress model that says every job consists of two factors: job demands and job resources. Job demands are work characteristics with a physical or psychological cost, such as workload, time pressure, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, lack of flexibility, or emotional demands. Job resources are positive aspects of a job that help individuals

achieve objectives and reduce stress, such as social support, autonomy, and feedback. The imbalance between the requirements of the job and the resources employees receive to meet those requirements is a driver of burnout (Bakker et al., 2004).

Frameworks for Addressing Burnout and Promoting Engagement

Two primary frameworks surfaced for assessing the burnout and engagement continuum and identifying intervention targets (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach et al., 2011; Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). Maslach and Leiter's (2021) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) are validated instruments frequently utilized in studies, offering a structured approach to measuring burnout and engagement across three dimensions of burnout (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy) and three dimensions of engagement (i.e., energy, involvement, and efficacy) (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). The research suggests that people's psychological relationship with their job is a continuum between the negative experience of burnout (e.g., exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy) and the positive experience of engagement (e.g., energy, involvement, efficacy). They can be placed into one of five profiles, ranging from Burnout, Overextended, Ineffective, Disengaged, and Engaged within the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2021).

The AWS assesses employees' perceptions of various work qualities that influence burnout and engagement, such as workload sustainability, alignment with values, rewards, control over work conditions, fairness, and the quality of professional relationships (Bailey, 2023). This framework provides a nuanced understanding of how organizational factors intersect with individual experiences, shaping burnout and engagement levels (Maslach, 2011; Maslach et al., 2011).

Parallel to Maslach and Leiter's (2021) framework, Shanafelt and Noseworthy's (2017) research on burnout and engagement among physicians used a validated survey instrument and identified seven key dimensions: workload, efficiency, flexibility/control, work-life integration, alignment of values, social support, and the meaning derived from work. Their work emphasized the impact of work unit and organizational factors on burnout, aligning with Maslach et al.'s (2011) perspective and suggesting that organizational interventions are pivotal in addressing burnout.

Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017) and Maslach et al.'s (2011) dimensions of burnout and engagement drivers indicate commonalities in the factors influencing burnout across different professions. By integrating these frameworks, we can identify dimensions contributing to burnout in the HR profession: workload, efficiency, meaning in work, culture/values, control/flexibility, social support/community, work-life integration, fairness, and rewards. By synthesizing the insights from the research on HR occupational characteristics, including compassion fatigue and toxin handling, we can begin to see the unique challenges faced by HR managers and develop a possible understanding of the drivers of burnout in the HR profession. This integrated approach informs the exploration of organizational-level interventions to foster HR staff well-being and mitigate burnout. This research will fill an essential gap in burnout engagement research by focusing on the HR Management profession.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in the research study, including the research purpose, design, process, sample, interview population, data collection, protection of human subjects, analysis of data approach, and summary.

Research Purpose

Previous research has explored burnout across various professions, yet a gap exists in understanding burnout, specifically within the HR profession. The purpose of this study was to explore the drivers of burnout among HR managers, including the occupational characteristics that are associated with burnout, and learn what interventions may be recommended to reduce burnout by answering the following questions:

- Are occupational characteristics associated with burnout in HR managers?
- What do HR managers' report as the key drivers of burnout?
- What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest to promote engagement and reduce burnout?

The HR manager faces unique occupational characteristics as described in Chapter 2, which are known to lead to increased levels of burnout. Yet, studies have yet to be done explicitly on burnout and HR Managers. Given the recently reported high levels of burnout in HR, this is an important issue to investigate further to understand what is happening and what levers can be pulled to improve the situation.

Research Design

A mixed-method approach was selected to provide an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Mixed method research designs include both quantitative and qualitative data. By including

quantitative data and qualitative data to understand concepts, opinions, and deeper meaning, more significant insights into the topic are gained. The type of mixed-method research design selected was the explanatory sequential mixed method. This approach has two sequential phases of research that build on each other, with "rigorous quantitative sampling in the first phase and with purposeful sampling in the second, qualitative phase" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 222).

The explanatory sequential mixed method approach was selected for two main reasons. First, burnout in the HR profession has yet to be studied in academic research. While there are anecdotal stories and HR burnout is mentioned in trade journals and popular press, there is room to provide research into the topic. Second, the explanatory sequential mixed method was appropriate for this research because understanding occupational characteristics and drivers of burnout (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy) is well suited for a quantitative survey and has established measures. Phase two consisted of a qualitative interview to provide greater insight and meaning into the survey results.

Research Process

The first phase consisted of conducting a quantitative research survey to understand if participants were experiencing burnout characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy and which driver dimensions and occupational characteristics had a significant relationship to burnout. The research process for phase one concluded with an analysis of the results. See Appendix A to view the survey questions.

The second phase consisted of interviews with the most senior HR Leaders in the survey population to get their feedback on the survey results, validate what I heard, gain a

deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and gain insights into possible interventions to improve existing practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013).

Six Senior HR Leaders were interviewed using video and transcription technology to ensure accurate data collection. The Interview Guide is in Appendix B.

Population

In large organizations today, many HR functions are structured with a center of expertise (COE) for specialized domains within HR, such as Talent Acquisition, Talent management, HR Operations, Total Rewards, and People Analytics. For phase one, the study population excluded individuals who worked in specialized COEs and focused on the HR Generalist population with at least five years of experience. The HR Generalist population included both individual contributors and those in management positions. Typical titles include HR Generalist, HR Business Partner, HR Manager, HR Director, VP of HR, Head of HR, and CHRO. I focused on professionals with at least five years of experience delivering broad-based HR services across an employee population, including the entire organization.

For phase two, I selected the most senior leaders of HR functions who participated in the survey. Typical titles include VP of HR, HR Director, and VP of HR Business Partners, and they were from small, mid-sized, and large organizations. The expected outcome for this interview phase was to help explain the initial survey results in more depth and gain more profound meaning in what is happening while answering the third research question: "What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest for promoting engagement and reducing burnout?"

Research Sample

For phase one, the sample consisted of 31 qualified respondents. The participants were obtained by sharing information about the study and requesting participation in the survey with LinkedIn and SHRM (Society of Human Resources Management). The survey information articulated the target population for the study as those with at least five years of experience working in an HR Generalist, HR Business Partner, or HR Management position responsible for ensuring the delivery of all HR services across a portion of the employee population. During the demographic part of the survey, participants were notified of experience requirements for the results to be included in the study results and could discontinue participation if they did not meet them.

For phase two, the sample consisted of six interviewees. The participants were obtained by reviewing the demographic data of the survey participants and selecting the seven most senior HR leaders of the survey population to interview. Out of the seven, one could not make the interview by the deadline.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The data collection was completed in two separate sequential phases, as outlined above. The first phase consisted of a quantitative research survey with four qualifying questions and 62 survey questions to understand the level of burnout or engagement of participants and the most salient drivers of burnout and engagement for HR managers. The second phase consisted of qualitative interviews with the most senior HR leaders who were selected for qualitative interviews based on their deep knowledge, expertise, and experience to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and survey results.

Phase 1: Survey

The survey comprised 66 questions and was administered using Qualtrics. Based on a review of previous burnout continuum research by Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017) and Maslach et al. (2011), a survey protocol (Appendix A) was designed to measure if participants were experiencing burnout characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy and which driver dimensions and occupational characteristics had a significant relationship to burnout. This section comprised 10 Likert scale questions tied to the burnout characteristics of exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy. The principal investigator independently developed interview questions for each burnout variable, occupational characteristics, and driver dimension.

The rest of the survey questions sought to understand the drivers of burnout, taking into consideration the driver dimensions from the combined Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017) and Maslach et al. (2011) research, including workload, efficiency/resources, meaning derived from work, culture and values, control/flexibility, social support/community at work, work-life integration, fairness/justice, and rewards, and the HR Manager occupational characteristics, including toxin handing and compassion fatigue. Additional questions were asked to gather data on other factors that may influence burnout. Table 1 outlines the survey question category and the number of questions in each area.

Table 1

Survey Question Category and Number of Questions

Question Category	# of Questions
Qualifying Questions	4
Burnout Engagement Continuum	10
Organizational Factors	4
Work Unit Factors	4
Individual Factors	10
Occupational Characteristics – Compassion Fatigue	2
Occupational Characteristics – Toxin Handling	5
Driver Dimension – Workload	3
Driver Dimension – Rewards	3
Driver Dimension – Meaning derived from work	3
Driver Dimension – Alignment to values	3
Driver Dimension – Fairness/Justice	3
Driver Dimension – Autonomy/Flexibility/Control	3
Driver Dimension – Community support	3
Driver Dimension – Efficiency/Resources	3
Driver Dimension – Work-life integration	3
Total	**66**

Phase 2: Interviews

The qualitative interview phase was used to gain more understanding and meaning in the survey analysis results while discussing possible interventions. The data analysis results from the survey were shared with the interviewee. The qualitative interview guide (Appendix B) comprised two topics for discussion and the same six questions for each topic. For topic one, the survey data related to the following prompt

was shared: Investigate to what extent HR Management occupational characteristics are associated with burnout. Six interview questions were asked after sharing the data related to that prompt. For topic two, the survey data related to the following prompt was shared: Investigate the drivers of burnout in the HR Management role. The same six interview questions were asked after sharing the data related to the prompt. In addition to asking interviewees for their opinions and feelings about the data, the questions also sought to explore work unit and organizational level strategies for promoting engagement and reducing burnout.

Protection of Human Subjects

The survey data was collected using Qualtrics. The survey maintained anonymity by avoiding asking respondents to provide any contact information, including email addresses, within the survey and by not collecting any demographic data that would identify them. Respondents were assigned a number for tracking. For those respondents that opt into phase two, a separate survey was created where participants left their contact information, title, and years of experience.

The qualitative interviews were conducted using audio transcription services. The audio transcription of the interviews were permanently deleted upon validation. All transcription and the concurrent notes were securely stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected laptop and in a locked office. Video interviews on Zoom were only audio recorded. To ensure confidentiality and data privacy, all data associated with the study will be deleted within three years after the study's completion. If information from this study is published in journals or presented at meetings, the data will be reported as a group or summarized data and participants' identities will be kept confidential.

Analysis of Data Approach

The survey data analysis started with a review of the participant demographics. Next, a reliability analysis using internal consistency of the instrument's scales was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. Lastly, a descriptive and correlational analysis using Kendall's tau-b was performed for the dataset to determine whether any variables were significantly correlated.

The survey's data analysis results were shared with the interviewee, and then open-ended questions were asked to obtain feedback and insights. The approach to data analysis sought to demonstrate qualitative rigor by using the Gioia et al. (2012) methodology for analysis, including creating first-order concepts, second-order themes, aggregate dimensions, and a data structure. This approach aims to show the relationship among the emergent concepts that explain the phenomenon and clarify how the data connects to the theoretical findings.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology for this study, including the purpose, design, interview process, sample, population, data collection, and analysis. This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-method design approach that identified occupational characteristics that put HR professionals at risk for burnout, critical drivers of burnout, and engagement, intending to understand organizational interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout for the HR management population. The next chapter reports on the results and analysis.

Chapter 4: Daya Analysis & Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine burnout antecedents and intervention strategies for HR managers. Three research questions were examined:

- Are occupational characteristics associated with burnout in HR managers?

- What do HR managers' report as the key drivers of burnout?

- What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest for promoting engagement and reducing burnout?

This chapter reports the findings of the present study based on a survey of 31 HR professionals and interviews with six HR leadership professionals. Survey findings related to Research Questions 1 and 2 are reported first. Then, thematic findings drawn from the interviews for Research Question 3 is reported.

Phase 1: Survey Findings

Respondent Data

A total of 31 HR professionals completed the survey. Most participants had 15 or more years of experience in HR (26; 83.9%) and as an HR manager (22; 71%). Most (23; 74.2%) had experience managing people managers. Respondents represented a range of company sizes, HR organization sizes, and employee population sizes (Table 2).

Table 2

Respondent Demographics

	n	%
Total years of experience in human resources		
5-9 years	3	9.7
10-14 years	2	6.5
15+ years	26	83.9
Total years of experience as human resources manager		
5-9 years	4	12.9
10-14 years	5	16.1
15+ years	22	71.0
Experience managing people managers		
Yes	23	74.2
No	8	25.8
Total human resources employees		
1-2	6	19.4
3-7	8	25.8
8-28	5	16.1
29+	12	38.7
Current company size		
1-100 employees	6	19.4
101-500 employees	6	19.4
501-2000 employees	8	25.8
2001+ employees	11	35.5
Employee population size		
1-100 employees	6	19.4
101-250 employees	4	12.9
251-500 employees	6	19.4
501-2000 employees	8	25.8
2001+ employees	7	22.6

N = 31

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency of the instrument's scales was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. Ten scales were found to exhibit sufficient reliability (Table 3). Internal consistency ranged from .65 (autonomy) to .83 (cynicism). Nunally (1978) advised that a sufficiently reliable scale exhibits internal consistency of at least 0.70.

Table 3

Scale Reliability

Scale	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cynicism	3	.83
Efficacy	3	.80
Toxin Handling	6	.79
Experience	3	.77
Value Alignment	4	.76
Exhaustion	4	.73
Work-Life Integration	7	.73
Fairness	4	.72
Belonging	3	.71
Autonomy	4	.65

The correlation analysis used the scales for the burnout variables and work dimensions. Descriptive and correlational analyses using Kendall's tau-b was performed for the dataset to determine whether any variables were significantly correlated (Table 4). The highest scores were reported for autonomy ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.69$) and value alignment ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.79$). The lowest scores were reported for belonging ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.92$). Correlational analyses indicated that efficacy and cynicism were not significantly related, although exhaustion was significantly negatively correlated with efficacy, $r = -.37$, $p < .01$ and positively correlated with cynicism, $r = .59$, $p < .001$.

Table 4

Correlational Analysis

	M SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	N Sig. Relationships
1. Efficacy	r 3.97 0.75	--									4
	p	.									
2. Cynicism	r 3.41 1.19	-.144	--								7
	p	.297	.								
3. Exhaustion	r 3.00 0.89	-.373**	.594**	--							9
	p	.006	<.001	.							
4. Toxin Handling	r 3.34 0.80	-.066	.274*	.313*	--						4
	p	.627	.043	.020	.						
5. Experience	r 3.14 0.67	.341*	-.283*	-.406**	-.087	--					5
	p	.015	.042	.003	.529	.					
6. Values Alignment	r 4.02 0.79	.279*	-.522**	-.504**	-.118	.235	--				6
	p	.043	<.001	<.001	.387	.092	.				
7. Fairness	r 3.67 1.05	.266	-.635**	-.598**	-.263	.315*	.517**	--			6
	p	.052	<.001	<.001	.051	.023	<.001	.			
8. Belonging	r 2.76 0.92	.219	-.379**	-.374**	-.139	.179	.391**	.445**	--		5
	p	.113	.005	.006	.307	.201	.004	.001	.		
9. Autonomy	r 4.06 0.69	.302*	-.502**	-.522**	-.312*	.404**	.469**	.454**	.335*	--	8
	p	.030	<.001	<.001	.022	.004	<.001	<.001	.015	.	
10. Work Life Integration	r 3.06 0.74	.170	-.107	-.284*	-.332*	.050	.047	.148	.044	.176	2
	p	.212	.427	.034	.013	.714	.730	.270	.743	.195	

Note. N = 31; correlations run using Kendall's tau-b test of two-tailed significance; *p<.05, **p<.01; add scales

The burnout variables were shown to significantly correlate with other aspects of the respondents' work dimensions:

- Efficacy: Significant positive relationships were found with experience, r = .34, p < .05; values alignment, r = .28, p < .05; and autonomy, r = .30, p < .05.

- Cynicism: A significant positive relationship was found with toxin handling, r = .27, p < .05. Significant negative associations were found for all other work dimensions except work-life integration. The strongest association was with fairness, r = -.64, p < .001.

- Exhaustion: A significant positive relationship was found with toxin handling, r = .31, p < .05. Significant negative associations were found for all other experience work dimensions. The strongest association was with fairness, r = -.60, p < .001.

A significant negative relationship was found between toxin handling and autonomy, r = -.31, p < .05 and with work-life integration, r = -.33, p < .05. Seven significant relationships were found among the remaining work life variables. The strongest relationship was between values alignment and fairness, r = .52, p < .001.

Efficacy, Cynicism, and Exhaustion (i.e., 1-3) are the burnout variables, and 4-10 are the work dimensions. Table 5 illustrates the number of significant relationships between the burnout variables and work dimensions and the total combined number of significant relationships. Exhaustion, Autonomy, and Cynicism have the highest number of significant relationships.

Table 5

Number of Significant Relationships among Burnout Variables and Work Dimensions

	Number of Significant Relationships		
	Burnout Variables	Work Dimensions	Total
1. Efficacy	1	3	4
2. Cynicism	1	6	7
3. Exhaustion	2	7	9
4. Toxin Handling	2	2	4
5. Experience	3	2	5
6. Values Alignment	3	3	6
7. Fairness	2	4	6
8. Belonging	2	3	5
9. Autonomy	3	5	8
10. Work Life Integration	1	1	2

Note. N = 31

Survey Data Findings Insights

From this, we see that the variables that had the largest number of significant correlations were exhaustion (9), autonomy (8), and cynicism (7). What this suggests is when work dimensions are suboptimal, exhaustion tends to be high. On that same vein, if HR Managers are exhausted, they are likely to perceive work dimensions as suboptimal. When work dimensions are suboptimal, cynicism tends to be high. Similarly, if HR Managers are cynical, they will likely perceive work dimensions as suboptimal. When

autonomy is low, workers then perceive work dimensions as suboptimal. Likewise, autonomy tends to be low when work dimensions are suboptimal. However, in all these cases, we cannot rule out a confounding variable acting on all of them.

A significant positive relationship was found between the occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue alongside cynicism and exhaustion. This means that as toxin handling/compassion fatigue increases, levels of cynicism and exhaustion tend to increase. Thus, cynicism and exhaustion are elevated when HR professionals must engage in more toxin handling.

A significant positive relationship was found between efficacy, values alignment, and autonomy. This indicates that individuals tend to be more effective as values alignment and autonomy increase. Thus, as values alignment and autonomy increase, individuals tend to be more effective.

Values alignment and autonomy significantly correlate with all burnout variables (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy). Given this, we are confident that values alignment and autonomy are linked in some way to burnout and engagement levels.

Phase 2: Interview Data Findings

The section reports the findings of the qualitative interviews. The findings review the participants' demographic information, the participants' feedback on the explanation of the phenomenon, and the thematic findings drawn from the interviews.

Demographics

Six of the most senior HR professionals who took the survey and volunteered to participate in the second phase of the research study were interviewed. The titles and years of experience can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

Interviewee Demographics

TITLE	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
HR Director	27
VP HR	23
VP, Talent & Organization Development	20
HR Director	16
VP Human Resources	27
Director, HR Business Partners	18

Explanation of the Phenomenon

The interviews captured the interviewee's meaning-making of the survey data. They yielded thematic findings for the remaining research question: "What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest for promoting engagement and reducing burnout?"

First, the survey findings and insights related to the occupational characteristics of Toxin Handling and Compassion Fatigue were shared with the interviewees. Then, questions were asked to understand what opinions, feelings, and reactions surfaced from the survey data findings, if this data aligns with their experience, and what interventions they would suggest to reduce burnout related to these occupational characteristics (Appendix B). The occupational characteristics survey data findings shared included:

- A significant positive relationship was found between the occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue and cynicism and exhaustion.

- This means that as the amount of toxin handling/compassion fatigue increases, levels of cynicism and exhaustion also tend to increase.

- While correlation does not indicate causation, cynicism, and exhaustion are elevated when HR professionals must engage in more toxin handling.

Second, the survey findings and insights related to the significant relationships between the burnout variables and work dimensions were shared with the interviewees. Then, questions were asked to understand what opinions, feelings, and reactions surfaced from the survey data findings, if this data aligns with their experience, and what interventions they would suggest to reduce burnout in the HR Management profession.

Using the Gioia et al. (2012) method, a collection of 99 first-order categories related to the meaning-making of the survey data and the question of what interventions HR managers suggest for promoting engagement and reducing burnout were identified. In total, 14 themes emerged from the first-order categories, helping to explain the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon and suggest ways to improve outcomes. By further distilling the themes, three aggregate dimensions were identified: Business Leadership & HR Alignment, The Emotional Toll, and HR Job and Function Design. Below are the 14 themes related to each of the three aggregate dimensions. The full data structure is listed in Appendix C (Gioia et al., 2012).

Aggregate Dimensions & Corresponding Themes

Business Leadership & HR Alignment
1. Support and Alignment between HR and Business Leadership
2. Leadership Accountability
3. Importance of values alignment between the individual and HR/Business

Leadership

4.   How the business views HR

5.   HR's role in balancing employee needs and business needs

6.   Being effective, making an impact, and engagement

The Emotional Toll

7.   The Dirty Work

8.   Awareness, acknowledgment, and recognition of emotional labor work

9.   Emotional Toll of HR work

10.   HR Mental Health

HR Job and Function Design

11.   HR Community Support

12.   The Cobbler's Children Syndrome

13.   HR Job and Function Design

14.   Workload & Appropriate Resourcing

Interview Findings Insights

Analysis of the first-order categories revealed the similarities and differences that emerged and second-order themes surfaced as the data was assimilated and integrated. The themes were considered to gain a greater understanding of the drivers of burnout in the HR Manager role and new concepts not previously found in the literature were identified and further distilled into aggregate dimensions. This approach aims to show the relationship among the emergent concepts that explain the phenomenon and clarify how the data connects to the theoretical findings.

Upon sharing the data with the interviewees, the first question was: "What comes to mind when hearing these findings?" All interviewees responded similarly, stating that they were not surprised by the survey data insights. Major themes around the relationship

with the business leaders, support from the business, values alignment, level of leadership

involvement, and accountability of business leaders emerged as important elements that

impact an HR Manager's well-being and resilience to cope with the emotional labor

burden of the HR Manager role. How the business views HR and the level of partnership

seemed important to the HR Manager's feeling of being effective and making an impact.

Conducting layoffs was consistently raised as taking a significant emotional toll

on HR Managers. The reason for the layoffs and handling of layoffs significantly

contributed to the HR Manager's determination of whether values alignment was present.

A strong alignment in values is critical to the HR Manager's ability to cope with the

"dirty work" and emotional toll related to the role.

The emotional labor required to show empathy when handling layoffs, employee

crises, and delivering difficult news consistently showed up in the interview data.

Cynicism was present in those scenarios where there was a lack of values alignment.

There was a recognition that sometimes difficult business decisions must be made, and

the level of autonomy in which the HR manager could carry out the work was important.

Emotional exhaustion was consistently present as an outcome when discussing the dirty

work, and there was a desire for awareness, acknowledgment, and recognition for doing

the "dirty work" that would go a long way to providing needed support.

Another dimension that surfaced was the acknowledgment that HR Managers

have personal lives as well and that their mental health is at risk when you combine

personal challenging scenarios such as the cancer of a partner, divorce, or a death in the

family combined with the toxin handling and compassion fatigue required in the role.

There was much discussion about how the emotional labor of the HR Manager role should be considered in the job design.

Themes from the Interviews for the Remaining Research Question

Each of the six interviewees had multiple suggestions focused on the remaining research question, "What organizational interventions do HR managers suggest for promoting engagement and reducing burnout?" Four significant themes surfaced related to the organizational interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout. These include Acknowledging and Recognizing the Impact, HR Community Support, The Cobbler's Children Syndrome, and HR Job and Function Design.

There was a desire for awareness, acknowledgment, and recognition from both business leadership and HR leadership for doing the "dirty work," which would go a long way toward providing needed support to HR Managers.

There was consistent recognition that HR managers do not have appropriate community support and outlets to deal with the emotional burden of the work. Many suggestions emerged around creating community support networks. Additionally, in the interviews, the odd feeling of knowing you are an employee but being separate as an HR professional surfaced. For example, one interviewee spoke about company social events and employees not wanting HR there, joking about being careful because HR is present. Due to the role's nature, HR has to be careful in social settings. As such, HR can feel separate from the rest of the organization

Additionally, HR people are employees but do not receive support, resources, or training on coping with work's emotional burden. Mental health and HR employee well-being were raised as a concern. There was a desire for recognition that HR professionals

are employees and have unmet needs. HR is responsible for training in many organizations but often does not have training for themselves. Based on feedback from the interviewees, there is a need for an "HR for HR" role, or an HR person who supports the HR department. The concept of the Cobblers' children having no shoes surfaced and sums up this phenomenon for HR.

Themes around workload, resourcing, and job design also emerged as suggestions for reducing burnout and promoting engagement. Like many others, HR jobs have been designed to create efficiencies, resulting in HR positions with the same person doing investigations and terminations repeatedly. Suggestions surfaced that job design should consider the work's emotional burden and be designed to include a counterbalance that "fills one's cup." The design should consider the health impact, sustainability, and the long-term ability to perform the role with compassion, not just looking at efficiency.

One HR department-level suggestion was to ensure variation in each day. This would allow for doing things that add energy to the day to balance the energy-draining work. For roles primarily responsible for difficult business decisions, difficult news, and letting people go, there should be some intentional way of adding positive back into the job scope. One interviewee described it as watering the flower and giving it nutrients. If you do not water the flower, it will dry out and die. The HR manager needs support, care, and space to charge their batteries. These solutions require more resources and planning and an acknowledgment of the emotional burden and toll the work takes.

Summary

This chapter outlined the findings of the present study based on a survey and interviews with HR professionals. The next chapter provides a discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has extensively explored burnout across various professions, yet a notable gap exists in understanding burnout, specifically within the HR profession. The HR profession has many specialization areas, so it is important to note that this study focused on HR management professionals providing broad-based HR services across employee populations, often referred to as generalists. Given the importance of HR management in looking after the people in organizations, it is vital to discover if HR managers are prone to burnout due to the occupational characteristics of the profession, determine the drivers of burnout in the HR manager role, and explore the organizational-level strategies that promote HR staff well-being and reduce burnout. By understanding the drivers of burnout in the HR management profession, the three research questions aimed to assist organizations in implementing strategies to improve HR professionals' well-being and ensure the sustainability of those who look after people in organizations.

Discussion

The explanatory sequential mixed method design called for a separate survey and interview data analysis, provided in Chapter 4. This discussion interprets how the interview data explains the survey data related to the burnout variables (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, efficacy), occupational characteristics (i.e., toxin handling and compassion fatigue), and the other work dimensions (e.g., values alignment, fairness, autonomy, and belonging). This section addresses study findings related to the HR manager's occupational characteristics. Lastly, I identify key burnout drivers based on the work dimensions and themes to promote engagement and reduce burnout.

Burnout Variables

The survey data found that exhaustion had a significant positive relationship with cynicism. This aligns with burnout research across many organizations and occupations that consistently found a strong relationship between exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout, and cynicism (Maslach et al., 2001). The survey data found a significant positive relationship between these two burnout variables. The interview data explains this relationship between exhaustion and cynicism concerning the emotional toll of HR work that can lead to feelings of exhaustion and cynicism that can develop as a coping mechanism. This suggests that the demanding nature of HR work and the emotional labor can lead to exhaustion and cynicism over time.

The survey data found that exhaustion had a significant negative relationship with efficacy, and efficacy did not have a significant relationship with cynicism. The burnout research aligns with this finding that reduced personal accomplishment (inefficacy) results from one, or both, of the two burnout dimensions, exhaustion and cynicism (Maslach et al., 2001). In a work environment where HR managers face persistent, excessive demands leading to exhaustion or cynicism, their effectiveness is likely to diminish. The interview data explains that the relationship and level of partnership between the business leadership and HR was an important factor in how effective the HR manager felt. As the HR manager ran into a lack of support and misalignment with the business leadership, they reported feeling ineffective and, over time, disengaged.

Occupational Characteristics: Compassion Fatigue and Toxin Handling

Compassion fatigue and toxin handling are inherent aspects of the HR role (Daniel, 2020; Kulick et al., 2009). Toxin handlers are organizational members who help

colleagues manage negative emotions in the workplace. Employees frequently approach HR with emotionally charged issues, anticipating assistance in resolving those problems or being sympathetic listeners (Daniel, 2017). Both the survey data and the interview data report a relationship between these occupational characteristics and symptoms of burnout in HR managers. The survey data found a significant positive relationship between the occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue and cynicism and exhaustion. This means that as the amount of toxin handling increases, cynicism and exhaustion also tend to increase. It appears that cynicism and exhaustion are elevated when HR professionals must engage in more toxin handling. These findings align with the research on HR managers as toxin handlers that repeated exposure to emotionally charged situations can result in emotional exhaustion and negatively affect performance (Kulick et al., 2009). The interview data offered a plausible explanation for these findings, with interviewees reporting that conducting layoffs, handling employee crises, and delivering difficult news takes a significant emotional toll on HR managers. Emotional exhaustion and cynicism were consistently present in the interview data as interviewees discussed the outcomes related to toxin handling and compassion fatigue.

Work Dimensions: Values Alignment, Fairness, Belonging, and Autonomy

Two primary frameworks surfaced for assessing the burnout and engagement continuum and identifying intervention targets (Maslach et al., 2011; Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). Both frameworks included burnout/engagement driver dimensions, including values, fairness, belonging/community support, autonomy, and other dimensions and factors that impact where an individual falls on the burnout and engagement continuum. The work dimensions of values alignment, fairness, belonging,

and autonomy are highlighted because they have reliable scales and significant positive or negative correlations to this study's burnout variables and occupational characteristics.

Values are a person's principles or standards of behavior, one's judgment of what is important in life. When we speak about values relating to work dimensions, it is at the core of individuals' engagement with their work lives and connection to the workplace. However, when there is a value conflict at work, research has found that it is related to all three burnout dimensions (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). In this study, the survey data found that values alignment had a significant positive relationship with efficacy and a significant negative relationship with cynicism and exhaustion. As values alignment increases, effectiveness increases. As values alignment increases, cynicism and exhaustion decrease. This aligns with the research on the impact of conflicts between the individual's values and the organization's values and its impact on the burnout and engagement continuum (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). The interviewees indicated that when handling toxic work such as employee layoffs, the reason for the layoffs and how impacted people were treated significantly contributed to the HR manager's determination of whether values alignment was present and their ability to cope with the emotional toll of the work and avoid becoming cynical. This is congruent with the survey data findings that values alignment significantly correlated with all three burnout dimensions (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy).

Fairness is the extent to which decisions at work are perceived as being impartial, and people are treated with respect. The survey data found that fairness had a significant negative relationship with exhaustion and cynicism. As fairness increased, exhaustion and cynicism decreased. Additionally, fairness and values alignment had a significant

positive relationship. HR managers look to leadership for fairness when determining and executing difficult business decisions. The interview data suggested that when HR managers felt that their values were aligned with those of the business and HR leadership, they were more likely to trust their leaders and feel confident in their roles. Additionally, when business decisions aligned with the HR manager's values, it was easier for them to execute these business decisions. Leadership accountability also played a role; when leaders were actively involved in rewards and discipline, it fostered a sense of fairness. The survey and interview data suggest a strong relationship between values alignment, fairness, and burnout variables. This aligns with research on fairness and its impact on burnout and engagement (Leiter & Maslach, 2004).

Belonging refers to feeling comfortable and happy in a particular situation or with a specific group. It involves being treated as a full group member, where you are accepted and welcomed. In the burnout research, community support was critical to supporting professional challenges and affirming a sense of shared values (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017; Leiter & Maslach, 2004). The survey data found that belonging had a significant negative relationship with exhaustion and cynicism and a significant positive relationship with values alignment, fairness, and autonomy. According to the interview data, the sense of belonging may reduce exhaustion and cynicism because it is associated with HR and business leadership support. Additionally, interviewees spoke at length about the need for HR community support to improve the HR Manager's ability to cope with toxin handling and compassion fatigue. A lack of peer support and isolation appears to impact HR managers' coping ability. This explains how belonging could positively or negatively affect exhaustion and cynicism levels.

Autonomy is one's ability to self-govern, freedom from external control, and perceived capacity to influence decisions that affect one's work. Autonomy had the highest number of significant relationships, with a significant negative relationship to cynicism and exhaustion and a significant positive relationship with efficacy, values alignment, fairness, and belonging. The interview data explained that autonomy significantly impacted HR professionals' engagement and effectiveness. Autonomy was highlighted as the most crucial result in one HR engagement survey conducted by an HR leader who was interviewed, confirming HR professionals highly value autonomy. There was a recognition that sometimes difficult business decisions must be made, and the level of autonomy in which the HR manager could carry out the work was important. A lack of autonomy, as indicated by not having a say in business decisions that HR managers are required to implement, a lack of ability to influence outcomes, or being required to work in ways that conflict with their values, contributed to feelings of exhaustion and cynicism. These points explain the survey data and suggest that autonomy is crucial for HR professionals to feel effective and reduce exhaustion and cynicism. This aligns with the burnout research that individuals want to have some input into decisions that affect outcomes for which they will be held accountable and that when these decisions do not align with their values, a feeling of inefficacy is likely to occur (Leiter & Maslach, 2004).

Themes to Promote Engagement and Reduce Burnout

While many organizations invest in wellness programs to treat the symptoms, the effectiveness of such initiatives in combating burnout remains questionable (Weiss, 2020). Many organizations mistakenly associate burnout with individual responsibility and offer mindfulness and stress management training, which treats the symptoms of

burnout rather than addressing the root cause. However, addressing burnout necessitates focusing on the primary drivers, not the symptoms, often system-level issues requiring systems-level changes.

The HR manager interview data suggested four significant themes related to organizational interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout. These include Acknowledging and Recognizing the Impact, HR Community Support, The Cobbler's Children Syndrome, and HR Job and Function Design.

Acknowledging and Recognizing the Impact

Business and HR leadership acknowledging and recognizing the impact of toxin handling and its emotional toll on HR managers is a necessary first step toward making progress. Open and candid dialogue from HR leadership, acknowledging that some jobs have a heavier emotional toll, would make a big difference in providing support. In a research study specifically focused on HR and toxin handling, participants reported a significant negative impact on their physical and emotional well-being, and three-quarters felt that this work was not recognized or appreciated by senior leaders (Daniel, 2020). Prior research has found that formalizing the toxin-handling responsibilities in job descriptions had a buffering effect on emotional exhaustion and increased the perception of HR being more effective. When organizational leaders acknowledge the work, they become more attuned to its value and are more likely to provide resources to support it (Kulic et al., 2009). One HR Leader interviewed discussed hiring people who understand the empathy and compassion needed for the role. Including these job demands in the job description could also ensure the hiring of individuals with the emotional intelligence required to perform the role. Lastly, acknowledging and recognizing the impact on health

and well-being will set the stage for the organization to demonstrate that it cares about the well-being of its HR Managers.

HR Community Support

HR managers face distinct challenges and have a professional identity and role distinct from those of other organizational members. The interview data illustrated the unique balancing act HR plays of being an employee but having access to employee-level and organization-level confidential information that can result in feeling isolated. Another balancing act identified in the interviews is between managing employee needs and organizational goals, which are often paradoxical, and little research has been done to identify how HR managers are managing these challenges (Kulic et al., 2009). A common theme in the interview data was the need for HR to have an outlet to discuss the work with someone who understands and is dealing with the same emotions. There was a desire for HR community support to provide an outlet, support, and a sense of belonging. This support is critical to helping HR managers navigate the challenges of their roles. It can include various activities, including celebrating achievements, peer support through sharing challenging experiences, and sharing ideas on navigating professional challenges. These activities do not happen organically and require intentional effort. Burnout research focused on creating community support for physicians at the Mayo Clinic found that creating dedicated spaces, such as a physician's lounge, fostered interpersonal connections and reduced isolation. The Mayo Clinic also experimented with providing physicians one hour of protected time per week to meet with a small group of colleagues to discuss topics relevant to the physician experience, which improved physicians' finding meaning in work and reduced burnout (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017).

The Cobbler's Children Syndrome

The Cobbler's Children Syndrome is a metaphorical expression from the old adage, "The cobbler's children go unshod." This saying suggests that a cobbler (or shoemaker) is so busy making shoes for customers that they neglect to make shoes for their own family. In the workplace context, it refers to situations where professionals fail to apply their expertise or best practices to their own work. This phrase surfaced in the interviews and is consistent with the theme that HR professionals are employees but do not have dedicated HR support for their function, often referred to as HR for HR. The interview data suggested that there are many unmet needs. For example, mental health and employee well-being have been hot topics in HR for the last 5+ years, and while HR is typically the ambassador of these programs, it is rarely the recipient. Beyond the need to provide training, resources, and support to improve HR mental health and well-being, a common theme was the general lack of training and professional development for HR employees. There is little research on the topic of unmet needs of HR professionals. However, one recent industry article focused on HR employee well-being found that rates of anxiety and depression are two-and-a-half to three times higher than in the general population and suggested that robust systems of support should be embedded within the HR profession, like other people-focused professions such as counseling and clinical psychology (Burrell et al., 2024). Organizations that acknowledge the toxin-handling responsibility of HR managers should consider providing more resources so that emotional exhaustion and HR ineffectiveness are not the result (Kulic et al., 2009).

HR Job and Function Design

The interview data revealed a need to consider the breadth of the role, long-term sustainability, job demands such as the level of emotional burden, and job resources in designing the HR manager position. HR has not been immune to designing its jobs to maximize efficiency at the expense of sustainability. One HR leader shared in the interview that many organizations have created these efficiencies, and they recommend that HR job design consider the emotional toll and ensure long-term sustainability to perform the role with compassion rather than focusing on efficiency only. Suggestions also included building in dedicated time and space, reflection, and opportunities to decompress and recover, with HR leaders setting the example. In addition to considering sustainability, health, and well-being in job design, there should be an intentional focus on adding variation with positive or uplifting work opportunities into the design.

Regarding HR function design, resourcing was discussed throughout the HR leader interviews. In addition to the consistent theme of heavy workload and inadequate resourcing, a theme around designing the function comprised of teams was suggested to ensure a balance in toxin handling and reduce risks of isolation. While this may result in an increase in resources and planning required, the quality of service and sustainability of the HR managers could provide a long-term benefit.

Implications

There has been little letup for HR professionals since the pandemic. The transformative influence of generative AI on work processes will significantly shape organization design and the future of all work. Given that HR will be in the eye of this storm, now is the time to take HR professionals' health and well-being seriously. This

study's findings added new and valuable information related to the occupational characteristics of the HR manager and the organizational interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout. The findings related to the work dimensions that drive burnout and engagement are consistent with other burnout research (Maslach et al., 2011; Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). However, this study was the first to address the HR manager's occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue and its correlation to burnout variables and other work dimensions, including values alignment, fairness, autonomy, and belonging. This study confirmed the significant positive relationship with exhaustion and cynicism and that values alignment, fairness, autonomy, and belonging seem to buffer the impact. This study yielded practical recommendations to improve outcomes for HR Managers.

The HR field is closely connected to Organization Development (OD). Many internal OD practitioners are part of HR organizations and are uniquely positioned to contribute to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the HR function. The field of OD can partner with HR and business leaders to continue conducting discovery and implement and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, HR professionals would benefit from Self as Instrument (SAI) training, a core concept in OD that highlights the self as an integral part of the change process (Cheung-Judge, 2001). Given HR's role in helping organizations manage through change, training focused on developing a high degree of self-knowledge and heightened self-awareness would benefit HR professionals in building sustainable and lasting self-care.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the survey. First, the population was small, with only 31 qualified survey respondents. Second, the survey questions were not validated and the focus was too broad. This combination resulted in the inability to use a significant portion of the survey data in the analysis. The initial plan had been to determine where each survey respondent fell on the burnout engagement continuum. However, this was impossible due to the inability to validate some data. It is recommended that future research use the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) to assess HR function burnout and engagement continuum results. The original design of the survey also sought to explore nine work dimensions. The following dimensions could not be included in the analysis because they did not meet the standards for the scales correlation analysis: Rewards, Meaning derived from work, Resources, and Workload. Lastly, while the correlation analysis produced revealing data, a third unknown variable acting on them could not be ruled out.

The interview data findings are only suggestive due to the small group of six HR leaders participating in phase two of this study. Additional interviews are recommended to ensure saturation.

Recommendation for Future Research

As HR functions consider their future department and job design, additional research is recommended to explore the impact of acknowledging and recognizing the emotional burden job demands, as well as providing HR community support, training, and resources on the engagement and burnout of HR managers. Very little academic or industry data associated with HR mental well-being and burnout was found in the

research process. Future research on this topic is recommended. Lastly, it is recommended that future research focus on the role of values alignment in the HR manager role and the possibility of a buffering effect on the burnout variables, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.

Conclusion

An engaged and healthy HR workforce is critical to the success of today's organizations. Recent industry surveys (e.g., Gartner, The Sage Group, HR Zone) have found concerning results related to health, well-being, and levels of burnout within the HR profession, which led in part to the development of this research. The study aimed to explore the drivers of burnout among HR managers, including the occupational characteristics associated with burnout, and learn what organizational interventions may be recommended to reduce burnout.

This study found that the occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue had a significant relationship with exhaustion and cynicism, two of the three burnout variables. The survey data also found that exhaustion had a significant negative relationship with efficacy. So, as toxin handling and compassion fatigue increase, exhaustion increases, and as exhaustion increases, effectiveness decreases. Based on these findings, I am confident that the occupational characteristics of toxin handling and compassion fatigue are associated with burnout among HR managers.

The study found a significant negative relationship between two burnout variables, exhaustion and cynicism, and the following work dimensions: values alignment, fairness, autonomy, and belonging. As values alignment, fairness, autonomy, and belonging decreased, exhaustion and cynicism increased. While the findings do not

definitively indicate that burnout was present in the population, they do appear to support the idea that these work dimensions are drivers of burnout, consistent with other burnout research (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach et al., 2011; Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017).

Organization-level efforts are needed to address HR Manager burnout and well-being. The study found four organization-level strategies to promote engagement and reduce burnout: Acknowledging and Recognizing the Impact, HR Community Support, The Cobbler's Children Syndrome, and HR Job and Function Design. Acknowledging and recognizing the impact and community support are consistent with prior research on recommended organizational interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017).

What is new from this study is the interventions identified that are specific to the HR manager role, including The Cobbler's Children Syndrome and HR Job and Function Design. HR often designs and delivers organizational training programs and provides employee support services but rarely is the recipient of such programs and services. Additionally, given the unique pressures HR professionals encounter, HR job design should consider the emotional labor, stress, and pressure that are the reality of people professionals to ensure sustainability, given the never-ending challenges and change efforts that are a normal part of today's work environment.

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Appendix A – Survey Questionnaire

Consent Form IRB #: 23-10-2276

Study Title: Burnout and Engagement in Human Resources Management

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether to participate. If you have any questions about the study please contact:

Principal Investigator: Cecilia Lee at Cecilia.Lee@pepperdine.edu

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are an HR Generalist, HR Business Partner, HR Manager, or HR Leader with at least five years of experience delivering broad-based HR services to an employee population. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?
Recent Human Resources (HR) Professionals surveys have indicated that a high percentage of those working in the HR profession are experiencing burnout. This research explores whether HR professionals are prone to burnout due to occupational characteristics, uncovers the drivers of burnout and engagement, and identifies potential interventions to promote engagement and reduce burnout.

What will be done during this research study?
You will be asked to complete a survey using an internet-based questionnaire. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and you may complete it from any computer or mobile device. During the survey, you can volunteer to participate in the second and final phase of the study, which consists of a 60-minute video interview with the principal investigator, Cecilia Lee. You will be asked for your feedback and perspective on the overall survey results during this interview.

How will my data be used?
Your survey results are anonymous and will not be connected to your identity. If you volunteer to participate in the interview, you will be asked to provide your name and email. However, your survey results will not be connected to this identifiable information.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?
This study poses no more risk than expected in normal physical or psychological routines of daily life. We do not anticipate you will be harmed or distressed during this

study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable with the questions. Potential risks include the risk of boredom or fatigue.

What are the possible benefits to you?
Being a participant in this study will not benefit you.

What are the possible benefits to other people?
Information from this study will help researchers better understand the connections between burnout and engagement in the HR Profession.

What will being in this research study cost you?
There is no cost to you for being a participant in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?
No compensation will be provided.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?
Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?
Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for no more than three years after the study is complete. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Pepperdine University, and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone:
1(310) 568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

Consent Form Confirm You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the "I Agree" button below, your consent to participate is implied. To print a copy of this consent form click here: Participant consent form survey

If you select "I DO NOT AGREE" the survey will end.

○ I AGREE (1)

○ I DO NOT AGREE (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By cl... = I DO NOT AGREE

Page Break

Instructions 1 Your responses to this survey are completely anonymous. Your privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance. Please feel free to provide candid responses. Your feedback will be kept strictly confidential.

At the end of the survey, you can volunteer to participate in phase two of the study. If you volunteer to participate in phase two, we will ask you to provide your name and email address. This information will not be linked with your individual survey results.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Cecilia.Lee@pepperdine.edu. Thank you for your participation!

The following four questions ensure that you meet the requirements to participate in the study. This study is focused on **HR Generalist / Management professionals with five or more years of experience**. If you do not meet this qualification, you may cancel the survey at this time or feel free to continue taking the survey, knowing your data will not be included in this study but could be included in future research.

Q1 How many total years of experience do you have working in Human Resources (HR)?

○ 0 - 4 years (1)

○ 5 - 9 years (2)

○ 10 - 14 years (3)

○ 15+ years (4)

Q2 What is your current or most recent job title?

_____

Q3 How many years of experience do you have working in an HR Generalist, HR Business Partner, or HR management/leadership position?

○ 0 - 4 years (1)

○ 5 - 9 years (2)

○ 10 - 14 years (3)

○ 15+ years (4)

Q4 Do you have five or more years of experience delivering HR Generalist services to an employee population?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Note 2 The following questions are designed to provide context about your work experience and life situation.

Q5 What is the company size or your current or most recent employer?

○ 1 - 100 employees (1)

○ 101 - 500 employees (2)

○ 501 - 2000 employees (3)

○ 2001+ employees (4)

Q6 In your most recent HR Generalist / HR Management role, what employee population size are you responsible for delivering HR services to?

○ 1 - 100 employees (1)

○ 101 - 250 employees (2)

○ 251 - 500 employees (3)

○ 501 - 2000 employees (4)

○ 2001+ employees (5)

Q7 What Industry are you currently or most recently working in?

_____

8 The management style and culture in the organization is characterized by… (check all that apply)

☐ Teamwork (1)

☐ Consensus (2)

☐ Participation (3)

☐ Risk-taking (4)

☐ Risk-adverse (5)

☐ Innovative (6)

☐ Freedom (7)

☐ Uniqueness (8)

☐ Competitive (9)

☐ High demand (10)

☐ Achievement (11)

☐ Conformity (12)

☐ Predictability (13)

☐ Stability (14)

☐ High change (15)

Q9 How many total HR employees work in your most recent organization?

○ 1 - 2 (1)

○ 3 - 7 (2)

○ 8 - 28 (3)

○ 29+ (4)

Q10 How is the HR function organized? Select all that apply.

☐ We have COEs (Centers of Excellence) within the HR Function. (1)

☐ Our function is Centralized (All HR employees report to an HR main office) (2)

☐ Our function is Decentralized (HR is embedded in the business unit) (3)

☐ Matrix (HR reports to both the business and HR main office) (4)

☐ Not Applicable (5)

Q11 Do you have COEs (Centers of Excellence) within the HR Function? If yes, please select all that apply. If no, please choose not applicable.

☐ Talent Acquisition (1)

☐ Talent Management (2)

☐ Compensation & Benefits (3)

☐ HR Operations (4)

☐ HR Shared Services (5)

☐ Employee Relations (6)

☐ People Analytics (7)

☐ Learning and Development (8)

☐ Other (9) _____

☐ Not Applicable (10)

Q12 Do you have experience managing a team of individual contributors?

○ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

Q13 Do you have experience managing people managers?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q14 My tenure at my most recent employer is?

○ 0 - 2 years (1)

○ 3 - 5 years (2)

○ 6 - 10 years (3)

○ 11+ years (4)

Q15 What is the Title of the person you most recently reported to?

_____

Q16 Do you work remote, hybrid, or on-site?

○ Remote (90%+ of the time) (1)

○ Hybrid (A combination of remote and on-site) (2)

○ On-site (90%+ of the time) (3)

Q17 Do you live in the United States?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q18 If the United States, what state do you live in?

_____

Q19 We are interested in understanding how demands outside of work may impact work-life balance. With this in mind, what is your personal life situation? Select all that apply.

☐ Married (1)

☐ Single (2)

☐ Children / Dependents (3)

☐ Assisting aging family members (4)

☐ I have health concerns about my own health and / or well-being (5)

☐ I have health concerns about a spouse and / or dependents (6)

☐ Is there anything else about your life situation relevant to share? (7)

_____

☐ I prefer not to answer (8)

Q20 Are you actively job searching for a new opportunity?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q21 I have considered leaving the field of Human Resources.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q22 I mostly have a positive relationship with my direct manager.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q23 Are you responsible for any of the following in your most recent position? Select all that apply.

☐ Employee Well-being (1)

☐ Point of contact for employees (2)

☐ Layoffs (3)

☐ Restructuring (4)

☐ Managing organizational change (5)

☐ Employee conflict resolution (6)

☐ Complaints (7)

☐ Investigations (8)

☐ Involuntary terminations (9)

☐ Coaching Managers (10)

☐ Culture (11)

☐ Confidentiality of sensitive information (12)

☐ Training (13)

☐ Union grievances (14)

Q24 Are you responsible for the management of emotionally charged situations at work?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q25 If you are responsible for managing emotionally charged situations, does your job description formalize this as a responsibility?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I don't know (3)

○ Not Applicable (4)

Q26 In a typical work week, how many hours per week do you work?

○ 0 - 20 hours (1)

○ 21 - 40 hours (2)

○ 41 - 50 hours (3)

○ 51 - 60 hours (4)

○ 61+ hours (5)

Q27 I am compensated fairly for the work I do.

○ Yes (1)

○ Maybe / I am not sure (2)

○ No (3)

Note 3 In the following survey questions, you will be asked to provide your opinions or experiences using a Likert scale. The Likert scale is widely used for measuring attitudes,

opinions, and behaviors.

It consists of a series of statements, and for each statement, you will be asked to select a rating that best represents your response.

Q28-Q32 Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale. There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest opinions and personal experiences are what we are interested in.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
The work I do aligns with my values (1)	○	○	○	○	○
My organizations values align with my values (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The behavior of my manager aligns with the organizations values (3)	○	○	○	○	○
My most recent company treated all emloyees fairly (4)	○	○	○	○	○
My most recent manager treated all employees fairly (5)	○	○	○	○	○

Q33-Q38 Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
Opportunities for advancement and recognition are distributed fairly (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I have the autonomy to decide how I complete my tasks (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I have the flexibility to decide when I complete work (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I can disconnect from work when on vacation / taking time off (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I have positive role models in my organization that demonstrate healthy work-life integration (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I have the tools and resources to be effective in my role (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q39-Q66 Please use the following scale to indicate your frequency of occurrence for each statement.

	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Half of the Time (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
How often do you feel productive at work? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel you make meaningful progress on your work tasks? (2)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel confident you can meet your performance goals? (3)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel emotionally drained or exhausted at the end of the typical workday? (4)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you lose sleep over work-related concerns? (5)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel excited and motivated to start your workday? (6)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you find yourself doubting the sincerity or motives of your co-workers? (7)	○	○	○	○	○

How often do you find yourself questioning the sincerity of your direct supervisor? (8)

How often do you find yourself doubting the sincerity of the Senior Leadership team? (9)

	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Half of the Time (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
How often do you think about work-related tasks outside of working hours? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you help colleagues in distress? (2)	○	○	○	○	○
How often must you implement or enforce policies contributing to employee distress? (3)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel overwhelmed by the needs of employees? (4)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you experience emotional exhaustion in your role, particularly related to dealing with the suffering of employees? (5)	○	○	○	○	○

How often do you have conflicting or competing demands at work and in life? (6)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you experience feelings of stress and/or anxiety about your workload? (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Role ambiguity is a lack of access to adequate information to do your job well. How often do you experience this? (8)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel frustrated with inefficient work processes and lack of technology? (9)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel the organization's values are reflected in the workplace culture? (10)	○	○	○	○	○

	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Half of the Time (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
How often do you feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment in the work that you do? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
How often does your work contribute to the organization's larger purpose or vision? (2)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in your department or work unit? (3)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you have social or professional activities to promote community within the HR Function? (4)	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you feel your team members are supportive of each other's work? (5)	○	○	○	○	○

How often do you need to work nights and weekends to complete your work successfully? (6)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

How often do you feel you can manage your work responsibilities without negatively impacting your personal life? (7)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

How often do you feel your contributions and achievements are recognized and appreciated? (8)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

How often does your manager offer opportunities for professional growth through new challenges? (9)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Q67 Final Question: Would you be willing to participate in phase two of this research study, which would involve a 60-minute follow-up interview? If you select yes, you will

be directed to enter your contact information on the next page. Your survey responses will not be linked to your identifiable information.

◯ Yes (1)

◯ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Final Question: Would you be willing to participate in phase two of this research study, which wo... = No

Q40 Enter First and Last Name:

_____

Q41 Enter email address:

_____

Q42 Enter current or most recent title:

_____

Q43 Enter years of experience in HR Management:

_____

Appendix B – Interview Guide

The purpose of the research is to explore the drivers of burnout among HR managers, including the occupational characteristics that are associated with burnout, and uncover ideas to increase engagement and reduce burnout.

Topic 1 - Investigate to what extent HR Management occupational characteristics are associated with burnout.

One of the goals of this research is to investigate to what extent the occupational characteristics of the HR Management role are associated with burnout. First, I will share our findings from the survey data surrounding the occupational characteristics of the HR Manager role and burnout results and then ask you follow-up questions.

Questions:

- What comes to mind upon hearing these findings?

- What opinions and/or feelings do you have about this data?

- Does this align with your experience and knowledge of what you have seen in your career?

- What do you think is going on?

- What HR department changes, if any, could make a positive impact?

- What can be done at the organizational level to promote engagement and reduce burnout for the HR manager population?

Topic 2 - Investigate the drivers of burnout in the HR Management role.

Another goal of this research is to investigate the drivers of burnout in the HR management role. First, I will share with you what we saw in the survey data surrounding drivers of engagement and burnout and then ask you follow-up questions.

Questions:

- What comes to mind upon hearing these findings?

- What opinions and/or feelings do you have about this data?

- How does this align with your experience and knowledge of what you have seen in your career?

- What do you think is going on?

- What HR department changes, if any, could make a positive impact?

- What can be done at the organizational level to promote engagement and reduce burnout for the HR manager population?

Closing Question:

- Is there anything you want to add that we haven't yet discussed?

- Have we missed something you think is essential?

- What else should we talk about regarding this issue/topic?

Appendix C – Interview Data Structure

Aggregate Dimensions & Corresponding Themes

Business Leadership & HR Alignment
1.   Support and Alignment between HR and Business Leadership
2.   Leadership Accountability
3.   Importance of values alignment between the individual and HR/Business Leadership
4.   How the business views HR
5.   HR's role in balancing employee needs and business needs
6.   Being effective, making an impact, and engagement

The Emotional Toll
7.   The Dirty Work
8.   Awareness, acknowledgment, and recognition of emotional labor work
9.   Emotional Toll of HR work
10.   HR Mental Health

HR Job and Function Design
11.   HR Community Support
12.   The Cobbler's Children Syndrome
13.   HR Job and Function Design
14.   Workload & Appropriate Resourcing

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
- Need balanced even support from both HR Leadership and Business Leadership. - Imbalance between support from HR and Business. - Support and involvement from business and HR leaders. - Takes a toll when no support from HR leadership and the business leadership. - If it's not important to management, why am I doing this? - If what your working on isn't important to leaders you become less effective. - If business doesn't want to change and they are stuck in their ways, then it's time to move on because what is the point. - Business asks for help, do all the work, and then they do nothing with it. - Can't be effective if not supported by the business leadership. - Balance of alignment: Need alignment between HR leadership and the business leadership.	Support and Alignment between HR and Business Leadership	Business Leadership & HR Alignment

• No support then walk away. • We need more support. From HR leadership and the business. • The partnership with the business leadership team. • It goes back to trust. Building the trust with the team, building the trust with the leaders.		
• Leadership accountability. Everything's been passed along to the next guy to fix. • If the top business leadership is making the painful decision then leadership should play an active partner in executing on those decisions. • When it's the good news, let's say, promoting someone, leaders don't seem to have a problem doing that. So why is it different when it's the painful decisions? It's like HR is the parent that does all the discipline and the business is the parent that gives all the rewards. both have to participate in both the rewards and the discipline and be on the same team. • These are Business decisions not HR decisions. And the business leaders need to partner with HR to execute on those business decisions. But it's really the business leader who needs to accountable. • Leadership accountability.	Leadership Accountability	Business Leadership & HR Alignment
• Balancing act between needs of employees and business. • Values alignment is high for me because I'm willing to deliver hard news I Ithink it's the right thing to do. I am okay to be in the caregiver role if I am given the ability to actually take care of people with good benefits upon exit. • Executing hard business decisions is a lot easier if you understand why the decision had to be made and that decision aligns with your values. If the decision doesn't align with your values and you are being forced into something you don't agree with. You can also then start questioning every decision being made. • When decisions are made that don't align with my values. Some decisions are out of your hands and you do what you are told to do (as long as it's not illegal or immoral). I guess those might be the scenarios you feel ineffective.	Importance of values alignment between the individual and HR/Business Leadership	Business Leadership & HR Alignment

• Because with the values, there's alignment, then that creates trust and then the trust. With trust, then comes a lot of confidence and assurance. • And I always make sure that I work for a leader that I call this principle centered, and that my values and the values of the head, and I would say not only of the HR team or the people and culture team, depending on the nomenclature you use, but also with the CEO, you know, at a certain point too, you know, what's their values and their directions and all that. And that's really important to me. • There was my value system and the organization value system was no longer aligned. And I was ready, I was more than ready to try my chance and find something else, somewhere else where the alignment was going to be stronger. • if it's meant by the autonomy, I'm not sure that say, well, just go away, HR, and do this and there's no talk and just go get it done. Yeah, that's not going to work very well. Yeah. • Especially if it's not aligned with your values and you're just told, too bad, go and do it. • So a layoff may need to happen. How you go about doing that is where the game changer is. What are some principles that you put in place.		
• HR isn't a necessary evil. • Leaders that are behind HR. Some leaders think HR impedes operations.	How the business views HR	Business Leadership & HR Alignment
• Support from HR Leadership on the struggle to manage the that balance between employees and the business. • help people live their lives and do what they need to do while still contributing to the organization's objectives and mandate? Like where's the win? The more of the win. • having good partners to work through that is really important. then manage that change in a way that is win not only for the leadership team, but for the employees who may be at first viewing this as a takeaway.	HR's role in balancing employee needs and business needs	Business Leadership & HR Alignment
• Support from business leadership made me effective. • Ability to make progress impacts feeling engaged.	Being effective, making an impact, and engagement	Business Leadership & HR Alignment

• Making progress led to feeling energized. • involvement from HR Leadership and Business leadership to make an impact. • If not making an impact don't feel engaged. • I don't agree with the finds on ineffective. Everyday I am going to affect somebody's life.		
• HR does the dirty work on behalf of what leadership have decided. The leaders who make these decisions should play a more active role in the dirty work. This may lead to them being more thoughtful in the future. • So there's decisions that are made from leadership and looking at the financials and looking at whatever needs to happen to make those financial numbers. But then it's. Then they delegate it to the HR team to go and take care of it and, like, get rid of whatever, 5% of the workforce or whatever. • Carol Burnett show, but at the end, with her mop in her bucket, HR is not the mop in the bucket crew. • HR Responsible for all things wrong in the organization and it takes a toll.	The Dirty Work	The Emotional Toll
• No recognition and no validation from HR leadership. • Would like recognition from and support from business leaders. • Acknowledge and recognize the emotional labor work • Support from HR leadership by talking about it, recognizing it, awareness, would make a big difference. • HR Department level: Acknowledging and appreciating that some jobs have a heavier emotional toll. Not all jobs are created equally in terms of what they expect from you emotionally.	Awareness, acknowledgement, and recognition of emotional labor work	The Emotional Toll
• Dread layoffs. Stress leading up to it because you know something others don't know. Feel responsible for them being in such a bad place. Then you hit the bottom. Exhaustion. • Deal with high stress because personally dealing with other problems and try to help them see the good and find a new path. No	Emotional Toll of HR Work	The Emotional Toll

strategies to deal with it. Just told to deal with it. • Dealing with employee emotional crisis – lost homes, mental health crisis, laid off employees • Story about first HR manager job when her boss told her one day she would be jaded and that you will begin to think everyone is a liar. And it's true. Now every employee that comes to me I think what is the end game they want. Cynicism that comes after 25 years of these scenarios. • When you feel cynical you start making choices about how much effort to put in. • You have to deliver difficult messages like not paying you while on leave because you don't meet the requirements. So you start blaming the law or system. It's not me making the decision it's the policy or the law. You don't have control to make things better you just deliver the news and move on. • dealing with the person that's having a baby, the person who's getting divorced. There's all these life moments that people have to deal with. • If you're truly a caring person and want to have that compassion. But it's very hard to have that compassion and have a big Teflon coat because then the Teflon coat comes through to the employee and it doesn't come through as compassion to the other person on the other side. • a big layoff, after, when you work through that milestone, then what do you do to kind of let people have the time and the space to recover. • Layoffs – Some HR people have disassociated from message delivering. I would prefer to do it because I know I will take good care of that person. You take it as a responsibility to give away some of your own energy and time to take care of that person. • Employees expect instantaneous results when they have a complaint or concern and want us to come to a conclusion we legally cant. • Employees call in when there is something significant in their life and so how you treat them is important even though it might be your 10th call of the day.		

• Employee context: something happened with people in general around their patience, their resilience. There's just an aggressiveness that has come. There's just a level of stress in the air. And it's wearing on people.		
• HR business partners have their own cycle of their lives. So they have probably times in their lives where they're better at managing and helping others. And if they're going through something personally and all that, they probably need some kind of a valve or a way out to then come back to the HR business partner once they move through their own cycle, too, because I don't think it's healthy for them if they're dealing too much with things on their own plates and trying to manage employee and business issues. • So why would we send them in a difficult situation or conversation if they're not in the frame of mind kind of thing that needs to be ready for that kind of assignment? • other programs to make sure that the HR business Partners battery pack is also fully charged at certain level at all times. So how do we take advantage of those programs and knowing that there's no judgment for that, it's okay. Right. Because again, some people might want to not raise their hands because they'll think, well, will that be a career limiting move, for example? So then the judgment of that had the stigma, you know, we need to also watch for those things, too. • HR people are have things happening in their own lives. So, if an HR team member is dealing with a personal tragedy is it the best time for them to be dealing with a certain situation at work? how do we allow to for HR professionals dealing with personal challenges to not also have to do heavy emotional labor work. You wouldn't send a person into a fire if they don't have their fire gear on, so why would we send an HR business partner in if their mental state, their battery tanks, are not charged up to handle that.	HR Mental Health	The Emotional Toll

• HR doesn't have an outlet • Employees dump emotions on us and we have nowhere to take that. • Have to be good at putting it aside so it doesn't affect your home life. • HR Friends to share with so you have an outlet. • Support group for HR People, get it off your chest, talk to someone who understands and is dealing with the same emotions. (outlet) • support each other and look out for each other. Talk to each other. At home our families and friends don't understand so difficult to talk to them. • belonging, the feeling included • HR or Org strategy: I think peer coaching would be a good idea. So, you know, how do you handle this and how do you work through this and what has worked well for you? I think some people are just also inadvertently isolating themselves. • HR or Org Strategy: is how do you create the community for the HR business partner to come together? • using each other and leaning on each other to get that support to go back to the business and to be able to do that. • to create that network • HR and org level: the peer coaching, helping each other out, the network, creating that network, that safe place to talk about things and to get some ideas or how to manage certain things and some support	HR Community Support	HR Job and Function Design
• Acknowledge that HR team members are also employees and have mental health needs. Employees first. • HR for HR – unmet needs. • EAP just for HR People. • Training for HR employees. • Shoemakers kids have no shoes. • HR is always isolated so a lack of belonging. You can't go to any of the employee birthday parties our events outside the office. You can't be to friendly or its perceived as favortism. Nobody wants to hang out with HR outside of the office.	The Cobbler's Children Syndrome	HR Job and Function Design

• know the team, know their stripes and their strengths and who will need what kind of support.		
• HR Department level: Variation to your day. Do things that add job or energy back into day to balance the hard things. For roles that are primarily responsible for difficult business decisions, difficult news, letting people go, there should be some intentional way of adding positive back into the job scope. • You create efficiencies out of the same person doing investigations and terminations repeatedly. Job Design should take into consideration the emotional toll or variation. Design the jobs to ensure they sustain long-term ability to perform with compassion not just looking at efficiencies. Consider the impact or health impact of the work being done in job design. • Autonomy was the number one engagement survey result for our HR team so this validates that HR people really want autonomy. It could be having control over messaging or how many follow ups with employees. It is changing how closely you manage how the HR people interact with others not the role itself. • the profile of who should kind of be in HR, it's a bit like who should be a teacher, right. And I do think that there are some people that are probably not in the right fit for the type of work and didn't kind of really understand (empathy). • We need to have better profiles and Personas built for the different role of the HR generalist and what that role is. And not all HR business partners made equal. • It's a bit like watering the flower. If you don't start watering, it's going to dry out. Right? So, again, what nutrients do the HR business partners need? They need time to talk things through amongst themselves, to charge their batteries. • so how do you let people take the time off in the space to be able to be okay? • How do you pair up HR business partners together to do some of these things? Because then it doesn't feel so hard and isolating. it	HR Job and Function Design	HR Job and Function design

might take some doubling up and may take a bit more time, but at the end of the day, the team and the recipient will be in a better place because of it. This requires more resources and planning. And most people just want to rip the band aid and get it done. You either pay upfront and do it properly or you're going to pay at the other end. One way or the other, there'll be a price to pay for that. you might have then some people going off on leave because you just wanted to get it over with but getting it over with got people in a bad place. • How you manage that experience is where the difference is. Having the autonomy of influencing how the work is done. • The solutions and things that we can put in place to help or automate even to help doing that because there's a lot of new systems and tools to help with that now. And people are more used to being self, you know, the self help finding solutions with the right technology.		
• Crazy workload. • Adequate resourcing. I don't know anyone that is not understaffed. Org level understanding of the breadth of the role. • Appropriate resourcing. Resourcing is a big deal. • Doing and burning yourself out and working 60 hours, weeks and all that's not sustainable.	Workload & Appropriate Resourcing	HR Job and Function Design