Final Essay:

Addressing Work-Related Burnout

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Description of Article

The study's goal described in the article was to determine how many academic librarians are experiencing the causes and effects of burnout. It achieved its goal by measuring the prevalence of academic librarian burnout using the CBI, a widely available and validated instrument to measure work-related burnout. Some of the key findings are that females and third genders experience more burnout than males, and some of the impacts of burnout are based on age, different generational work values, gender, and work-life balance. These issues are important to libraries and the LIS profession because they can impact their health, job satisfaction, work performance, and retention. All of which could impact services to the clients who use the library.

Analysis of Issues

In my opinion, the main issues are leadership and work management in libraries, workplace culture, and how the library works with various types of employees. Another major issue is that a library may be functioning in a placid-randomized environment. As Franks (2018) explains, "A placid-randomized environment is one in which the organization assumes that both the goals and dangers are basically unchanging" (p.20). This is a problem because it would adversely affect the organization's viability, having them adjust its goals quickly when external factors warrant, which is demanding on staff. Similarly, organizational culture is where all staff learn to be influential members. It can be a problem because, as explained by Martian(2012), "Organizational culture can both illuminate the reason for a particular action and dictate the action take place" (p.348). So, if a particular action is bad for the organization, it can cause other issues, including staff burnout.

Some possible causes are lack of communication or barriers in communication between staff and managers and managers not considering the diversity of workers. Some other causes might be that employees feel a loss of control at work and cannot influence decisions that affect them, such as their schedule and workload. Alternatively, there could be unclear job expectations due to the lack of communication between staff and managers or a lack of social support and dysfunctional workplace dynamics. Another possible cause is that some staff do not like each other, leading to other issues. Since as Farrell(2014) explains, "Colleagues who dislike each other may be a sign of a larger organizational problem. Employees who do not like to work with each other may signal deeper issues that need to be addressed" (p.502). This could cause problems with day-to-day operations.

Some factors contributing to work-related burnout are age, different generational work values, and time as a librarian. As explained by Wood, Guimareas, Holm, Hayes, & Brooks (2020), "Gender is not the sole predictor of academic librarian burnout; age and years in the profession are also predictors. In this study, age and years in the profession are highly co-related, meaning those with many years in the profession are in older age categories and those with fewer years in the profession are in younger age categories." (p.522). It was found that burnout is highest in librarians aged 35-45, the second highest is 18-34, including 45-55, and the lowest group was 65+. Gender is also a significant factor for burnout. "While age often serves as a predictor of burnout, the authors have found that primary variable in predicting burnout is gender followed by age" (Wood et al. 2020, p523.). Differences in generations can also lead to burnout. While the authors relate generational issues with work-life balance, it can impact other areas too. However, it is important to note that the millennial generation and generation x value work-life balance higher than other job characteristics (Wood et al. 2020, p.527). In comparison, it is not the case in older generations such as Baby Boomers. Some of the issues mentioned above can contribute to work-related burnout, especially if they are not equipped to deal with them.

Consequences

There are multiple causes of burnout that can be either short or long-term and can impact both the library and the librarian. If these causes of burnout go unchecked, it will have a significant impact on the librarian and the library for a long time and may make it hard for the library to be able to operate in the future. Some of these on the individual are decreased work productivity, job dissatisfaction, professional mistakes, absenteeism, and the intention to give up the profession. For the library, it can reduce how well the services at the library are being provided to patrons, it can incur high organizational costs, and it can even cause a drop in the number of employees working at the library as a result of absenteeism and employees may have the intention of leaving the profession.

The consequences discussed are why management must consider the effects of these issues for various reasons. Some of these reasons it impacts the library is how it is seen overall, it can affect the budget and the resources available for the library, and it can create extra work for the staff to perform. Especially if the library does not monitor its spending or does not use all its money, it can reduce the amount of money given to the library in the future since it could be seen as unnecessary by the governing body (Charbonneau 2022 Managing Money slide 4). This, in turn, can cause a drop in the services the library can provide and could lead to fewer patrons using the library. It can also lead to consequences of being unaware of the environment outside of the library, which can cause a sudden change in jobs and impact their position in the future. One example of this is shown in the article *Managing Change with Environmental Scanning*. The example has to do with a university library director who was unaware of a change the university had made regarding closing specific programs and was unsure of what to do with each of the librarians who specialized in those areas( Katopol, p1. 2014).

Recommendations

My recommendations to management for addressing burnout within the library profession are: provide a flexible work schedule for librarians who have children, provide more assistance to older librarians who have been working in the field for a long time, maybe introduce "fun at work." If possible, have a counselor or someone who is part of the staff that they can talk to about work-related issues. Alternatively, work with individual librarians to figure out what works for them.

While most of these recommendations are straightforward, such as having flexible schedules or more training for younger librarians, the idea of "fun" does not often come to mind when it comes to working. It can also be seen as frivolous to traditional management and leadership since they are not actually getting any work done. However, as Leeder explains, "Our ability to make decisions together is based upon our ability to agree and disagree constructively, and that I argue, comes from playing and having fun together" (p.621, 2014). Having a counselor as part of the staff is another good recommendation since there are many benefits to both employees and managers. Some of the benefits for employees are helping to establish or improve coping skills, developing practical solutions to problems, and creating a safe space to talk about the issues. Then the benefits for managers are decreased employee absenteeism, lower turnover rates among employees, improved employee performance which leads to productivity gains, and it establishes a reputation as an employer that cares about their staff.

Recommendations for improving leadership and management are to learn management concepts, theories, and different management approaches. It is also good for managers to figure out their leadership and management style or approach because it will help them learn the skills, they need to become successful managers. However, managers and leaders should not get locked into one approach. These eight approaches are scientific, administrative, behavioral, management science/quantitative, system, contingency, and quality, composite/contemporary (Charbonneau 2022, Management Concepts slide 7).

Some recommendations for workplace culture or operating environment are: it is essential to notice constantly changing factors inside and outside of the organization and how they impact daily decisions and actions. External factors are sociocultural, technological, political/legal, economic, and institutional (Charbonneau 2022, Environment and Structure slide 6). A manager should also learn how to do environmental scanning, which is a process for getting information about different activities, trends, relationships, and other environmental factors.

The recommendations for working with various types of employees are to develop skills that will help both the managers and employees learn to work with different individuals and focus on organizational performance contribution. If employees do not like each other, the first skill is to determine what this dislike with the other person is. "Identifying the reasons will assist the leader in determining a course of action. This will also determine if the dislike is based on behaviors that impact work or behaviors that simply irk others" (Farrell 2014.p.503). The next skill is to learn how to establish values and standards to help guide employee behavior. Another recommendation is to separate yourself from the situation, if possible, as long as it does not impact the job performance; this will allow you to evaluate the situation with a more open mind.

With these recommendations in mind, I would make three decisions to fix burnout in academic librarians. The first would be changing the work schedules for older librarians and librarians with children to accommodate their needs. Second, I would find ways to introduce "fun at work" in the library by asking employees what they would like to do. The third is that I would hire at least a part-time counselor for the library if the budget allowed it; if not, I would find new training methods for library staff to help with employee interactions.

As for whether any new guidelines or policies should come up from burnout of academic librarians, I think there should be a few new ones created. The individual library should determine these since each library is different. However, if policies or guidelines were to be introduced, I would suggest that they be in areas that deal with managing the amount of work each staff member has and how to manage work schedules based on the librarian’s age or if they have children.

How I would go about implementing a plan for these decisions and follow-up would be done in a series of steps. First, I would decide what kind of counselor would be helpful in these cases and decide if hiring one would be beneficial. Second, I would schedule meetings with librarians with kids and older librarians to find a work schedule that fits their needs. Third I would determine how to introduce “play” that increases a team dynamic, productivity, creativity, etc. Once this plan was implemented, I would check in monthly to see if the plan was working and adjust as needed.

As a possible future manager, the factors I would need to consider in maintaining a positive work environment are having clear communication and listening skills and making sure that I show trust and appreciation for them. I would also encourage them in different ways, such as prioritizing a healthy work-life balance and health and wellness, especially mental health. If "fun" at work were introduced at the library, I would join in with the staff whenever I could.

Importance to Management and Leadership

These issues relate to the 7040 course, management, and leadership in general. The different skills in management and leadership we learned in the course will help solve these issues. Also, it can be used to help leadership and management in other areas outside of libraries and with cases of burnout in the workplace. Some key takeaway messages from this final assignment are that it is important to work with staff on various levels to help make them successful and avoid burnout. Also, effective management and leadership skills are necessary to help staff avoid burnout. But what works for one group of staff may not work for another. Lastly, I think these issues could also be relevant to library staff burnout because of the COVID-19 pandemic; the pandemic alone could cause staff burnout and add to it if they had already experienced burnout symptoms.

References

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