TESTING THE ROBUSTNESS OF THE PROGRESSIVE PHASE BURNOUT MODEL FOR A SAMPLE OF ENTREPRENEURS

By: NUR GRYSKIEWICZ AND E. HOLLY BUTTNER

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Abstract:
The robustness of the 8-phase model of burnout was tested by using the Revised Maslach Burnout Instrument (MBI) on a sample of entrepreneurs. The results are consistent with the model's proposition that mean scores on the subdomains of (a) depersonalization, (b) (lack of) personal accomplishment, and (c) emotional exhaustion, increase regularly and predictably as the experienced level of burnout reported by respondents increases.

Article:
Golembiewski, Munzenrider, and Stevenson (1986) modified and extended Maslach's Burnout Instrument (MBI) (Maslach and Jackson, 1982) to introduce a progressive phase model of burnout. The modifications of the MBI included (a) the shortening of the original 25 items to 23 and (b) changing the rating format to self report on the degree to which each statement is like or unlike the respondent on a 7-point Likert Scale. An example of an item to be rated by the respondent is "I feel emotionally drained from my work."

The proposed phase model builds on the three subdomains underlying the MBI as follows:

1. Depersonalization, or the tendency to distance self from others and to objectify relationships;
2. Personal accomplishment, or one's sense of doing well on a worthwhile task;
3. Emotional exhaustion, or the degree to which individuals approach or surpass their comfortable coping limits.

The phase model of burnout reportedly distinguishes high versus low scores on each of the subdomains. Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1984) argued that this convention permits generating eight logically possible combinations, which are called phases. The model proposes that the succeeding phases are progressively virulent from depersonalization to emotional exhaustion (Golembiewski and Munzenrider, 1990; Golembiewski, Munzenrider, and Stevenson, 1986). Therefore, individuals with low levels of burnout would tend to report low scores in each of the three subdomains. As the level of burnout increases, the mean score for the subdomain, depersonalization, would increase first, followed next by an increase in the score for (lack of) personal accomplishment, and finally, with an increase in the subdomain score for emotional exhaustion. At a high level of burnout, the mean scores for all three subdomains would be high.

The model of this progression is presented as the top half of Table 1. Norms for the high and low boundaries for each subdomain were empirically determined by using a sample of 1,535 employees of a large federal agency (Golembiewski, Munzenrider, and Stevenson, 1984). Employees completed Maslach's (modified) Burnout Inventory and median scores in each phase by subdomain were computed. The high-low cutoffs for each subdomain were determined by the median split.

The present study set out to investigate the robustness of the 8-phase model of burnout on a sample of entrepreneurs, by determining whether a sample of entrepreneurs' burnout scores was distributed across the subdomains and phases in a pattern similar to that found by Golembiewski et al. in their 1986 study of employees of two large organizations. Entrepreneurs' work environment, characterized by limited resources, high levels of autonomy, personal financial risk, and so on presumably differ markedly from the bureaucratic environment where the norms originated (Golembiewski and Munzenrider, 1984). In addition, entrepreneurs characteristically possess personality attributes including above average levels of independence, leadership, risk taking, endurance, sustained effort, readiness for change and below average need for support which are significantly different in level from employees of large organizations (Hornaday and Aboud, 1971; Hornaday and Bunker, 1970; Mescon and Montanari, 1981; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1985, 1986). To date, there has been no systematic examination of entrepreneurial burnout. The purpose of this study is to determine whether participants in an entrepreneurial sample are distributed across the phases as predicted by the model.

METHOD

Sample

A random sample of 300 entrepreneurs located on the east coast of the U.S. was selected from two entrepreneurial networking groups. In addition to demographic statistics, respondents were asked if they were (a) the founder, (b) an owner or partner, and (c) actively managing the business. These three criteria were used for selecting participants who fit Cunningham and Lischeron's (1991) definition of an entrepreneur. While 119 individuals responded to the survey, only 81 responded affirmatively to all 3 questions and, therefore, constituted the entrepreneurial sample. The sample consisted of 72 males and 9 females. The average age was 46 and the mean years in business was 6. Seventy percent of the participants indicated that their business was profitable in the year preceding the study.

Procedure

To test the robustness of the 8-phase model of burnout, this study followed Golembiewski and Munzenrider's (1984) procedure. Only the composition of the sample differed. The revised MBI was included within an entrepreneurial decision-making questionnaire as part of the survey.

Statistical Analysis

Internal-consistency estimates of reliability (coefficient alphas) were obtained for the Revised Maslach Burnout Scale and for each of the subdomains of depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion. In addition, means and standard deviations for each of the three subscales across the eight phases of burnout were examined.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained estimates of internal-consistency reliability for the Revised Maslach Burnout Scale was .82; and .69, .68, and .80 for each of the subdomains of depersonalization, personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion, respectively.

TABLE 1
Distribution of Subdomain Means and SDs by Phase
A Comparison of a Model of Eight Progressive Phases of Burnout and the Distribution of Subdomain Means and Standard Deviations by Phase Obtained for a Sample of 81 Entrepreneurs

	Progressive Phases of Burnout[a]							
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Theoretical Model of the Phases of Burnout								
Depersonalization	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi
Personal Accomplishment[b]	Lo	Lo	Hi	Hi	Lo	Lo	Hi	Hi
Emotional Exhaustion	Lo	Lo	Lo	Lo	Hi	Hi	Hi	Hi
Mean Reported Entrepreneurial Scores across Phases of Burnout[c]								
Depersonalization	10.35	20.67	11.8	20.00	13.43	22.43	12.17	25.46
(SD)	(3.0)	(3.8)	(1.5)	(3.5)	(1.8)	(4.2)	(3.5)	(5.2)
Personal Accomplishment	16.35	15.33	25.2	25.67	17.07	17.43	26.50	27.31
(SD)	(3.2)	(3.4)	(1.9)	(2.9)	(3.2)	(1.6)	(5.9)	(5.4)
Emotional Exhaustion	11.75	14.78	11.4	11.83	23.47	25.43	24.17	27.69
(SD)	(3.3)	(2.0)	(2.4)	(3.5)	(4.8)	(5.2)	(6.5)	(7.2)

[a] Source: Golembiewski, Munzenrider, and Stevenson, 1986.
[b] Reverse scored—the lower the score the greater the sense of personal accomplishment.
[c] The higher the mean score within a subdomain, the higher the degree of burnout the respondent reported.

As can be seen from Table 1, the mean distribution of scores for the entrepreneurial sample follows the proposed low-high configurations through the eight phases as suggested by the model. While entrepreneurs differ from employees in large organizations in work environment and personality attributes, the pattern of burnout by subdomain reported by the entrepreneurial participants in this study is remarkably similar to Golembiewski and Munzenrider's (1984) model across the eight phases of burnout; thus, lending credibility to the robustness of the model. It should be noted that this study did not purport to test for differences in the level of burnout reported by entrepreneurs as compared to employees of large organizations. Caution in the interpretation of these findings is warranted, however, because of the relatively small sample of entrepreneurs participating in this study. Clearly, additional research is needed to determine whether the level of burnout reported by entrepreneurs is significantly different from that of other groups. In summary, the descriptive statistics offered in Table 1 provide some support for the robustness of Golembiewski et al.'s (1986) 8-phase model of burnout.

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