Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2026; 6(5):1502-1509

Received: 29-08-2026
Accepted: 09-10-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Job Burnout in Contemporary Organizations: A Critical Narrative Review

Tuan-Dung Hoang
University of Finance – Marketing, Vietnam

DOI: https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2026.6.5.7044

Corresponding Author: **Tuan-Dung Hoang**

Abstract
Job burnout has become a central concern in organizational behavior, human resource management, and occupational health psychology. Although it is frequently discussed as a problem of excessive workload, contemporary scholarship conceptualizes burnout as a multidimensional response to chronic, unsuccessfully managed occupational stress. This narrative review synthesizes foundational theories, meta-analyses, measurement research, and selected recent developments to clarify what burnout is, why it emerges, how it affects workers and organizations, and which interventions appear promising. Particular attention is given to the job demands–resources framework, conservation of resources theory, emotional labor, the recovery process, and mismatches between employees and their workplaces. The review also examines ongoing debates concerning burnout's overlap with depression, alternative measurement instruments, the limitations of predominantly cross-sectional evidence, and the risks of treating individual resilience as a substitute for organizational change. Finally, it develops a research agenda concerning digital work, artificial intelligence, work–nonwork boundaries, withdrawal behaviors, and multilevel processes. The central argument is that burnout is best understood as a dynamic outcome of the interaction between working conditions and employees' capacity to sustain and replenish psychological resources. Research and management practice should consequently prioritize the redesign of work as well as appropriate individual support.

Keywords: Job Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Job Demands-Resources Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Employee Well-Being, Work Withdrawal

1. Introduction

Job burnout is a persistent challenge for organizations because it connects the quality of working life with employee health, motivation, relationships, and organizational functioning. Employees may remain formally present and continue performing required tasks while experiencing severe fatigue, emotional distancing, or declining confidence in their effectiveness. These experiences matter for employees, but they also matter to employers that depend on sustained concentration, customer service, collaboration, and discretionary contributions. Burnout therefore sits at the intersection of occupational health psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management rather than belonging exclusively to any one discipline.

Interest in burnout has expanded beyond occupations traditionally associated with intensive human interaction. Early investigations focused heavily on health care, education, and social services, where workers regularly encountered the emotional needs of others. Subsequently, researchers demonstrated that exhaustion and cynical detachment also appear in manufacturing, professional services, administration, technology, and other occupations. This development broadened the theoretical question from whether emotionally demanding professions are susceptible to burnout to which combinations of working conditions systematically deplete employees' capacities (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) [17, 22].

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) [28] characterizes burnout as an occupational phenomenon arising from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. The definition emphasizes exhaustion, psychological distance or cynicism toward work, and reduced professional efficacy. Importantly, the ICD-11 does not classify burnout itself as a medical condition. This distinction guards against interpreting every experience of tiredness as a disease while recognizing that sustained occupational distress can coexist with clinically significant health problems.

Despite a substantial research tradition, several questions remain unresolved. Researchers disagree about the extent to which the established dimensions form a single syndrome, whether burnout is adequately distinguished from depression, and how

reliably prevalence can be estimated across instruments and contexts. Moreover, the rapid reorganization of work through digital communication, algorithmic management, and artificial intelligence creates exposures that are not fully captured by traditional workload indicators. These developments invite theoretical extension without implying that every emerging form of occupational stress requires a new label.

This review has five objectives. It clarifies the conceptual boundaries of burnout; integrates major theoretical explanations; evaluates evidence about antecedents and consequences; compares leading approaches to measurement and prevention; and proposes directions for future organizational research. The overarching position is that burnout should not be reduced to personal fragility or a simple failure of time management. It is more coherently approached as a work-related process shaped by demands, resources, recovery opportunities, and organizational practices.

2. Review approach and scope

This paper adopts a critical narrative review rather than a systematic review or quantitative meta-analysis. Its purpose is integrative: to connect theoretical traditions with research findings and to identify conceptual and methodological issues likely to influence future studies. Sources comprise widely cited theoretical contributions, peer-reviewed meta-analyses and longitudinal reviews, original measurement studies, and selected recent work addressing interventions and the changing organization of work. The discussion places greater weight on meta-analytical and prospective evidence when assessing empirical relationships, while retaining conceptual studies where the principal question concerns definitions or mechanisms.

A narrative approach is appropriate for a topic whose research spans psychological theory, occupational epidemiology, management, clinical debates, and intervention science. These bodies of work often employ distinct outcome measures and research designs. Their diversity makes a purely numerical synthesis insufficient for the broader conceptual questions addressed here. At the same time, narrative synthesis brings limitations: source selection is purposive, no exhaustive database screening was performed, and the review should not be interpreted as a PRISMA-compliant assessment of every eligible study. Consequently, its claims are framed as evidence-based interpretations rather than definitive causal conclusions.

3. Conceptualizing job burnout

3.1 The multidimensional model

The most influential conceptualization of burnout identifies three components: exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach *et al*., 2001) [17]. Exhaustion concerns perceived depletion of emotional, cognitive, or physical energy. Cynicism refers to a negative, distant, or indifferent orientation toward one's work; in interpersonal service settings, depersonalization can include detached reactions to clients or patients. Reduced professional efficacy involves diminished confidence in one's ability to achieve valued work outcomes. Although related, these dimensions are not interchangeable.

A person may be exhausted yet remain committed to the work and confident in their competence. Another employee may feel cynical or disengaged without reporting especially high fatigue. These patterns are important because they suggest different mechanisms and potentially different remedies. Reducing an excessive workload may help an overextended employee, while repairing perceived injustice or a collapse in work meaning may be more relevant to a person who has become cynical. The multidimensional perspective thereby discourages treating a single total score as a complete description of an employee's experience.

3.2 Burnout, stress, fatigue, and disengagement

Occupational stress, ordinary fatigue, and burnout overlap, but they refer to different aspects of experience. Job stress generally describes perceived demands that tax or exceed available coping resources. Fatigue can follow a difficult day and may improve after adequate recovery. Burnout, by contrast, refers to a more persistent work-related pattern involving depletion and psychological distancing, frequently accompanied by diminished efficacy. Neither a single stressful event nor temporary tiredness is sufficient to establish the multidimensional experience.

3.3 Classification and clinical boundaries

WHO (2019) [28] restricts burnout to the occupational context and does not classify it as a medical illness. This is a classification statement rather than proof that occupational experiences are unrelated to medical disorders. Bianchi, Schonfeld, and Laurent (2015) [6] argued that burnout and depression share symptoms and that evidence for complete distinctiveness is inconsistent. Koutsimani, Montgomery, and Georganta (2019) [13] similarly documented meaningful associations between burnout, depression, and anxiety while not establishing that the constructs are identical. More recently, Parker and Russo (2025) [19] reviewed definitional and diagnostic debates and argued against simply treating burnout and depression as synonymous. The debate remains open rather than fully settled.

For organizational studies, the most defensible position is pragmatic conceptual precision. Burnout should be measured as a work-related construct while researchers acknowledge its association with broader mental health outcomes. Survey scores should not be used to diagnose depression or other psychiatric conditions. Similarly, employees who report substantial symptoms should not be reassured that they have merely experienced routine work stress. The theoretical boundaries of a research variable and the needs of a person seeking professional assessment are separate issues.

4. Major theoretical explanations

4.1 Job demands–resources theory

The job demands–resources (JD–R) model provides one of the most comprehensive explanations of burnout. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) [7] proposed that job characteristics can be organized into demands and resources. Demands are aspects of work requiring sustained effort and therefore carrying physiological or psychological costs. They may include time pressure, emotional demands, conflicting expectations, and demanding interactions. Resources are characteristics that support goal achievement, reduce the costs of demands, or promote learning and development. Examples include autonomy, supervisor support, feedback, and adequate staffing.

The model distinguishes a health-impairment process from a motivational process. Persistent demands can erode energy and contribute to exhaustion, whereas sufficient resources foster engagement and may mitigate some adverse experiences. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) [22], studying four occupational samples, found that demands were especially relevant to burnout while resources were especially important to engagement. Their findings also cautioned against treating burnout and engagement as exact opposites: the two were negatively related but maintained distinct empirical patterns.

Bakker and Demerouti (2017) [3] developed the framework further by considering interactions among demands, resources, individual differences, and outcomes. Their work emphasizes that resources may buffer adverse demands, although buffering is not guaranteed in every job or study. For example, autonomy can enable employees to decide how work is completed, but discretion may offer limited protection when staffing is inadequate or deadlines are objectively impossible. Empirical evidence should therefore test the relevant interaction rather than assume it.

4.2 Conservation of resources theory

Conservation of resources (COR) theory complements JD–R by explaining why continuing demands can become increasingly damaging. Hobfoll (1989) [10] proposed that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valued resources. Stress can arise when resources are threatened, lost, or not sufficiently replenished after substantial investment. Resources encompass time, energy, social support, status, and other valued conditions or capacities. Viewed through this lens, burnout reflects a pattern in which work repeatedly consumes resources without adequate opportunities for restoration.

COR theory helps explain potential loss cycles. An employee facing persistent time pressure may sacrifice sleep or nonwork activities to meet immediate demands. Reduced recovery can then impair attention, patience, and emotional regulation, making subsequent tasks feel more demanding. The person may expend additional effort to maintain the same performance, deepening the depletion process. Although this sequence requires longitudinal testing in specific settings, it provides a plausible account of why burnout may intensify even when objective workload does not continue increasing.

4.3 Areas of worklife and person–job mismatch

Leiter and Maslach (2004) [15] developed the areas-of-worklife approach around six dimensions: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Burnout risk can arise when employees experience persistent mismatches between themselves and the organizational environment in one or several of these areas. This perspective adds relational and ethical dimensions to explanations centered primarily on the amount of work. Excessive workload is important, but unfair procedures, inadequate recognition, interpersonal conflict, and value incongruence may also undermine a sustainable relationship with work.

4.4 Emotional labor and recovery

Emotional labor offers an additional explanation for burnout in customer-facing occupations. Grandey (2000) [8] described emotional labor through emotion regulation: workers may need to display feelings that do not correspond to their actual experiences. Surface acting, in which employees adjust visible expressions without changing felt emotions, can be psychologically demanding. In a meta-analysis, Hülsheger and Schewe (2011) [11] found that emotional labor strategies were differently associated with indicators of employee well-being. The burden is therefore not simply that employees interact with customers, but that the required pattern of emotional regulation can impose substantial costs.

Recovery theories explain why the effects of demands depend partly on what happens after effort has been invested. Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) [25] distinguished psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control during nonwork time. These recovery experiences describe mechanisms through which employees may restore resources. Sonnentag (2018) [24] subsequently discussed the recovery paradox: employees facing stronger stressors may be precisely those who find it hardest to disengage and recover. Recovery is consequently not only a matter of personal choice; it can be constrained by job design and organizational norms.

5. Antecedents of burnout

5.1 Quantitative and cognitive demands

High workloads, intense time pressure, and conflicting responsibilities are among the most consistently examined antecedents of burnout. The meta-analysis by Lee and Ashforth (1996) [14] found that demand-related correlates were especially strongly linked with emotional exhaustion. Alarcon's (2011) [1] later meta-analysis also supported relationships between higher demands, lower resources, and burnout. Yet workload should not be reduced to hours alone. Interruptions, frequent task switching, ambiguity, and a shortage of recovery opportunities can make ostensibly manageable hours psychologically demanding.

5.2 Emotional and relational demands

Emotional demands are especially salient in health care, education, hospitality, retail, and service management. Workers may be expected to remain polite, calm, and attentive while encountering frustration, abuse, complaints, or distress. Grandey's (2000) [8] framework highlights that the regulation of emotions is itself labor. If employees repeatedly conceal negative feelings without support or recovery, emotional exhaustion may accumulate. The risk can increase when organizational performance metrics reward outward friendliness but ignore the psychological cost of difficult interactions.

Relational conditions also shape burnout. Low supervisor support can deprive employees of assistance with prioritization and resources. Conflict with colleagues can turn routine collaboration into an additional source of vigilance. Perceived unfairness or disrespect may promote cynicism because employees question the reciprocity of the employment relationship. Research on work-related mental health more broadly identifies high demands, low control, role stress, workplace bullying, and weak support as relevant psychosocial risks (Harvey *et al*., 2017) [9]. These findings are not burnout-specific estimates, but they reinforce the importance of the organizational context.

5.3 Insufficient resources and organizational mismatch

Although high demands draw attention, resource deficits are

equally important to a comprehensive explanation. Employees may cope with intense periods of work when managers provide clear priorities, adequate staffing, relevant information, and authority over operational decisions. Conversely, modest demands can become frustrating when workers lack the tools or discretion needed to achieve meaningful outcomes. The JD–R literature thus encourages examination of the balance and interaction between demands and resources rather than either category in isolation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) [3].

5.4 Work–nonwork conflict and insufficient recovery

Burnout may also emerge when work repeatedly intrudes into employees' nonwork activities. The conflict is not limited to parenting or marital responsibilities. Rest, exercise, friendships, personal learning, and leisure can all be displaced by work demands. A meta-analysis by Amstad and colleagues (2011) [2] linked work–family conflict to outcomes across work and nonwork domains. Although work–family conflict is not identical to broader work–leisure conflict, the findings support a wider concern with competing role demands and the costs of inadequate boundaries.

Digital connectivity intensifies this issue when employees remain reachable after formal working hours. Checking messages may appear minor in isolation, but repeated interruptions can impede detachment and create a continuous expectation of responsiveness. Employees who feel unable to disconnect may struggle to reconstruct psychological resources between shifts. Sonnentag's (2018) [24] account suggests that recovery can be most difficult precisely when stress is most severe. For theory and practice, the critical question is whether employees possess genuine control over their nonwork time, not merely whether the organization advertises flexible arrangements.

6. Consequences of burnout

6.1 Health and psychological functioning

Burnout is associated with adverse health outcomes, although the strength and causal interpretation of those relationships vary across studies. Salvagioni and colleagues (2017) [21] systematically reviewed prospective research and identified evidence linking burnout to several physical and psychological outcomes, including sleep difficulties, depressive symptoms, musculoskeletal complaints, and some cardiovascular-related outcomes. Because the review relied on prospective designs, it offers stronger temporal evidence than a purely cross-sectional synthesis. Nevertheless, prospective association does not automatically establish a unique causal pathway from burnout to every reported condition.

Psychological consequences deserve equally careful interpretation. Persistent exhaustion may accompany difficulties concentrating, irritability, pessimism, and diminished satisfaction with work. Some symptoms overlap with depression and anxiety, and their relationships may be reciprocal. Koutsimani *et al*. (2019) [13] found meaningful correlations among burnout, depression, and anxiety, underscoring the value of measuring these constructs separately. A study that treats burnout as both a predictor and an outcome of closely related negative emotional states risks producing inflated relationships through common measurement content.

6.2 Attitudes, withdrawal, and performance

Burnout may influence job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, absenteeism, and presenteeism. The JD–R model predicts that sustained exhaustion can diminish employees' capacity to invest effort, while cynical distancing can weaken identification with work. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) [22] found patterns connecting burnout with health problems and intentions to leave. Salvagioni *et al*. (2017) [21] reported occupational consequences in prospective studies, although some findings were mixed. These observations support an important practical point: employees may continue attending work while becoming less psychologically available for it.

Performance outcomes are more complicated than popular accounts suggest. Taris (2006) [26] critically reviewed studies using performance indicators beyond employees' own assessments and found negative associations between exhaustion and several outcomes, including in-role behavior. However, the evidence base was comparatively small, and associations varied by dimension and outcome. Burnout cannot therefore be equated with uniformly poor performance. Highly conscientious employees may temporarily compensate for exhaustion by increasing their effort, while externally imposed standards can conceal deterioration until resources are severely depleted.

The distinction between burnout and withdrawal behavior is also consequential for research on quiet quitting. Psychological withdrawal or a decision to restrict work to contractual duties can reflect burnout-related conservation of resources, but it can also reflect perceived inequity, deliberate boundary-setting, or a preference against unpaid extra-role work. A defensible empirical model should specify whether burnout is hypothesized to precede withdrawal and should demonstrate that measures of the two constructs capture different content. Otherwise, a statistical association may reflect overlapping questionnaire items rather than a meaningful behavioral mechanism.

6.3 Organizational and societal consequences

Organizations may incur indirect costs when burnout contributes to turnover, reduced service quality, impaired collaboration, and difficulty maintaining continuity. In jobs involving customers or vulnerable service recipients, the consequences may extend beyond the employee to third parties. Yet economic estimates should not be transferred casually from one national system or profession to another. Cost calculations depend on wage structures, health care systems, turnover patterns, and the measurement of presenteeism.

7. Measuring burnout

7.1 Maslach Burnout Inventory

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) has shaped both the definition and empirical study of burnout. Versions developed for human service occupations emphasize exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, while the general survey (MBI–GS) measures exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy in broader work settings. Its multidimensional structure permits researchers to distinguish fatigue from detachment and self-evaluated effectiveness. The broad conceptual influence of the MBI also means that studies using different instruments may not be examining precisely identical forms

of burnout (Maslach *et al*., 2001; Maslach & Leiter, 2016) [17, 16].

Three measurement issues require attention. First, higher professional efficacy represents a more positive state, whereas higher exhaustion and cynicism represent more negative states. Analysts must therefore document score directions before constructing composites. Second, the three dimensions do not necessarily have identical antecedents or consequences; separate analyses may be more informative than a single combined score. Third, researchers should respect questionnaire licensing and adaptation requirements. Reconstructing copyrighted items from secondary publications or mixing differently worded translations can threaten both legal compliance and measurement validity.

7.2 Copenhagen Burnout Inventory and Burnout Assessment Tool

The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) was developed by Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, and Christensen (2005) [12]. It emphasizes exhaustion through personal, work-related, and client-related domains. This approach facilitates examination of whether fatigue is concentrated in occupational experiences or extends more broadly across life. However, because the CBI places different emphasis on the construct than the three-dimensional MBI, measures should not be treated as interchangeable without validation.

Schaufeli, Desart, and De Witte (2020) [23] introduced the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT), which conceptualizes core dimensions as exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment. The instrument responds to concerns that traditional conceptualizations may underrepresent concentration difficulties and problems regulating emotion. It is particularly useful when these symptoms are theoretically relevant, but employing a newer instrument does not automatically resolve every question about the construct's diagnostic boundaries or cross-cultural generalizability.

7.3 Measurement quality and research design

Cross-cultural research must establish that participants understand the items as intended. Translation and back-translation are useful starting points but cannot replace pilot testing, cognitive interviews, or statistical evaluation of measurement structure. In multilingual and multi-occupation samples, tests of measurement invariance are particularly important before interpreting differences in latent means. A higher observed average in one group may reflect wording or response styles rather than an actual difference in burnout.

Finally, researchers should not interpret a survey threshold as a universal clinical diagnosis. Instruments vary in theoretical coverage, scaling, norms, and recommended interpretation. Parker and Russo (2025) [19] highlight how unsettled definitions complicate prevalence estimates and comparisons across settings. Transparent reporting therefore requires specifying the instrument, item version, scoring procedure, population, and the meaning of any categorization adopted.

8. Prevention and intervention

8.1 The case for organizational interventions

An exclusively individual approach assumes that employees can resolve burnout through mindfulness, exercise, personal resilience, or improved time management while leaving the working environment untouched. Such activities can be beneficial, but they cannot consistently offset impossible deadlines, chronic understaffing, harassment, or unfair procedures. The JD–R and areas-of-worklife frameworks instead locate important intervention opportunities in job design, access to resources, managerial practices, and organizational expectations (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Bakker *et al*., 2023) [15, 4].

Organizations can begin with a structured assessment of psychosocial risks. Relevant questions include whether staffing matches demand, whether priorities are clear, whether employees can influence the pace or sequence of tasks, and whether support is available during emotionally demanding interactions. The goal is to identify concrete conditions that employees and managers can change. Aggregate survey results are useful only when followed by decisions about workload allocation, processes, and accountability. Measurement without action may itself undermine trust when employees repeatedly report difficulties that remain unresolved.

8.2 Evidence on interventions

Evidence suggests that workplace interventions can reduce exhaustion, but effect sizes and study quality require careful interpretation. Bes and colleagues (2023) [5] analyzed organizational and combined interventions and found a modest overall reduction in exhaustion, with substantial heterogeneity and very low certainty of evidence. This finding supports cautious optimism rather than the claim that any particular organizational program reliably prevents burnout. Different interventions may work through different mechanisms, and their results depend on implementation quality and organizational context.

In a systematic review and meta-analysis involving physicians, West, Dyrbye, Erwin, and Shanafelt (2016) [27] found that interventions could reduce burnout, while also demonstrating the relevance of both individual-oriented and structural approaches. Findings from health care may be informative but should not be automatically generalized to every occupation. Organizational interventions are difficult to evaluate because managers, teams, regulations, and patient or customer demand can change during a study. Nielsen, Randall, Holten, and González (2010) [18] argue that implementation processes are central to understanding whether organizational health interventions succeed.

WHO (2022) [29] recommends a comprehensive approach to mental health at work that includes action on psychosocial risks, manager and worker training, appropriate individual support, and accommodations where needed. The guidelines acknowledge that the certainty of evidence for some organizational interventions remains low. This nuance is important: insufficiently strong experimental evidence is a reason to improve program evaluation, not a reason to ignore well-established workplace hazards.

8.3 Practical intervention architecture

A coherent prevention strategy can be organized into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Primary prevention changes the conditions that generate strain, such as workload planning, shift scheduling, staffing, unclear responsibilities, excessive monitoring, and unfair processes. Secondary prevention helps employees recognize early signs of difficulty and develop coping or recovery skills. Tertiary support assists employees already experiencing significant

impairment, potentially including professional evaluation, adjustments to duties, or a structured return to work.

These levels should reinforce one another. Training supervisors to recognize exhaustion is useful, but managers need authority and resources to modify problematic work conditions. Encouraging employees to disconnect after hours is meaningful only if urgent requests are limited and response expectations are explicit. Flexible arrangements can be helpful, yet flexibility must not disguise around-the-clock availability. Likewise, access to confidential counseling is valuable but should not function as a substitute for correcting persistent organizational risks.

9. Burnout in digitally mediated and AI-supported work

Digital technologies create both resources and demands. Communication platforms can support coordination, remote collaboration, and timely access to information. At the same time, notifications, rapid response expectations, data-intensive monitoring, and fragmented tasks can interfere with concentration and recovery. Through a JD–R lens, the effects of technology depend on whether it increases employees' effective control and task support or instead imposes additional cognitive, temporal, and emotional costs. Digitalization is therefore not inherently protective or harmful.

Artificial intelligence makes the balance more complex. Automation can remove repetitive tasks, improve information retrieval, and free capacity for higher-value work. Yet the same technologies may create new duties involving verification, exception handling, adaptation, or performance monitoring. A plausible risk is that productivity gains raise expectations faster than they reduce demands. Another is that employees experience uncertainty about skill requirements and future job roles. These mechanisms should be studied as hypotheses rather than treated as universally established effects of AI exposure.

Several conceptual distinctions can improve future research. AI exposure is not the same as AI-related work demands; frequency of tool use does not necessarily indicate strain. Job insecurity is distinct from actual employment change, and concerns about changes in job quality should be separated from concerns about job loss. Researchers should also distinguish technology-induced workload from ordinary workload, psychological detachment from merely being physically away from work, and burnout from digital fatigue that resolves after short periods of rest.

Longitudinal and comparative designs are especially valuable in this area. Studies could examine employee well-being before and after implementation of an AI system, compare departments with different task redesign strategies, and investigate whether training or participatory implementation moderates subsequent demands. Multilevel designs can test whether technological stressors arise from the software itself, managerial expectations, team norms, or combinations of these factors. Such work would extend established burnout theory rather than multiplying loosely defined new syndromes.

10. Methodological and conceptual limitations in the literature

The burnout literature is substantial, but accumulation of studies does not eliminate fundamental inference problems. First, many relationships are estimated with cross-sectional questionnaires. When demands, burnout, and withdrawal intentions are measured concurrently, the direction of effects cannot be established. Employees who experience burnout may perceive demands more negatively, and strained employees may report fewer resources even when formal conditions have not changed. Reciprocal effects are theoretically plausible and should be evaluated with designs capable of testing them.

Second, conceptual overlap can inflate observed relationships. Exhaustion items may resemble general fatigue or distress, cynicism items may resemble disengagement, and efficacy items may resemble self-evaluated performance. A model linking burnout to these variables can become partially tautological if the measures are not adequately separated. Researchers should demonstrate discriminant validity conceptually and statistically, inspect item content, and avoid adding constructs merely because they yield significant paths in a structural equation model.

Third, samples are frequently concentrated within particular occupations or geographic settings. Evidence from physicians, teachers, or European welfare contexts may not generalize directly to precariously employed service workers or rapidly changing labor markets. Cultural expectations about emotional expression, hierarchy, after-hours availability, and professional commitment can alter both exposures and survey responses. Multi-country research should therefore establish measurement comparability rather than interpret national differences as self-evident cultural facts.

Fourth, not all burnout dimensions necessarily follow the same developmental sequence. Exhaustion may arise early under excessive demands, whereas cynicism may intensify after perceived failures of reciprocity or persistent unfairness. Professional efficacy may decline, remain stable, or vary independently. Researchers should compare alternative temporal models instead of assuming an invariant progression. Person-centered analyses can complement variable-centered studies by identifying configurations of symptoms, provided the resulting profiles are replicated and interpreted cautiously.

11. Agenda for future research

Future research should move beyond repeatedly showing that demanding work correlates with burnout. A first priority is examining temporal mechanisms. Panel studies can track how demands, resource losses, recovery opportunities, and burnout influence one another over several periods. Intensive longitudinal studies can investigate whether days characterized by difficult customer interactions or after-hours interruptions predict next-day exhaustion, and whether recovery experiences interrupt these short-term processes. Such designs could test theoretical sequences more directly than single-wave survey models.

A second priority is specifying boundary conditions. Autonomy, supervisor support, and psychological detachment are often proposed as buffers, but the protective role of each depends on the demand involved. Autonomy may help with task sequencing while offering limited protection from compulsory customer-facing hours. Supervisor support may reduce uncertainty but not substitute for adequate staffing. Studies should distinguish resources that remove a demand from resources that merely help

employees endure it. Testing interactions and nonlinear effects can reveal where protective resources cease to be sufficient.

Third, researchers should investigate occupational burnout alongside, rather than as a synonym for, withdrawal behaviors. A useful theoretical model might propose that sustained work demands increase burnout, which then raises the likelihood of psychological withdrawal when opportunities for recovery are constrained. Alternative pathways should also be tested: perceived unfairness may directly encourage limits on discretionary effort without producing burnout, and autonomy may reduce withdrawal by increasing control over legitimate boundaries. Separating these processes would offer a more nuanced understanding of quiet quitting and related phenomena.

Fourth, the changing relationship between work and nonwork activities deserves explicit consideration. Traditional work–family models do not always capture the circumstances of unmarried or childless employees. Work may compete with leisure, social relationships, caregiving for extended family, education, and basic recovery. Researchers could explore whether particular nonwork activities restore depleted resources and whether organizational expectations make those activities difficult to protect. Such studies should avoid assuming that people without spouses or children experience fewer meaningful boundary demands.

Fifth, research should treat AI adoption as an organizational change process rather than a binary technology variable. Investigations could test whether AI-related cognitive demands, perceived job-quality insecurity, monitoring intensity, and training adequacy explain variation in burnout. The same technology may simultaneously reduce routine effort and increase the complexity of remaining tasks. Theory-driven measures should capture both pathways, while research designs should separate anticipated threats from experienced work changes.

Sixth, stronger multilevel models are needed. Team norms regarding availability, leader behavior, service climate, and staffing decisions may shape individual burnout. Employees also influence their environment through proactive behaviors. Job crafting, for instance, involves workers actively changing aspects of their tasks and resources; Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, and Zacher (2017) [20] documented important relationships between job crafting and work outcomes. However, proactive adaptation should be investigated alongside structural constraints. It should not become a rationale for making employees individually responsible for chronically defective job design.

12. Conclusion

Job burnout is best understood as a multidimensional, work-related response to persistent occupational stress rather than a synonym for ordinary tiredness, depression, or reduced willingness to perform extra-role activities. Major theoretical traditions converge on the importance of sustained demands, threatened or depleted resources, inadequate recovery, and mismatches between employees and their working environments. Reviews and meta-analyses associate burnout with adverse well-being and occupational outcomes, although causal directions, effect sizes, and the independence of particular dimensions require careful interpretation.

Three implications follow. Researchers should select measures that match explicit conceptual definitions and adopt designs capable of evaluating temporal processes and competing explanations. Employers should prioritize the conditions under which employees work, combining structural prevention with supportive individual resources. Future scholarship should examine digital technologies, AI-related demands, nonwork boundaries, and withdrawal behavior without abandoning established theoretical distinctions. A sustainable workplace is not one in which employees are trained indefinitely to withstand depletion; it is one in which demands, resources, and opportunities for recovery are organized so that effective work can continue without chronic exhaustion.

13. Acknowledgement

This research is funded by the University of Finance – Marketing.

14. References

1. Alarcon GM. A meta-analysis of burnout with job demands, resources, and attitudes. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 2011; 79(2):549-562. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.03.007
2. Amstad FT, Meier LL, Fasel U, Elfering A, Semmer NK. A meta-analysis of work-family conflict and various outcomes with a special emphasis on cross-domain versus matching-domain relations. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2011; 16(2):151-169. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022170
3. Bakker AB, Demerouti E. Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2017; 22(3):273-285. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000056
4. Bakker AB, Demerouti E, Sanz-Vergel A. Job demands-resources theory: Ten years later. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior. 2023; 10:25-53. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-053933
5. Bes I, Shoman Y, Al-Gobari M, Rousson V, Guseva Canu I. Organizational interventions and occupational burnout: A meta-analysis with focus on exhaustion. International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health. 2023; 96:1211-1223. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-023-02009-z
6. Bianchi R, Schonfeld IS, Laurent E. Burnout-depression overlap: A review. Clinical Psychology Review. 2015; 36:28-41. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.01.004
7. Demerouti E, Bakker AB, Nachreiner F, Schaufeli WB. The job demands-resources model of burnout. Journal of Applied Psychology. 2001; 86(3):499-512. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.499
8. Grandey AA. Emotion regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize emotional labor. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2000; 5(1):95-110. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.5.1.95
9. Harvey SB, Modini M, Joyce S, Milligan-Saville JS, Tan L, Mykletun A, *et al*. Can work make you mentally ill? A systematic meta-review of work-related risk factors for common mental health problems. Occupational and Environmental Medicine. 2017;

74(4):301-310. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2016-104015
10. Hobfoll SE. Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. American Psychologist. 1989; 44(3):513-524. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513
11. Hülsheger UR, Schewe AF. On the costs and benefits of emotional labor: A meta-analysis of three decades of research. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2011; 16(3):361-389. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022876
12. Kristensen TS, Borritz M, Villadsen E, Christensen KB. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory: A new tool for the assessment of burnout. Work & Stress. 2005; 19(3):192-207. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370500297720
13. Koutsimani P, Montgomery A, Georganta K. The relationship between burnout, depression, and anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Frontiers in Psychology. 2019; 10:284. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00284
14. Lee RT, Ashforth BE. A meta-analytic examination of the correlates of the three dimensions of job burnout. Journal of Applied Psychology. 1996; 81(2):123-133. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.81.2.123
15. Leiter MP, Maslach C. Areas of worklife: A structured approach to organizational predictors of job burnout. Research in Occupational Stress and Well Being. 2004; 3:91-134. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3555(03)03003-8
16. Maslach C, Leiter MP. Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry. World Psychiatry. 2016; 15(2):103-111. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20311
17. Maslach C, Schaufeli WB, Leiter MP. Job burnout. Annual Review of Psychology. 2001; 52:397-422. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397
18. Nielsen K, Randall R, Holten A-L, González ER. Conducting organizational-level occupational health interventions: What works? Work & Stress. 2010; 24(3):234-259. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2010.515393
19. Parker G, Russo N. Current issues in relation to burnout's definition, measurement, prevalence and management: A narrative review. Psychiatry Research. 2025; 352:116709. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2025.116709
20. Rudolph CW, Katz IM, Lavigne KN, Zacher H. Job crafting: A meta-analysis of relationships with individual differences, job characteristics, and work outcomes. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 2017; 102:112-138. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.05.008
21. Salvagioni DAJ, Melanda FN, Mesas AE, González AD, Gabani FL, Andrade SM. Physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout: A systematic review of prospective studies. PLoS One. 2017; 12(10):e0185781. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185781
22. Schaufeli WB, Bakker AB. Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. Journal of Organizational Behavior. 2004; 25(3):293-315. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248
23. Schaufeli WB, Desart S, De Witte H. Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT)-Development, validity, and reliability. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2020; 17(24):9495. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249495
24. Sonnentag S. The recovery paradox: Portraying the complex interplay between job stressors, lack of recovery, and poor well-being. Research in Organizational Behavior. 2018; 38:169-185. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2018.11.002
25. Sonnentag S, Fritz C. The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: Development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology. 2007; 12(3):204-221. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.3.204
26. Taris TW. Is there a relationship between burnout and objective performance? A critical review of 16 studies. Work & Stress. 2006; 20(4):316-334. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370601065893
27. West CP, Dyrbye LN, Erwin PJ, Shanafelt TD. Interventions to prevent and reduce physician burnout: A systematic review and meta-analysis. The Lancet. 2016; 388(10057):2272-2281. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31279-X
28. World Health Organization. Burn-out an occupational phenomenon: International Classification of Diseases. World Health Organization, 2019.
29. World Health Organization. WHO guidelines on mental health at work. World Health Organization, 2022.