Managers Coping Mechanisms to Burnout: A Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study was to describe the managers coping mechanisms to burnout; the causes of burnout and the extent they were experienced in the workplace; how they coped with the challenges of burnout experiences; and the insights they can share to avoid burnout. Phenomenological approach was utilized with seven (7) top and middle managers from medium enterprises in General Santos City, Philippines who were picked to undergo focus group discussion. The results of the discussion were transcribed, translated and coded to produce themes. As regards to causes and extent of burnout, the following were the themes: unclear work expectations and lot of workloads, work-life imbalance, lack of organizational support, and disengaged subordinates. As to how they coped with challenges of burnout, the themes were created: seeking support; evaluating options and priorities, communicating with the boss, and motivating subordinates. As to their insights, the themes were generated: commitment to the job, balancing work and family life, and high engagement to the job.

KEYWORDS: Burnout, Coping Mechanisms, Middle and Top Level Managers, Phenomenological Study

I. INTRODUCTION

Increased global competition, diversity of production, and the development of the service sector industries are affecting today's world of work (Burke & Ng, 2006). As a result, employees are increasingly exposed to work demands to meet deadlines and negatively affecting their efficiency and effectiveness at work (Pallot, et.al, 2010).

In today's business competition and cost effectiveness, job engagement tenders a truthful win-win chance for organizations and employees. However, employees' efforts sometimes are unrecognized by most organizations, thus, leading them to be burnout at work (Haddon, 2011). Burnout is defined as a state of exhaustion where workers are cynical about the value of work and doubtful of capacity to perform (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Moreover, Halbesleden & Buckley (2004) stated that burnout is a psychological response to stress. This is characterized by employee's emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment.

Burnout is an issue that a human resource office in every organization should not forgo. If employees are exhausted it may lead to disengagement (Thanacoody, et. al, 2014; Juevesa, et. al, 2020), dissatisfaction and uncommitted in doing with their jobs. By that, it will lead to organizational downfall due to lack of productivity and lower labor efficiency (Payos, 2010).

Additionally, the managers are not an exemption on the issue of burnout (Montgomery, et. al, 2003). Since they are the one handling the organization or department, it is expected that whatever performance their offices had, it is assumed that this is their direct responsibilities. By those concepts, personalization of issues leading to psychological distraction is something to be dealt with among them (Kahn, 2017).

With the aforementioned information, the researchers believe that there is a need to investigate further the concept of burnout as experienced by top and middle managers in General Santos City. By understanding the concepts, administrators can create programs to support managers of their organization. Thus, managers will be more effective, number of customers will increase (Juevesa & Castino, 2020), companies will grow, escalating healthcare costs will decrease and organizational objectives will be achieved.

With that, this study was conducted to explore and understand the burnout experiences of managers in General Santos City.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe how managers experiences burnout in the workplace. The study involves the top and middle managers of medium enterprises in General Santos City. They shared insights on how to deal with the burnout issues in the workplace. Hence, this study will aid the administrator, owner, or the head of the human resource office on how to truly understand and responds with managers burnout issues. Another important part of the study is discovering the causes of burnout issues in the workplace and how to cope with it.

In this study, the intention is to listen, grasp and work closely to the unfold stories by the managers about the causes of their burnout in the workplace and the coping mechanisms they had in dealing with the burnout issues to remain productive and efficient managers of the institution.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the causes of burnout and the extent they were experienced in the workplace?

2. How do managers cope with the challenges of burnout experiences?

3. What insights managers share to their colleagues and to the business professionals about burnout experiences in general?

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the nature of the study, the research design used in terms to presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researchers, research participants, the data collection process, data analysis, procedural rigors and the ethical considerations in the process which includes the following: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability of the study and all individuals involved

Research Design

This study used a qualitative-phenomenological research design focusing on the burnout experiences of the top and middle level managers in General Santos City.

According to Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge (2009), qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena which aims to help understand the social world and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of the world and seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do; how opinions and attitudes are formed; how people are affected by the events around them; and how and why cultures and practices have developed the way they have (Borrego, Douglas & Amelink, 2009). Flick (2009) reiterated that qualitative research is an inquiry approach in which the inquirer analyzes and codes the data for description and themes, interprets the meaning of the information drawing on personal reflections and past research, and writes the final report that includes personal biases and a flexible structure.

Ritchie & Lewis (2003) said that the main strengths of qualitative method are that it provides rich and detailed information about populations, perspectives of social and cultural contexts, inclusion of a diverse and representative cross section of persons, in-depth analysis of the impact of situations, data collection process requiring limited respondents, and a process requiring limited resources. Weaknesses innate in qualitative data are that it results in facts which are not objectively verifiable, requires a labor intensive analysis process, and needs skilled interviewers to successfully carry out the primary data collection activities (Carbone, 2014).

Phenomenological studies examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved in lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). Its goal is to describe the meaning of each subject's specific experiences of a phenomenon (Worthington, n.d.). To understand these lived experiences, the researcher must consider his own beliefs and feelings by identifying what to discover and putting aside these ideas through bracketing (Aspers, 2015). Only when disregarding these ideas about the phenomenon can the researcher see the experience from the subject who has lived these experiences (Bresler, n.d.). As Cooper, Fleischer & Cotton (2012) said, the reactions, perceptions, and feelings of an individual as he experienced an event are important to understand an event beyond quantitative details.

Data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously which are very different from the methods used in quantitative research (Groenewald, 2004). Simon & Goes (2011) asserted that phenomenology could be difficult to understand, particularly if a person has a limited background in philosophy. Although phenomenological research is viewed as soft science, Kafle (2011) contended that this research method is rigorous, critical, and systematic so, it calls for beginner researcher to seek a mentor experienced in phenomenological studies. Lin (2013) added that conducting phenomenological research is challenging, exciting, and exhausting but the final output is satisfying.

With the aforementioned descriptions, this study focused on the burnout experiences of the top and middle level managers in General Santos City, the qualitative-phenomenological research design was appropriate to generate the lived experiences of the participants concerning burnout in the workplaces.

Role of the Researchers

A burnout issue is not a new concept in the business world (Shirom, 2007). In fact, different businesses nowadays provided support program to their employees in terms of work-life balance (Omar, 2015), personality development, psychological and counseling programs. However, not all organizations are exactly alike in handling with their employees (Medina, 2011). Moreover, not all employees are the same in dealing with workplace issues. Thus, burnout experiences can be perceived by employees as a product of administrative issue or can be a personal issue.

Since this study, has a personal meaning to the researchers as human resource practitioners, academicians, and management consultants, the data were gathered personally by conducting focus group discussion (FGD) to 7 participants. In the study, the researchers were purely an investigator and the personal research tool in gathering data from the participants. The gathering of data was facilitated with the help of the co-researchers and colleagues in the profession. During the process, taking down of notes and video recording of FGD were undertaken. Assistance from independent reader and analysts was sought in the conduct of the study. After coming with similar findings, the researchers employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for the data analysis and interpretation. After which, the personal insights were formed.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were the top and middle level managers of medium enterprises in General Santos City. Seven (7) managers as participants were chosen as the focus of this study because they can provide substantial descriptions regarding their burnout experiences. Ideally, the numbers of participants are within Creswell's (2007) suggestions that can be enough to conduct an FGD to gather data for a qualitative research.

It was to be noted that the random sampling technique was applied to determine the samples of medium enterprises from the list obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), General Santos City.

In random sampling, Frerichs (2008) said that subjects in the population are sampled by a random process, using either a random number generator or a random number table so that each subject in the population has the probability of being selected for the sample. This idea was supported by Deauna (2011), stating that random sampling is the procedure by which all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected assuming that units to be sampled are included in a sampling frame. With these, the list of the medium enterprises in the city was numbered in sequential order from one to the total number of enterprises then the sample was drawn from the list using a random sampling program.

Data Collection

In the collection of data, the researchers used an FGD with the participants by means of note-taking and video recording.

Before the FGD was conducted, procedural rigors and ethical considerations were explained and properly observed. The ethical issues principle by Kaiser (2009) was highly observed in the conduct of the study. It was to be noted that preliminary meeting has been set before the actual conduct of FGD where researchers details the study to be conducted and its nature of confidentiality. Written consent was also asked for to assure the willingness to participate in the conduct of the study. Essentially, confortable environment with privacy was provided. Moreover, the trust and respect to interviewees shared ideas were greatly acknowledged.

Through the FGD process, the researchers listened carefully on participants' descriptions including the manner of delivery and facial expressions. For issues to be clarified, it was assured to be asked again with respect to earn the trust being hope for focusing on the phenomenon of the studied subjects.

Analysis of Data

As this is a phenomenological study, the analysis of the data was done using the Colaizzi's method. According to Collaizzi (1978) in Edward & Welch (2011), the Collaizi's method has seven (7) steps, namely: 1) transcribing all the subjects' descriptions; 2) extracting significant statements that directly relate to the phenomenon under investigation; 3) creating formulated meanings; 4) aggregating formulated meanings into theme clusters; 5) developing an exhaustive description which is a comprehensive description of the experience as articulated by the participants; 6) identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and 7) returning to participants for validation.

With the aforementioned steps, responses through the transcriptions was analyzed for significant meanings through open coding, categorizing meanings through axial coding, clustering, identifying emergent theme or themes, and lastly, coming up with a narrative out of the findings supported by literatures and studies done by

varied authors concerning burnout which necessitate discussions and interpretations of the phenomenon based on the subjects' lived experiences.

Locale of the Study

The focus of the study is top and middle level managers of medium enterprises in General Santos City.

General Santos City is the southernmost city in the Philippines. It is classified as a highly urbanized city and the fifteenth (15th) most populous city in the country. It is part of the SOCCSKSARGEN (South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Sans City) region and geographically located in the province of South Cotabato. The city's major economic activity is primarily anchored in the agro-industry and fishing industry. The city has more than 1,000 newly registered medium to large enterprises (www.gensantos.gov.ph) and more than 9,000 renewed business permits for the year 2019 (www.businessmirror.com.ph)

The locale of the study was chosen because the mentioned cities contain medium enterprises where this study is focused.

Procedural Rigors

To establish the study's trustworthiness founded on the established qualitative criteria, the concepts of credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency) and confirmability (neutrality) was described (Krefting, 1991). Strategies that the researchers used to enhance the value of the study with reference to these concepts were presented as follows:

Credibility. This refers to how fitting are the findings with what is in actuality. In the context of this research, the strategies like the adoption of well-established method, familiarity with the culture of participating organizations, random sampling of the participants, triangulation, tactics to ensure participants' honesty, iterative questioning, frequent debriefing sessions, peer scrutiny of the research project, researcher's reflective commentary, member checks, thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and examination of previous research findings was used by the researchers to establish confidence for the accurate recording of the burnout phenomenon.

Transferability. This concept refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other situations. In this study, although the number of participants is small and unique, the study can be an example within the broader group of medium enterprises' top and middle managers and so, the prospect of transferability cannot be immediately rejected. Moreover, in this case, the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they were based, the restrictions in the contributed data, number of participants involved in the fieldwork, data collection methods that was employed, number and length of the data collection sessions and the time period over which the data was collected were given at the outset. With above stated provisions, the transferability in the conduct of the study was achieved.

Dependability. This refers to the steadiness of the outcome which means that if the study will be repeated in the same perspective, with the same process and with similar contributors, parallel results will be gained. In this study, to address dependability, the processes were reported in detail so that, any future researcher can repeat the work, but not necessarily to gain the same results. Moreover, this will allow the readers to assess the extent to which proper research practices will be followed. To develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness, the study had a research design and its implementation describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level. In addition, the operational detail of data gathering addressing the detailed activities of what has been done in the field and the reflective appraisal of the study evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken was clearly presented.

Confirmability. This concept refers to the researcher's equivalent concern to objectivity which means that the findings are the result of the experiences of the participants rather than that of the researcher. In the study, to ensure confirmability, the researcher admitted his own predispositions and triangulation was employed to reduce the effect of researcher bias. Moreover, an audit trail was employed showing a data-oriented approach, that is, how the data eventually leading to the formation of recommendations was gathered and processed during the course of the study. The manner in which the concepts inherent in the research question that will give rise to the work to follow can be tracked using a theoretical audit trail.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers observed ethical principles in the conduct of the research. According to Cohen (2007), these ethical principles concern with a) doing no harm to the participants; b) privacy and anonymity; c) confidentiality; d) informed consent; e) rapport and friendship; f) intrusiveness; g) inappropriate behavior; h) data interpretation; and i) data ownership and rewards.

Doing no harm to the participants. This study safeguard against doing anything that will harm the participants. In the study, none of the participants had adverse reactions, thus, the interview was continued. In case that the participant was adversely affected, then this study was discontinued.

Privacy and anonymity. To maintain privacy and anonymity, the researchers remove the identifying information concerning the participants or organizations from the records. In any case that information was made public, guaranteed that permissions has been sought for from the participants.

Confidentiality. The researchers were responsible to keep the learned information confidential. Nothing in this study harmed the participants and the people within their organizations.

Informed consent. The study makes the participants informed about the nature of the study by providing complete information about the direction of the study. The participants have the freedom to withdraw from the interview if deemed necessary and must not be penalized for doing such withdrawal.

Rapport and friendship. The researchers provided an environment that is trustworthy and in the same manner, sensitive to the power they hold over the participants. The researchers also assure neutrality avoiding situations in which participants will think that they were friends with the researchers.

Intrusiveness. The researchers dealing focus only on the study which is the burnout experiences of the participants. Such other matters outside of this focus were not considered by the researchers although there are situations that the participants revealed other matters. In this case, the researchers redirected the interview back to the topic.

Inappropriate behavior. The researchers in any manner are not closed to the participants. The researchers remember that they researchers are bounded by the code of conduct to treat the participants with respect.

Data interpretation. The researchers analyzed data in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretations or fraudulent analysis. The researchers interpreted data and presented evidence to the extent of his professional judgment and understanding.

Data ownership. The researchers own the work generated. Moreover, participants need not be given any copy of the manuscript.

RESULTS

Presented in this chapter were the experiences of the study participants, their insights and discernments as well the concepts emerged from the information gleaned through the focus group discussions. This is presented based research questions identified:

Table 1

Essential Themes and Thematic Statements on causes of burnout and the extent they were experienced in the workplace.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Unclear Work Expectations and Lot of Workloads	The organizational objectives are not clear.
	Lack of organizational planning.
	The owners' plans and decisions are changing.
	My job authority is not that clear.
	Too much expectation which is beyond my jobs.
	Not comfortable with the assigned jobs.
	I have a lot of work demands.
	I receive an assignment without manpower to help.
	I am spending too much with the job.
	I cannot sleep at night thinking with my jobs.
	I have difficulty in balancing my jobs and family time.

Work-Life Imbalance	I have a lot of deadlines to meet every day.
	I have difficulty in dividing my work life and non-work life.
	I don't have enough time for personal relaxation.
	I don't have enough time for relatives and friends.
Lack of Organizational Support	I am not provided with necessary equipment to accomplish my job.
	The budget request for the job to be done is always delayed.
	Lack of office supplies and other materials for the job.
	My immediate head is not listening to my suggestions.
	I am not motivated to work.
	The owner is not always around when you refer concerns.
Disengaged Subordinates	My co-employees are not motivated to work.
	My subordinates are not sharing with their work problems.
	My subordinates don't care about meeting the deadlines.
	I cannot ask for extra miles job among my officemates.
	I feel that my subordinates don't like going to work every day.
	They don't have initiatives in their job performance.

From the data collected on the experiences of the studied participants, 4 main themes emerged. These themes helped researchers determine which core ideas to report. These themes are:

Unclear Work Expectations and Lot of Workloads- the discussion enormously circulated that burnout can be caused by unclear expectations about the jobs and having a lot of workloads. They reiterated that these issues can lead them to be psychologically affected especially in the area of beating deadlines and work accomplishment as expected from them.

Work-Life Imbalance – The responses revealed that there are clearly problems among managers in terms of balancing work-time and family time for both concerns demands attention. This factor causes them to feel burnout at the end of the day.

Lack of Organizational Support – the FGD results clearly presented that lack of organizational support can create burnout to managers. Organizational support is something that managers will need to be productive and efficient in the workplace.

Disengaged Subordinates – Based on the responses of the participants as reflected in this study, managers need subordinates support in doing the jobs. Teamwork and collaboration contributed a lot for organizational success. In this case, the disengaged employees cause managers to feel psychologically in distress.

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Statements on coping with the challenges of burnout experiences

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Seeking Support	I just talk to my wife and my children.
	I open up to my relative and friends.
	I prefer to find new friends to understand me.
	I refer the case to the Human Resource Office.
	I ask assistance from close friends.
	I am calling my graduate school classmates.

	I am sharing to my friends who have consultancy business.
Evaluating Option and Priorities	I prefer to give time to myself and forget the job for a while.
	I am thinking of finding a new job where employers are supportive.
	I respect and adjust to the situation.
	I am setting new and reasonable objectives.
	I am doing what is really needed based on my priorities.
	I am negotiating with my boss in coping with office deadlines.
	I work 8 hours a day and spent the remaining time with family.
Communicating with the Boss	I find time to talk to my immediate head.
	I try to reach out and voice out to my superior.
	I am writing to my boss to explain my side.
	I formally requesting what I am needed to cope up the deadlines.
	I became open to them on the problem that I encountered.
	I honestly confront my boss about any issues and expectations.
Motivating Subordinates	I tried talking to my employees in the department.
	I find a way motivating them.
	I proposed incentives to the top performer.
	I hear their comments and sentiments.
	I proposed training program for them.
	I recognized all of their contributions.

To cope up with the challenges of burnout, 4 essential themes emerged. These are:

Seeking Support – Managers resorted to seeking advice from family, friends and experts to cope up burnout experiences. These matters help them to feel at ease and relieve.

Evaluating Options and Priorities – To cope with burnout, managers are making a move in evaluating options that will help them relieve the ill feeling of psychological stress. More so, by having priorities, jobs were done systematically.

Communicating with the Boss – On the FGD conducted, it was raise out that all problems can be sold thru proper communication and set down meeting. To cope up with stress, the participants stated that they try communicating with their boss to resort on the positive win-win situation on matters to be dealt about the jobs.

Motivating Subordinates – By motivating subordinates, the manager can find a way to lessen their burnout. In the concept, that well-motivated employees perform better in the workplace and can be leaned on by the managers in doing the jobs.

Table 3

Themes and Core Ideas on insights managers share to their colleagues and to the business professionals about burnout experiences in general

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Commitment to the Job	Value your job.
	Be committed in doing the assigned task.
	Love the organization that you are working.
	Helps correct the mistake in the organization.

	Accept the culture in the workplace.
	Talk to your boss and be honest about your job.
	Be loyal to your work.
	Just do what you can offer to the organization.
Balancing Work and Family Life	Love your job but find time for family.
	Balance your time with job and family.
	Take enough sleep but report to job on time.
	Don't bring paper works at home, do it in the office.
	Have time for personal relaxation.
	Have time for vacation with family.
	Separate work and non-work life.
High Engagement to the Job	Have excellent attitude in the workplace.
	Lend a helping to co-employees.
	Do an extra mile.
	Be responsible to the job assigned.
	Exert the best effort in the task.
	Be a service-oriented personnel
	Strive for excellence in giving service.
	Always support the head and the co-workers

On the insights that managers can share to their colleagues and professional business administrators, 3 themes emerged as follows:

Commitment to the Job – Managers believe that even how burnout we are with the jobs, at the end of the day, it us who can help ourselves. They believe that commitment to the job can fight burnout in the workplace.

Balancing Work and Family Life – Managers and employees are working to provide the needs of their family. Well balance work and family life makes them happier and satisfied.

High Engagement to the Job – on the FGD, managers stated that highly engaged subordinate can make job in the office easy to accomplish and lessen the burden of the managers in coping with deadlines.

SUMMARY

The results of the study during the focus group discussion revealed that managers feel burnout because of: unclear expectations and lot of workloads; work-life imbalance; lack of organizational support, and disengaged subordinates. The discussion enormously circulated that the said situations causes them to feel psychological stress due to expectation lies on their shoulders as managers of the office.

The participants were also vocal that burnout can be solved through: seeking support; evaluating options and priorities; communicating with the boss, and motivating subordinates. By doing these coping mechanisms, burnouts were little by little being lessened. The participants were blunt about admitting that burnout is a personal experience and can be dealt depending on the person emotional and mental capability to balance issues among themselves.

This study further revealed that in the organization teamwork and collaboration among groups are best remedy for organizational success, thus, managers believe as stated during the FGD conducted that: commitment to the job; balancing work and family life, and high engagement to the job can cover burnout among managers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications for practiced are offered:

On their causes and the extent of burnout experience. The experiences presented by the managers reflected in this study have negative experiences but can be a lesson for other managers to avoid problem it in the future. It also revealed that causes of burnout solely lie on the hands and decision of the managers. Their boss, subordinates, or work environment causes burnout but it's up to them on how to deal with it positively.

On coping with the challenges of burnout. It has been established that managers learned to adjust themselves to cope up with the burnout challenges. It is presented by the participants that managers should be well-versed enough to make this worst situation an opportunity to improve. Those coping mechanisms identified are effective to have productive and positive atmosphere in the workplace.

On the insights to be shared to their colleagues. Data suggested that commitment to job, work-life balance, and high engagement of employees should be maintained in the workplace. If these three factors are always present burnout among managers and employees can be avoided as much as possible.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In as much as the burnout experiences and coping mechanisms in this study were limited to General Santos City, the following implication for future research may be done:

Since the phenomenological study presents evidences about the coping mechanisms of managers to burnout, it could be probable to conduct a study about burnout experiences of business owners of medium enterprises and know the reason on how they cope up with it. Also a future research can be conducted for burnout and coping mechanisms of rank and files employees, for us to understand how they lived with these experiences.

Moreover, the findings of the study were viewed from the lens of the middle and top managers of medium enterprises, thus, another research like corporate managers of corporation could be a legitimate venture to look out.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The investigation on the experiences of burnout among managers and their coping mechanisms has highlighted the significance and importance of the study. The results mentioned in this study substantiated with Burisch (2002) and Spence-Laschinger et.al (2010) that burnout may be experience among employees not only among managers or business professional but in any profession as well. The result of the study also upheld the assertion of Denzin & Lincoln (2008) and Starks & Trinidad (2007) that a qualitative method of research is better at bringing to surface the human perceptions from actual happenings since through discussions; the participants could relive the essence of their experience.

Thus, the study about Managers Coping Mechanism to Burnout, have left insights about commitment, work-life balance and engagement to help both individual and organizational success.

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