

8 Leadership, management and wellbeing

Daniel Xerri opens this chapter with the findings of a small-scale study into burnout in school leaders in Malta, and the practical measures adopted to address this problem. **Jonathan Yates** discusses the negative impact of organisation silos, and describes a marketing project designed to combat these by encouraging collaboration across departments to achieve common objectives. For **Elna Coetzer and Robyn Stewart**, teacher wellbeing needs active support from management. In this report of their workshop, they introduce activities for the teacher's room to explore what we can do to promote our own and our colleagues' wellbeing. With a focus on English language teacher associations, **Beatrix Price** discusses the need for effective management to unlock the potential of volunteers in order to develop their personal, professional and leadership skills. The chapter ends with a success story from **Bostan Hyat**, who describes the challenges and triumphs of developing a 21st-century educational team in Kazakhstan, Central Asia.

8.1 School leaders' experiences of burnout: causes, effects and solutions

Daniel Xerri *University of Malta, Msida, Malta*

Introduction

Burnout affects the physical and mental wellbeing of school leaders working in different ELT contexts around the world. As a syndrome which results from chronic workplace stress that has been improperly managed, burnout is characterised by a lack of energy and fatigue, detachment from one's job and a sense of professional inefficacy (World Health Organization, 2024). Based on the results of a study conducted in Malta's private ELT sector, this paper sheds light on what causes burnout in school leaders, how they are impacted by it, and what practical measures can be adopted to address the problem. The study consisted of interviews with nine school leaders who had varying levels of experience in their position and managed schools that differed in terms of staff and student population sizes.

Causes

When the school leaders were asked to describe what causes burnout, they mostly referred to periods in which they had to run the school with limited resources while coping with excessive work. The issue of teacher shortage was mentioned by most interviewees, with many of them associating it with the problem of not being able to

cater for a surge in student bookings. Another common experience recounted by the school leaders consisted of the stress caused by having to manage their team remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. One interviewee explained, 'During the Covid years, there were so many other added pressures to be dealing with that were mostly HR related. You were responsible for teachers' livelihoods. You worked around the clock in order to ensure that these people ultimately got their hours, got their salary'.

Effects

For the interviewed school leaders, the effects of burnout manifest themselves on both personal and professional levels. With respect to the former, they talked about the toll burnout takes on their physical and mental health, and its impact on their personal life and relationships. For instance, one school leader said, 'It's my life outside of work that is mostly affected. I suffer when I get home and maybe I get sick or have migraines'. Another interviewee, explained that 'At home, I really don't have that much patience. I'm a very different person, I don't know what happens to me'.

On a professional level, burnout affects these school leaders' performance and relationships at work, even though they seek to hinder it from doing so. In certain cases, burnout also made them think of quitting their job and leaving the ELT sector. One interviewee affirmed, 'I don't think I let it affect my behaviour towards other people at school. But after a period of intense stress, I feel less productive. There's a bit of a lull. I take it a bit easy when it comes to things that need to be done'.

Solutions

The solutions to burnout consist of either mitigating its effects or preventing it from happening. The interviewed school leaders mentioned a number of ways that helped them to bounce back after experiencing the effects of burnout or coming very close to them. These consisted of practising yoga and meditation, carving alone time for themselves, regulating their diet, and taking up new sports or hobbies. However, the school leaders were very much aware that addressing burnout requires shifting the focus from its symptoms to its causes (Davis, 2021).

The prevention strategies shared by these school leaders consisted largely of adjustments they made to the way they conducted their role and led the organisation. Establishing clear boundaries with their employers was paramount, as it enabled them to focus on doing their job efficiently without feeling they were responsible for everything that needed to be done within the organisation. For instance, one school leader stated, 'There are moments where I have to tell my superiors that there simply aren't enough hours in the day'. Setting up a support system at work and delegating certain duties were also deemed fundamental. One interviewee explained, 'You have to choose the right people ... If you hire people with a "can do" attitude, then you can do it. It energises you and you feed off the support they give you'.

Conclusion

A burnout culture operates in certain schools and this has an impact on all the people that form part of its community, including those at the helm. In order to bring an end

to such a culture, it might be important to start from the idea that *we* are the ones who dignify work, shape its character and give it meaning within our lives, rather than the opposite (Malesic, 2022).

daniel.xerri@um.edu.mt

References

- Davis, P. (2021). *Beating burnout at work: Why teams hold the secret to well-being and resilience*. Wharton School Press.
- Malesic, J. (2022). *The end of burnout: Why work drains us and how to build better lives*. University of California Press.
- World Health Organization. (2024). *Burn-out an 'occupational phenomenon'*. <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>

8.2 Breaking organisational silos with a marketing video

Jonathan Yates *Inspired Kids, Taipei, Taiwan*

Why should you care about organisational silos?

Throughout many years working in the EFL industry for a range of language teaching organisations (LTOs) – from large multinationals to small independent schools – there were issues that negatively impacted both my ability to perform my duties and my motivation. I often chalked these up to problems with individual staff members: inefficient employees, perhaps selfishness or laziness, maybe just people not getting along. I didn't understand that a lot of the problems were systemic, a natural occurrence that was rooted way deeper than just on individual levels. I saw symptoms rather than the underlying cause – organisational silos.

An organisational silo could be an individual, small groups, or entire departments that fail to adequately share information, cooperate, collaborate, or communicate in a transparent manner. These silos can form for many reasons: people are naturally drawn towards those they share the most in common with (language/culture/goals/objectives/roles), or a lack of opportunity for collaboration. They can also form because of poorly communicated or unclear company visions and values, and inductions that fail to integrate an employee with the entire company.

The results of siloisation can manifest themselves through reduced efficacy, redundant rivalries, and even resentment. A 'them and us' mentality between employees of different ranks, schedules, departments, centres, regions, or versus the idea of the company as a whole. Organisational silos can erode trust and lead to employees losing sight of, or belief in, the common goals and values of an LTO. Silos can end up pulling in different directions to fulfil their own goals rather than appreciating the holistic nature of an organisation. For an LTO to truly thrive, they must be aware of and actively strive to combat the negative effects of siloisation.