



# Professional staff are burnt out

A call to action for higher education leaders

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# What is burnout?

Burnt out individuals experience

- Chronic fatigue
- Distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work
- Report psychological and physical health problems
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Emotional instability
  - Memory impairment
  - Pain

Bakker, Costa 2014; Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach 2009



Present in many occupations,  
including Australian universities



# What is burnout?

By contrast, energetic and invested individuals are:

- Committed
- Innovative
- Creative
- Demonstrate high quality performance standards

Bakker, Albrecht, Leiter 2011



We think Professional staff involved in the  
administration of WIL have high levels of burnout



# Why we should care

- The work professional staff undertake is steadily growing in importance (Szekeres 2011)
- Professional staff are taking on new responsibilities and increasingly complex work (Graham 2012; Simpson and Fitzgerald 2014)
- Successful Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experiences has important implications for graduating students and employability
- The national agenda for WIL is strengthening
- Professional staff play a vital part in quality service provision



# The research question

What are the organisational factors perceived to be impacting the experience of work for professional staff administering WIL in Australian universities?



# The project

- National Association of Field Experience Administrators (NAFEA)
- Conducted in 2018
- Involving professional staff from universities across Australia
- Mixed methods
  - Oldenberg Burnout Inventory
    - Disengagement, Exhaustion, Overall scores
  - Narrative
    - What work or home factors are impacting your scores today?
- Survey, N=25



# Burnout scores

					Hindrane demands				
	ID	D score (8-32)	E score (8-32)	Overall score (16-64)	Work Overload	Emotional Demand	Work/Home Interference	Physical Demand	Resources
High burnout (range 48-64)	Participant A	25	28	53	Y	Y			
	Participant B	22	26	48				Y	
Mid burnout (range 32-47)	Participant C	22	25	47		Y			
	Participant D	19	28	47	Y				
	Participant E	23	23	46		Y			
	Participant F	23	22	45			Y		
	Participant G	22	23	45					
	Participant H	21	22	43	Y				
	Participant I	22	20	42					Y
	Participant J	22	18	40	Y			Y	
	Participant K	21	19	40					
	Participant L	21	19	40					Y
	Participant M	20	20	40	Y				Y
	Participant N	21	18	39					
	Participant O	19	19	38	Y				
	Participant P	18	20	38		Y			
	Participant Q	16	21	37					
Participant R	20	16	36		Y	Y	Y		
Participant S	18	18	36			Y			
Participant T	17	19	36						
Participant U	17	18	35					Y	
Participant V	15	20	35			Y			
Low burnout (range 16-31)	Participant W	15	16	31					Y
	Participant X	16	13	29					Y
	Participant Y	10	8	18					
					6	5	4	3	6



# Hindrance demands

## Work overload

- *'keeping many plates spinning'*
- *'not taken into consideration for staffing'*
- *'limited people in your team'*

## Emotional demands from colleagues

- *'new academic director who has a very manic personality'*
- *'working with negative colleagues who create stresses'*
- *'changes in academic team members has led to feelings of being more isolated'*

## Work – home interference

- *'Long distance travel time'*
- *'Relationship issues at home'*
- *'Passing of my mother'*

## Physical demands

- *'sitting all day gives me back, neck and hip pain'*
- *'5 of us in a very small office'*
- *'Barriers to accessing stand up workstation'*



# Future research



How do we mitigate against elevated burnout levels?

What is the experience of work in Australian universities?

Unique working environments with high levels of psychological stress and low job satisfaction (Winefield et al 2003)

Complex and often fractious relationships between academic and professional staff

- Professional staff engaging in 'managerialism' (Gray 2015)
- Professional staff identified as 'the bearers of much that is wrong with the academy' (Gillberg 2010.p.133)
- Academics are a 'cross' that must be borne by administrators (Pitman 2000)



By examining Australian  
universities  
through a different lens  
we can seek a deeper  
'why'