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## Article

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# The Impact of Behavioral Symptoms of Burnout on Work Engagement of Older Employees: The Case of Slovenian Companies

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## Abstract

The main objective of the paper is to determine the impact of behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees on their work engagement in large- and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. The research is based on the implementation of a factor analysis by which we wanted to reduce the large number of variables into a smaller number of factors. With those factors, we performed a simple linear regression. Based on the results, we confirmed the hypothesis that behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees have a statistically significant negative impact on their work engagement. Well-being of employees of varying ages in the workplace is key for long-term effectiveness of companies. From this point of view, companies should apply appropriate measures to reduce burnout as well as to contribute to employees' well-being and better workplace performance, which is reflected in work engagement of employees.

**Keywords:** burnout, behavioral symptoms of burnout, older employees, work engagement

## Introduction

Workplace burnout is a fundamental crisis in the psychological connections that people establish with work (Leiter & Maslach, 2016, p. 91) and the long-term consequence of mental strain (Jugdev et al., 2018). Stress stems from internal and environmental demands that affect psychological well-being (Haynes & Love, 2004). Psychosocial stressors that contribute to workplace burnout include long hours, greater workloads, job uncertainty, poor prospects for pay and promotion, ambiguous roles on projects, and time and budget pressure that accelerate the risk of mistakes or compromise standards of quality and ethics (Korman, 2010, p. 24). Burnout can lead to disengagement in the workplace. Also, workplace burnout results in productivity loss and employee turnover (Ahola et al., 2006). According to Packirisamy et

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al. (2017), burnout has an impact on the human system and thereby influences productivity and performance.

Employees may not be aware of the negative impacts on their performance that these factors can have, such as increased errors or lower productivity. Employers and co-workers may attribute the changes to a poor attitude or loss of motivation. The negative effects of burnout can increase significantly before anyone recognizes or addresses the problem, and unaddressed burnout can increase the chance of developing clinical depression or other serious conditions (see, e.g., Maslach & Leiter, 2002, Moyer et al., 2018). Thus, organizations that invest extensively in programs to develop and support employees appreciate that engaged employees (an organization's mental capital) improve productivity and drive competitive advantage and innovation (Jugdev et al., 2018). Engagement is characterized by individual perceptions of energy, effectiveness, and motivation at work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and a feeling that work is meaningful and fulfilling (Saks, 2006). It is important to know that an engaged employee is a vital prerequisite for a healthy company. Stressful, depressed, and dissatisfied employees may not be able to obtain the same quality level of work and productivity as those employees with low stress and high satisfaction. From this perspective, it is important that employers can create a safe and friendly environment to work (Rožman et al., 2018).

According to Henkens and Leenders (2010), burnout of older employees can be explained by a high workload and a lack of challenge and physical demands of the job, less opportunities for growth and a lack of social support, especially from colleagues in the organization where they work. Further, Zaniboni et al. (2014) argue that the demographics of the global workforce are changing, specifically with an aging diverse workforce introducing new research objectives. It becomes more important to find ways for people to remain satisfied and engaged in their work at different life stages. Therefore, it has become important to understand the role of individual differences in examining the effects of job characteristics on job attitudes. That means that job characteristics are not experienced in the same way by all workers. Given the demographic shifts in today's workplace, worker age would appear to be such an important individual difference (see e.g., Zaniboni et al., 2014; Rožman et al., 2018; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees on their work engagement in large- and medium-sized Slovenian companies. The literature and research are scant in regard to comprehensive and systematic theoretical knowledge on older employees and their symptoms of burnout. With this research, we hope to fill that gap. Thus, this paper aims to verify the following hypothesis:

H1: Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees have a statistically significant negative impact on their work engagement.

This article provides a review of the literature, a description of methodology, results about the behavioral symptoms of older employees and their impact on work engagement of older employees, and finally a discussion of the findings.

## Literature Review

### Burnout in the Workplace

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness in the workplace and by chronic negative responses to stressful workplace conditions (Moyer et al., 2017). Maslach et al. (2001) define burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness, i.e., a lack of accomplishment. Burnout results in reduced productivity, higher absenteeism, and the intention to quit one's job. Hogarth (2017) summarizes that burnout is a reduced ability to cope with stress and is related to chronic dysfunctioning at work. It is considered to be the result of prolonged exposure to chronic stress at work. Maslach and Leiter (2002), Moyer et al. (2018), and Babyar (2017) define burnout as a syndrome characterized by three dimensions: feelings of exhaustion, increased cynicism with respect to one's job, and a negative perception of one's own professional efficacy. Feelings of exhaustion relate to feelings of being overly tired and to the exhaustion of one's emotional and physical resources. Cynicism relates to a negative, indifferent attitude, or to an excessively detached response to different aspects of one's job and represents the interpersonal component of burnout (Hogarth, 2017). Reduced efficacy represents the self-evaluation component of burnout and relates to feelings of incompetence and a lack of performance and productivity at work (Babyar, 2017).

### Symptoms of Burnout

Signs and symptoms of an employee experiencing burnout may include reduced efficiency and energy, lowered levels of motivation, increased errors, fatigue, headaches, irritability, increased frustration, suspiciousness, and more time spent working with less being accomplished. Severe burnout can also result in self-medication with alcohol and other substances, sarcasm and negativity, and debilitating self-doubt. Burnout may result in a number of outcomes, including poor physical health, clinical depression, reduced job satisfaction, decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, increased risk

of accidents, poor workplace morale, and communication breakdown (Mosadeghrad, 2014; Bilban & Pšeničny, 2007).

Burnout includes three symptoms: physical, psychological, and behavioral. Almost any physical symptom may indicate burnout, as the first signs manifest at the body's weakest point when it loses the ability to self-regulate. This varies greatly from person to person. If one is prone to developing allergies, burnout might show up as eczema or hay fever at first. Most frequently, however, the initial symptoms of burnout include sleep disorders, indigestion, head and back pain, dizziness, tiredness and exhaustion, disturbances of sleep, disturbance of appetite palpitations, tinnitus, weakened immune system, eczema, hay fever, and asthma. Psychological symptoms of burnout include increased irritability, boredom, lack of motivation, feeling of stagnation, low self-esteem, restlessness, an inner feeling of emptiness, anxiety, despair, a feeling of futility, blunting, loss of pleasure (lust for life, work, family). Behavioral symptoms of burnout include lack of concentration, lack of ability to make decisions, self-doubt, loss of performance, tendencies toward social withdrawal, increased coffee and alcohol consumption, spending less time engaging in enjoyable or relaxing activities, irritability and anger, cynicism and dissatisfaction, procrastination, careless mistakes, absenteeism, and tardiness (see e.g., Bilban & Pšeničny, 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2002; Babyar, 2017).

### Reasons for Burnout Appearance in Companies

Burnout is a psychological term that refers to long-term exhaustion and diminished interest in work and is often defined as a syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. Occupational psychosocial factors associated with burnout are roughly divided into internal (e.g., personal) and external (e.g., environmental) factors. Burnout symptoms can partly be explained by personality traits (e.g., perfectionism, idealization of support, self-promotion, inability to say "no," refusing to share a part of the job demands, unrealistic expectations of the actions taken, etc.) and some external factors, e.g., poor work organization, inadequate preparation for concrete work, lack of organizational support, professional isolation, etc. Internal factors include feelings about themselves and about job (see, e.g., Tatalović Vorkapić & Mustapić, 2012).

### Burnout of Older Employees and Their Work Engagement

According to Ahola et al. (2006), burnout increases with ageing. Among the demographic variables, age turns out to be the most related to burnout. It has been found that

poor health is one of the major determinants of early retirement, and the poorer the health of older workers is, the stronger their intentions appear to be to withdraw from the labor force early (Wang & Shultz, 2010). Health is traditionally one of the most important determinants of early retirement, and it turns out that older employees have a stronger intention to leave the labor market prematurely as health diminishes. There are various reasons why people with burnout complaints may have a stronger desire to withdraw from the labor force. One reason is that burnout decreases employees' work engagement. Employees who have a weaker work engagement are assumed to be more likely to decide to retire. Retirement offers older employees the opportunity to escape unsatisfying situations at work (Henkens & Leenders, 2010). Chen et al. (2013) argue that there is a negative relationship between burnout in the workplace and work engagement. Also, authors Upadyaya et al. (2016) summarize that there is negative relationship between all types of burnout symptoms (physical, psychological, behavioral) in the workplace and work engagement. Engagement is a positive state of mind and involves energy, involvement, and professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 2012). Bakker and Demerouti (2008) assert that engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; experience better health; create one's own job and personal resources; and transfer one's engagement to others. Robertson and Cooper (2010) found that low levels of stress and burnout, high levels of psychological well-being, and work engagement of older employees play a central role in delivering the important outcomes that are associated with success in companies.

Based on the theoretical ground, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H1: Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees have a statistically significant negative impact on their work engagement.

## Methodology

### Data and Sample

We carried out an empirical research on behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees in Slovenia from July 2016 to February 2017. A survey was conducted to examine the impact of behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees on their work engagement in large- and medium-sized companies in Slovenia. In the research on the management of older employees in Slovenia, 1,086 older employees were included in the sample by random

selection. In each large- and medium-sized company, we selected up to four employees who participated in our research. Respondents answered at least 85% of the questions, and we did not exclude any questionnaires.

The structure of older employees was as follows:

- In the survey, 41.8% of older employees aged from 56 to 61 years, 38.4% employees aged from 50 to 55 years, and 19.3% of employees aged from 62 to 67 years were involved. The lowest percentage is presented by older employees aged over 68 (0.6%) years.
- The biggest share of companies in which older employees are employed present large companies (54.3%). Medium-sized companies comprised 45.7%.
- The companies in which older employees are employed were from manufacturing (30.3%); trade, maintenance and repair of motor vehicles (16.4%); financial and insurance activities (11.0%); professional, scientific and technical activities (10.9%); information and communication activities (7.6%); construction (4.4%); other diversified business activities (3.4%); real estate business (3.4%); catering (2.8%); health and social care (2.4%); supply of electricity, gas and steam (2.2%); transport and storage (1.8%); agriculture and hunting, forestry, fishing (1.2%); water supply, sewage and waste management, environmental rehabilitation (1.0%); other activities (0.7%); and mining (0.4%).

**Research Instrument**

When designing the instrument for measuring the behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees and work engagement, we relied on various theoretical principles and research. Table 1 shows the statements of several authors that we included in our questionnaire.

To determine the behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees and their work engagement, the employees indicated their agreement to the listed statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “completely agree.” For this type of research, we used a Likert-type scale because we wanted to know the strength of agreement with statements in the questionnaire.

**Statistical Analysis**

Data were analyzed with the SPSS program. Within the empirical part, we wanted to establish whether the use of factor analysis is reasonable on the basis of Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ( $KMO \geq 0.5$ ) (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. We used factor analysis to reduce a large number of variables into fewer numbers of factors and to describe the factor with certain variables. Based on the results of factor analysis, we did not eliminate any variables because communalities were higher than 0.40 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). We saved the derived factor points and with that created new variables (factors). Based on the gained new variables (factors), we performed a simple regression analysis.

**Table 1.** Statements of Several Authors in Questionnaire

Dimension	Statements	Source
Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees	1. I lack the will to socialize with co-workers	Bilban and Pšeničny, 2007
	2. I lack the will to work	
	3. I wish for solitude	
	4. My working ability has declined	
	5. I have difficulties with concentration and memory	
	6. I have nightmares	
	7. I avoid activities	
	8. I have insomnia	
Work engagement of older employees	1. I do my work with passion	Macey and Schneider, 2008
	2. I am engaged to the quality of my work	
	3. I feel connection with the company in which I worked	
	4. I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company and I am helping to develop the company	
	5. I feel that my work and job are important	
	6. I am proud to be employed in this company	
	7. I am engaged to achieve successful business results	Wagner and Harter, 2006
	8. I trust in my colleagues and the manager	Gruman and Saks, 2011
	9. I believe in the successful development and operation of our company	Xu and Thomas, 2011
	10. I would not leave the company even if I could get another opportunity for a job	Robertson and Cooper, 2010
	11. I feel very good at my workplace	
	12. I feel like a “part of the family” in the company	

Source: Authors

We also checked the reliability of measurement of research within the scope of inner consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach 1951, 297–334). Churchill and Brown (2004, 337) define that the indicators of highly reliable constructs should be highly connected and show that all measure the same latent construct. The authors state that the reliability of the measurement, which has a coefficient  $\alpha \geq 0.80$ , is marked as exemplary, if the coefficient is in the interval  $0.70 \leq \alpha < 0.80$ , as very good, in the interval  $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.70$ , as moderate, and if the coefficient  $\alpha$  is smaller than 0.60, as barely acceptable.

## Results

### Behavioral Symptoms of Burnout of Older Employees

Table 2 presents the results of factor analysis for the construct behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees. The value of Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.933) and the results of Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p < 0.01$ ) suggested the use of factor analysis.

**Table 2.** Results of Factor Analysis for the Construct Behavioral Symptoms of Burnout of Older Employees

Statement	Communalities	Factor loadings
I lack the will to socialize with co-worker	0.879	0.938
I lack the will to work	0.870	0.933
I wish for solitude	0.861	0.928
My working ability has declined	0.860	0.928
I have difficulties with concentration and memory	0.821	0.906
I have nightmares	0.798	0.893
I avoid activities	0.787	0.887
I have insomnia	0.557	0.746
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure: 0.933		
	Approximate Chi-Square	11098.325
Bartlett's test of sphericity	df	28
	<i>p</i>	0.000
Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 80.413%		

Source: Authors

The values of all communalities in Table 2 for construct behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees are higher than 0.50; therefore, we have not eliminated any variables because they all correspond to the criteria. The total variance explained is 80.4%. Table 2 also shows that all factor loadings are higher than 0.70. In our case, the most important role in behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees is achieved by the statement: "I lack the will to socialize with co-workers."

Table 3 shows the value of Cronbach's alpha for the factor behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees.

**Table 3.** Value of Cronbach's Alpha for the Factor Behavioral Symptoms of Burnout of Older Employees

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.964	8

Source: Authors

The value of Cronbach's alpha (Table 3) for the factor behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees is 0.964; therefore, the reliability of the measurement in the behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees is exemplary.

### Work Engagement of Older Employees

Value of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.961) and results of Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p < 0.01$ ) suggest the use of factor analysis. Table 4 presents the results of factor analysis for the construct work engagement of older employees.

**Table 4.** Results of Factor Analysis for the Construct Work Engagement of Older Employees

Statement	Communalities	Factor loadings
I do my work with passion	0.807	0.948
I am engaged to the quality of my work	0.815	0.936
I am engaged to achieve successful business results	0.807	0.934
I feel connection with the company in which I worked	0.871	0.933
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company	0.832	0.930
I trust in my colleagues and the manager	0.835	0.929
I feel that my work and job are important	0.873	0.920
I am proud to be employed in this company	0.900	0.914
I believe in the successful development and operation of our company	0.863	0.912
I would not leave the company even if I could get another opportunity for a job	0.847	0.903
I feel very good at my workplace	0.865	0.899
I feel like a "part of the family" in the company	0.876	0.898
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure: 0.961		
	Approximate Chi-Square	21971.451
Bartlett's test of sphericity	df	66
	<i>p</i>	0.000
Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 84.931%		

Source: Authors

The values of all communalities in Table 4 for construct work engagement of older employees are higher than 0.80; therefore, we have not eliminated any variables. Table 4 also shows that total variance explained is 84.9%. All factor loadings are higher than 0.80. In our case, the most important role in work engagement of older employees is achieved by the statement: "I do my work with passion." Table 5 shows the value of Cronbach's alpha for the factor work engagement of older employees.

**Table 5.** Value of Cronbach's Alpha for the Factor Work Engagement of Older Employees

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.982	12

Source: Authors

The value of Cronbach's alpha (Table 5) for the factor work engagement of older employees is 0.982; therefore, the reliability of the measurement in the work ability of older employees is exemplary.

### Impact of Behavioral Symptoms of Burnout of Older Employees on Their Work Engagement

After saving factor scores as new variables, we performed a regression analysis to verify the hypothesis. In the continuation, we present the results of testing of the hypothesis: Behavioral symptoms of burnout have a statistically significant negative impact on the work engagement of older employees.

The value of correlation coefficient is -0.783, which indicates a strong connection (Bastič, 2006) between the variables. The value of the determination coefficient is 0.613; 61.3% of the entire variability (work engagement of older employees) can be explained by the variability of an independent variable (behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees) (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Value of Correlation Coefficient and Determination Coefficient

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Correlation coefficient	Determination coefficient
Work engagement of older employees	Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees	- 0.783	0.613

Source: Authors

**Table 8.** Reliability of the Regression Coefficient

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
Work engagement of older employees	Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees	- 0.782	0.019	- 0.783		- 41.258	0.000

Source: Authors

We have established the reliability of the derived regression function with the *F*-test:  $F = 1702.253$ . The regression function is reliable ( $p < 0.01$ ) (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Results of *F*-test (ANOVA)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Work engagement of older employees	Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees	1702.253	0.000

Source: Authors

Table 8 shows the reliability of the regression coefficient.

The results of the regression (Table 8) indicated that the regression coefficient of behavioral symptoms of burnout was -0.782 ( $\beta = -0.783$ ) and was significantly different from 0 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a statistically significant negative impact of the independent variable (behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees) on the dependent variable (work engagement of older employees). On the basis of the conducted simple regression analysis, we confirmed the hypothesis: Behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees have a statistically significant negative impact on their work engagement.

### Limitations

We limited our research to medium- and large-sized companies in Slovenia by following the assumption that companies with a smaller number of employees do not have the developed systematic human resources management. Newell and Scarbrough (2002, 86) and Hornsby and Kuratko (2003, 74-77), on the basis of research studies, explain that the majority of small companies do not have a human resources professional and that the owner of a small company performs this function. Also, our research is limited to the behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees and their work engagement.

### Further Research Possibilities

Our proposal for further research is to examine the differences in burnout and work engagement in the workplace between

younger and older employees in Slovenia or between different countries. Further research possibilities also include the study relating to examination of the different measures that have been introduced in different countries for the prevention of burnout in the workplace. Further research possibilities we see in the follow-up survey to measure improvement in time after implementation of relevant measures and, also, our further research refers to analyzing different constructs with structural equation modeling (SEM).

## Conclusion

Results in Table 8 let us draw the conclusion that behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees have a statistically significant negative impact on their work engagement in medium- and large-sized companies in Slovenia. Also, the results in Table 2 show that behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees are reflected in lack of will to socialize with co-workers, lack of will to work, wish for solitude, declined working ability, difficulties with concentration and memory, nightmares, avoiding activities, and insomnia. The most important role in behavioral symptoms of burnout of older employees is achieved by lack of will to socialize with co-workers.

The results of the research presented in this article are an additional confirmation that it is necessary to improve and form an adequate working environment for older employees. Companies should provide work hour flexibility. They also should promote health and a healthy lifestyle and manage stress and burnout in the workplace. Strategies in companies that can help reduce workplace stressors and prevent burnout include helping employees understand their value for the organization and their contributions to the organization's goals, enforcing reasonable work hours, including, if necessary, sending employees home, helping assess workloads for those who feel pressured to remain working beyond normal business hours. The workplace environment affects

how employees feel about their jobs and can influence their work habits. The physical environment is one factor that can affect employee productivity, their motivation, satisfaction, and work engagement. Therefore, companies should also include mentorship, counselling, transfer of knowledge, etc. in the work environment. Working conditions must be adapted for all employees, and workplaces should be developed according to the age diversity of employees and the workload adapted to all age groups. Organizational factors tend to play an important role in the employees' burnout and well-being, which are reflected in the work engagement of employees. Therefore, Slovenian companies should actively try to detect such factors and take corrective actions for the better health and well-being of the employees. It is important to know that job characteristics are not experienced in the same way by all employees.

According to Cheung and Wu (2013), one of the most important strategies for the retention of older employees is offering flexible working practices, which are acceptable to the individual as well as to the organization, and which, in this way, satisfy the need for work. The objective of flexible working practices is better harmonization of working hours with the needs of the organization and, at the same time, better adjustment of work to personal interests of employees, meaning balancing work and life. Brown (2005) argues that decreasing the workload and burnout in the form of working hours has been shown as the most wanted form of flexible work.

Wagner and Harter (2006) reveal a positive correlation among engagement, success, and business results. The result of this is visible in the greater satisfaction and loyalty of customers, lower fluctuation and decreased absenteeism and presenteeism, fewer accidents at work, bigger profit, greater effectiveness and productivity, and better work quality. Harter and Adkins (2015) argue that engaged employees have a smaller probability of health problems. The research shows that nonengaged employees face more health problems than engaged employees.

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# Vpliv vedenjskih simptomov izgorelosti na delovno zavzetost starejših zaposlenih: primer slovenskih podjetij

## Izveček

Glavni cilj prispevka je ugotoviti vpliv vedenjskih simptomov izgorelosti starejših zaposlenih na njihovo delovno zavzetost v velikih in srednje velikih podjetjih v Sloveniji. Raziskava temelji na izvedbi faktorske analize, s katero smo želeli zmanjšati veliko število spremenljivk v manjše število faktorjev, s katerimi smo izvedli enostavno linearno regresijo. Na podlagi rezultatov smo potrdili hipotezo, da imajo vedenjski simptomi izgorelosti starejših zaposlenih statistično značilen negativen vpliv na njihovo delovno zavzetost. Dobro počutje starostno raznolikih zaposlenih je ključ do dolgoročne uspešnosti podjetij. S tega vidika morajo podjetja uporabljati ustrezne ukrepe za zmanjšanje izgorelosti in prispevati k dobremu počutju zaposlenih ter k izboljšanju delovnega okolja, kar pa se odraža v delovni zavzetosti zaposlenih.

**Ključne besede:** izgorelost, vedenjski simptomi izgorelosti, starejši zaposleni, delovna zavzetost