

The impact of professional networking and burnout on the organizational and professional commitment of human resources professionals

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Abstract

Research on burnout has not focused much attention on human resource (HR) professionals, who are often the link between managers and employees. HR professionals have become more integral in organizations' strategies, processes and protocols. Burnout and lack of both professional and organizational commitment from this group of employees could be detrimental to organizations. This study examines the effects of professional networking and burnout on the organizational and professional commitment of HR professionals, as well as the potential moderating relationship of professional networking on the relationships between job burnout and organizational and professional commitment through professional networking channels such as LinkedIn forums, professional memberships in organizations like the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), or other HR support work groups. A positivist approach using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was utilized to examine these relationships, and burnout was significantly and negatively related to both professional and organizational commitment. Further, professional networking had a significant positive influence on the relationship between burnout and commitment, meaning that burnout had a less negative impact on commitment when networking was higher. The results provide insight into factors that assist HR professionals in lessening the effects of burnout, while also increasing organizational and professional commitment.

Keywords

professional networking • burnout • organizational commitment

Burnout, social capital, and organizational commitment are critical topics that have recently received attention in the human resource development literature (e.g. Gubbins & Dooley, 2021; Nimon & Shuck, 2020; Zarwi et al., 2023). Occupational burnout refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The repercussions of burnout have cascading effects for employees (Blocking Burnout in Your Organization, 2019; Lee & Ashforth, 1993). These effects include but are not limited to employees' overall health, attitudes, and job performance (Yaldiz et al., 2018). A great deal of burnout research has been conducted in the realm of service professions. For example, previous burnout research has examined doctors, teachers, and firefighters and has revealed that burnout is a concern for employees' physical and mental state, as well as the economic impacts on the organization (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015). Part of the motivation of this study is to examine professionals that are not mainly externally focused, particularly as service workers, but internally focused to organizational constituents. This study examines professionals who typically don't provide a service to the public, but whose tasks and responsibilities are

internally focused on advancing the good of the organization and its human capital.

HR professionals' roles exist in virtually every medium to larger size organization and their roles are integral to performance and employee effectiveness (Uma Devi & Murali Krishna, 2016). HR professionals are often on the front line of organizational issues; thus, it is important to understand the concerns of burnout and how to mitigate the effects of this common organizational workforce phenomenon for HR professionals. However, there is limited research regarding HR professionals and the occupational stresses that they face and the impacts that these occupational stresses have upon them (Yusliza et al., 2019).

Human resource management (HRM)/personnel departments vary per organization in size and in specific responsibility, but in general, their tasks and purview involve personnel management issues such as performance appraisal, discrimination/bias, training, career development, team building, and labour relations (Murphy, 1995; Krishna & Prasad, 2012; Murphy & Southey, 2003). HR professionals are proactive agents who are able to develop, plan, and implement a host of organizational activities that drive

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performance (Glover & Butler, 2012). The ability for HR professionals to fulfil their duties decreases when they are mired in stress and dealing with great work demands. High work demands are typically an antecedent to burnout, which is negatively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and professional commitment (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2010; Singh & Gupta, 2015).

HR professionals are not immune, and burnout is a problem that has fallen under the radar for this group of professionals and needs examining because of the critical roles they play for organizations. This study addresses whether or not professional networking resources (e.g., LinkedIn, X/ Twitter, Society for Human Resource Management, attending professional workshops, etc.) moderate the effects between burnout and both professional and organizational commitment. As previous research has identified, burnout can have a negative effect on commitment (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Yaldiz et al., 2018). Understanding the effects of burnout on the organizational commitment of HR professionals is important to keep them engaged and motivated to perform and stay with the organization. Organizational commitment is defined as attachment and loyalty to the working environment and has been linked to job satisfaction, engagement, and low turnover (Singh & Gupta, 2015). Organizations that want to perform at a high level need employees dedicated to their profession. Employees with high organizational commitment have been associated with higher performance and positive behaviour towards work (Somech & Bogler, 2002; Tolentino, 2013). In Tolentino's (2013) research, job performance was higher for academic staff with higher levels of organizational commitment.

A related but distinct concept is that of professional commitment. Professional commitment is an attachment and identification with one's profession and has been identified as being a positive for group attitude, dedication to job tasks, and participation in technical decisions (Singh & Gupta, 2015), which are important elements in general, but especially for HR professionals. Employees high in professional commitment display a strong willingness to remain in their profession and are willing to put substantial effort in their profession (Singh & Gupta, 2015; Somech & Bogler, 2002). Somech et al. (2002) found that professional commitment can be an indicator of engagement and is associated with a greater participation in organizational matters. Professional commitment has also been positively associated with professional competence, most notably effective communication, subject matter knowledge (Akram et al., 2015), and job performance (Tolentino, 2013), all desirable attributes in employees.

Both constructs – organizational and professional commitment – are important to examine because there has not always been consensus on the difference between

the two. Some research has argued that the two entities overlap greatly, while others believe that there is a zero-sum relationship between the two, i.e., more professional focus means less organizational focus, and vice versa (Singh & Gupta, 2015; Somech & Bogler, 2002). The present study addresses both constructs, with the expectation that both organizational and professional commitment will be important for HR professionals.

In addition to being a resource to HRM and HRD practitioners, this study contributes to literature regarding social capital theory. Social capital has been defined in various ways (Social Capital, n.d.; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). However, the core underlying premise is that social capital is the sum of real or potential resources linked to a network of acquaintances for mutual benefit (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Khaksar et al., 2019). As an active process, social capital is the ability for individuals or groups to benefit from membership in networks or equivalent social structures (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Khaksar et al., 2019). This study seeks to illuminate the role HR professionals play in organizations, the occupational pressures that they face, and the role that social capital, which in this study equates to professional networking resources, can have regarding reducing the effects of burnout on their professional and organizational commitment. Thus, professional networking, as part of social capital theory, creates a resource of information and support that can increase engagement and support.

Prior research has found that professional networking impacts both professional and organizational commitment, and that burnout is negatively associated with both organizational and professional commitment. Given this, and our focus on burnout and commitment among HR professionals, the following research question guided this study, and led to the specific hypotheses presented below:

Does professional networking moderate the relationship between burnout and both professional and organizational commitment?

Literature review

Professional networking

This study investigates the importance of professional networking through the theoretical foundation of social capital (Hollenbeck & Jamieson, 2015; Gubbins & Dooley, 2021). Social capital theory highlights the accessing of information and gaining knowledge through various mechanisms, i.e., reviewing articles, participating in forums, workshops, and connecting with others. The objective is to examine HR professionals on an individual level, but also, to some

extent, by industry and role. This study seeks to uncover the potential advantages of professional networking. Professional networking is defined within this study as associations or utilization of workshops, conferences, professional organizations, wikis, blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, and other tools that professionals may utilize to connect with each other in order to enrich their knowledge and expand their resource base in the field of HR.

Research has shown that users of networking options, both electronic and non-electronic, report higher informational benefits (Utz & Breuer, 2019). Griggs and Allen (2018) highlighted the value of an HR Professional Group at NHS Digital in the UK. Concerning electronic networking options, entities such as LinkedIn, X, Facebook, SHRM, CUPA, CIPD, etc., make it easier for people to maintain or extend their networks. This study focuses on the effects that professional networking resources have on HR professionals as they associate with each other. Research on social capital has increased since 2012 (Engbers et al., 2017). Prior research by Turner (2011) identified almost thirty definitions of social capital. In Utz and Breuer (2019), networking is defined as behaviours with an expressed purpose of building and maintaining interpersonal relationships that have the likelihood of facilitating work-related activities, by providing access to resources and jointly maximizing advantages of the individuals involved.

This study examines professional networking from the social capital theory perspective, with a focus at the individual level. Studies have shown that at the individual level, increased social capital has led to improved engagement and performance (Bjørnskov, 2006; Poortinga, 2012; Yu et al., 2013). Social capital is a multifaceted and “big umbrella” concept and theory (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; Woolcock, 1998). The research by Narayan (2002), Poortinga (2012) and others have identified social capital as being constructed of bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding and bridging are among the most widely used constructs related to social capital. Wallace (1995) stated that stronger collegial ties result in greater professional commitment. One way to obtain these type of ties is through the mechanism of bonding and bridging.

In prior literature, bridging and linking are often defined jointly as the connection between individuals of different groups (Coffé & Geys, 2007; Poortinga, 2006). An example of bridging is dissimilar HR professionals, maybe from different organizations or industries, being able to make a cohesive connection with each other. Conversely, social capital bonding brings together individuals who see themselves as similar. Bonding and bridging are widely used in networking research due to the versatility that they bring. Bonding and bridging can be utilized at various levels of analysis (Derven, 2009). The present study uses bonding and bridging and its effects at the individual level.

Through connecting and sharing information, professional networking can be considered a resource that provides positive effects (Utz & Breuer, 2019). Individuals with high social capital in this respect have more avenues to garner moral and professional support, as well as resources from which to draw information and knowledge (Erickson, 2011). Through connecting and receiving moral, emotional, and professional support resources, via connecting with others, it is anticipated that networking alleviates the effects of burnout by adding to resource options available for HR professionals.

Burnout

Burnout is a phenomenon that encroaches on organizations and individuals with negative consequences such as absenteeism, turnover, and lower production (Simha et al., 2014). The term comes from the field of psychology. It involves emotional and interpersonal stressors that employees may encounter in the workplace (Blocking Burnout in Your Organization, 2019). The typical components of burnout, as historically studied, are emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Yavas et al., 2013). Exhaustion is characterized by depleted energy leading to an inability or unwillingness to complete tasks adequately. Depersonalization is depicted as having an uncaring disposition.

The Job Demand Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001) has been used to study burnout in past research and is used in this study as well. In the JD-R theory, regardless of the job, the psychosocial work characteristics can be classified as either demands or resources (Hakanen et al., 2008). These demands, often coupled with lack of resources, have been considered the antecedents of employee burnout (Fernet et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2016). Job demands are defined as “physical, social, or organizational aspects that require sustained physical or mental effort” (Hu et al., 2016, p. 127). These demand components are what binds them to burnout and the repercussions that typically follow burnout (Hu et al., 2016). For human resource professionals, the job demands can be duties such as providing coaching to managers, providing strategic direction, arbitrating work rules, meeting payroll deadlines, as well as being administratively organized and efficient. Job resources refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational components related to professional work that are important in achieving work outcomes. Research has demonstrated that individuals with larger pools of resources are able to meet demands more easily and to protect themselves from higher levels of burnout (Bakker et al., 2007; Crawford et al., 2010; Westman et al., 2004).

In addition to the JD-R theory, when it comes to the importance of resources, it is also valuable to consider the Conservation

of Resources (COR) theory. COR theory posits that when employees perceive a threat to their resources, stress levels can increase leading to burnout (Halbesleben, 2006; Hobfoll, 1989; Thomas & Lankau, 2009). Based on COR theory, when any of the core resource elements that HR professionals possess are threatened, burnout is a potential outcome. For example, burnout can reduce comradery if through workload or some other stressor, an HR professional has less time to socialize with colleagues.

As utilized in prior research by Simha et al. (2014), a multi-theoretic approach is deployed here. Both JD-R and COR are used to provide more explanatory power in looking at the various perspectives that resources play in burnout research.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is a concept utilized in relation to motivation and productivity. Employees with strong organizational commitment are more dedicated to their organization and are apt to work harder to contribute to the success of the organization (Marmaya et al., 2011; Tolentino, 2013; Zarwi et al., 2023); it is also synonymous with loyalty. With this in mind, employees who are high in organizational commitment are more likely to remain with the organization. This sense of loyalty may arise out of internal culture or other phenomenon that may draw an employee close to the organization.

Professional commitment

Professional commitment refers to the loyalty and dedication that an HR professional has to their profession. Organizations value committed professionals. An HR professional high in professional commitment is more responsive to work details and tasks. In addition, high professional commitment is associated with stronger involvement, dedication, stronger values of the profession, and a strong willingness to remain a part of the profession (Teng et al., 2007).

Prior literature has examined professional commitment, however not many studies do so with, or in comparison to organizational commitment (Singh & Gupta, 2015). However, professional commitment has been compared and contrasted to organizational commitment, such that the relationship between organizational commitment and professional commitment has been a topic of debate (Singh & Gupta, 2015). Despite the commonalities, these constructs have been shown to be distinct, as they may have different impact related to outcomes such as turnover (Singh & Gupta, 2015). For example, to advance ones' professional aspirations and opportunities, a professional may have to change organizations. This example shows a focus on ones' professional commitment versus the commitment to the organization. With that said, when it comes to commitment to one's profession and organization, an employee can identify

positively with one or both. The two are distinct enough to be separate constructs when examining burnout impacts.

Hypotheses and model

Professional networking, organizational, and professional commitment

We use a positivist research approach in this study to address whether or not professional networking has a positive association with commitment (Anderson & Fontina, 2024). Utz and Breuer (2019) identified that professional networking provides additional resources and improves knowledge and engagement. As demonstrated in prior research, additional resources to employees (e.g. training, collegial support, workshops, time off) can boost elements related to commitment (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Henttonen et al. (2014) found specifically that bonding and bridging are positively related to team identity. Team identity, as used in the Henttonen et al. (2014) study, is similar to affective commitment. In Henttonen et al. (2014), the relationship between bonding and bridging and team identity was strong. Team identity was measured with items such as, 'my membership of this work team reflects what I am personally' and 'when I talk about our work team I usually say "we" rather than "they."' The team identity items used to measure the construct conveys an emotional tie between the organization/group and the individual; in essence the construct parallels the affective commitment construct items used in this study such as, 'my profession helps define me' and 'I feel emotionally connected to my organization.'

Based on this and the social capital theory literature, professional networking is expected to be positively related to both organizational and professional commitment. Thus, it is posited that:

H1: Professional networking has a positive association with organizational commitment.

H2: Professional networking has a positive association with professional commitment.

As prior literature has revealed, if employees experience emotional exhaustion or depersonalization due to threats to their current resources or a lack of resources, lower commitment levels are the most likely outcome (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Thus, a threat of losing resources can lead to HR professionals feeling less dedicated and less emotionally attached with the organization and its goals (Kim & Wang, 2018; Teoh et al., 2011). Based on these elements, this study posits:

H3: Burnout has a negative association with organizational commitment.

As presented in prior JD-R and COR literature, increased demands, and the threat of losing resources or inadequate resources invested into the job and organization can cause exhaustion and depersonalization for employees (Thomas & Lankau, 2009). These negative effects are hypothesized to affect commitment to both profession and organization. Increased demands in the form of workload, or less resources in the form of feedback, training, and career growth can ultimately cause employees to become more susceptible to emotional and physical exhaustion, as well as feelings of detachment, both organizationally and professionally (Corso-de-Zúñiga et al., 2020; Westman et al., 2004). Job involvement, engagement, and attentiveness to work details are positively correlated with professional commitment (Singh & Gupta 2015). As such, in keeping with prior studies, there is an expectation that, as Wallace (1995) found, depersonalization or poor collegiality will lead to lower professional commitment. Thus, this study posits that:

H4: Burnout has a negative association with professional commitment.

Social capital functions as a buffer to stress in adverse times (Poortinga, 2006). Through mutual and collaborative sharing of resources, the social and professional ties formed via networking, can assist HR professionals in being productive assets to their organizations (Boyas et al., 2012; Turner, 2011). Social capital positively impacts elements related to career and professional successes (Seibert et al., 2001). Conversely, burnout has been shown to negatively impact the career and professional indicators like job satisfaction and engagement (Adebayo et al., 2018; Matyus & Adam, 2017). Specifically, burnout has been shown to affect an individual's commitment to an organization in the form of turnover, less production, and decreased emotional concern or attachment to the organization. However, adequate resources such as professional support, plus time and information related to greater knowledge in completing tasks and duties, can dampen these effects (Adebayo et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). Choi et al. (2020) found that social resources can moderate the relationship between job stressors and organizational commitment. In this study, social capital is the theory and general mechanism used to explain and support the role of professional networking in the relationship between burnout and commitment. As stated in prior literature, the foundation elements of commitment are negatively correlated with depersonalization (Kim & Wang, 2018; Teoh et al., 2011). However, Wallace (1995) identified that collegiality or co-worker support has been found to be positively associated with commitment. Similarly, bonding and bridging and other professional knowledge building networking resources, which resolve the respective concerns of reduced or threatened

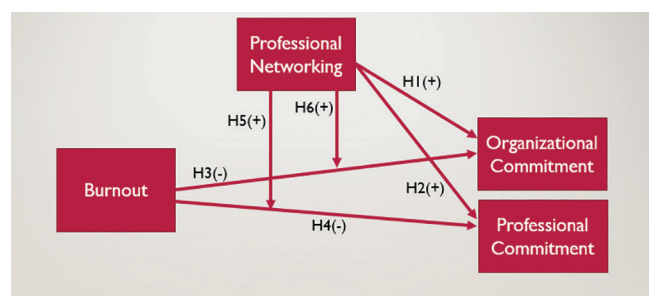


Figure 1. Research Model.

resources of JD-R and COR (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hakanen et al., 2008), are expected to dampen the negative effects of burnout. The moderating effects hypotheses in this study are based on prior literature which has found that social resources can moderate the relationship between burnout and commitment. Thus, this study posits the following moderating hypotheses:

H5: Professional networking moderates the relationship between burnout and professional commitment, such that the negative impact of burnout on professional commitment is lowered at higher levels of professional networking.

H6: Professional networking moderates the relationship between burnout and organizational commitment, such that the negative impact of burnout on organizational commitment is lowered at higher levels of professional networking.

Figure 1 presents the research model for this study.

Methods

Sample

The participants in this study consisted of a sample of HR professionals in the United States who completed electronic surveys distributed using Qualtrics, a third-party collection software and service entity. Reminders were sent to the sample group to encourage a good return rate and to limit non-response bias. The objective, based on power calculation, was to generate a minimum of 250 complete and useable responses from HR professionals. Statistical power is an evaluation of the probability of identifying a difference, when there is an actual difference within the comparative data (Werner, 2022).

Data collection

Data was collected using Qualtrics. Once accessed, HR professionals completed a survey that took on average

between 12-15 minutes to complete. The data collection efforts yielded 363 (n=363) useable responses from HR professionals in a variety of industries and HR roles. The Health Care industry is represented with the most respondents in the industry category. In the Gender category, there were more females (59.4%) than males (40.6%), and there were more HR managers represented in the HR Role category.

To combat common methods bias (CMB), survey items were not grouped by construct (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, a post hoc test, Harman's single factor test, was conducted to evaluate if common methods bias exists. The results of the test revealed a variance of 30.6%, well below the 50% threshold discussed by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Although it is not possible to eliminate all potential sources of common methods bias, the results of the Harman single factor test provide confidence that common method bias is not a significant threat to the validity of the results found.

Measures

All scales used in this study were adapted from scales used in prior research, with the greatest change or adaptation made for the scale for professional networking. To measure burnout, a commonly used instrument, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Simha et al., 2014) was utilized in this study. The survey is available from the first author by request. The Cronbach alpha for burnout is .831. Professional networking utilizes a Likert scale adapted to a seven-point scale from Utz and Breuer (2019). The Cronbach alpha of the professional networking scale in this study is .788.

Organizational commitment was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), using items from Aydogdu and Asikgil (2011) and Somech and Bogler (2002). The Cronbach alpha for organizational commitment in this study is .796. Professional commitment utilized a Likert scale adapted to a seven-point scale from the scales of Smith and Hall (2008), and Chang and Choi (2007). Scale items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha for professional commitment in this study is .722.

The control variables utilized within this study are mainly based on previous studies with topics dealing with organizations,

burnout, and commitment. Thus, this study controls for both gender and industry demographics. Industry is often controlled for in studies regarding organization outcomes such as organization commitment (Longenecker et al., 2006).

Data analysis procedures

This section describes the data analysis methods employed in this study. In addition to the descriptive statistics shown in Table 1, the testing of the six hypotheses entails regression. For the construct variables utilized, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm unidimensionality of the measures (Churchill, 1979). The results of the CFA, and the factor loadings of each item that comprises each construct are available from the first author.

Results

Organizational commitment results

A tiered model estimation was conducted to highlight the incremental gain in fit. Table 2 depicts the summary of the regression models run in SPSS. As shown, each model is statistically significant. Table 2 portrays the results related to the dependent variable, organization commitment, obtained through the SPSS data analysis process. OC-Model 1 shows the results of the impacts of burnout on the dependent variable, organizational commitment. This model has an R-Square of .012.

OC-Model 2 shows the impact of burnout and professional networking on organizational commitment. The R-Square of this model is .411. In addition, the variable professional networking also has a significant impact on the dependent variable, organizational commitment.

OC-Model 3 displays the full model noted in equation (1), which includes the interaction effect. The R-Square of Model 3 is .449. Model 3 is the best model and the results of this model support hypotheses H1, H3, and H6. Based on Model 3, when professional networking is higher for HR professionals, their commitment to their organization is also higher. Lastly, the interaction or moderation effect of professional networking on the relationship between

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations					
Variables	Means	s.d	Professional Networking	Organizational Commitment	Professional Commitment
Burnout (.831)	3.906	1.301	0.255**	-0.109*	-0.093
Professional Networking (.788)	4.612	1.02		0.583**	0.579**
Organizational Commitment (.796)	5.194	1.062			0.722**
Professional Commitment (.722)	5.14	1.18			

N = 363. Cronbach alphas in parentheses

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Organizational Commitment Regression Model Summary

Organizational Commitment			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-2.873 (.052)	-3.055 (.040)	-0.042 (.040)
Burnout	-0.109 (.052)*	-0.275 (.042)***	-0.357 (.044)***
Professional Networking		0.654 (.042)***	0.679 (.041)***
Burnout x Professional Networking			0.166 (.033)***
R-Square	0.012	0.411 [‡]	0.449 [‡]
Adjusted R-Square	0.009	0.408	0.445
F Change	4.307	244.088	24.996
F(sig.)	0.039	<.001	<.001
Maximum VIF	1.00	1.07	1.25

DV is Organizational Commitment.

Results are inclusive of control variables.

Standard errors are given in parenthesis.

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

**Significant at the 0.01 level.

***Significant at the 0.001 level.

[‡]Denotes significant (at 0.05 level) R-Square change from lower model.

Table 3. Professional Commitment Regression Model Summary

Professional Commitment			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.126 (.052)	1.110 (.041)	-0.031 (.041)
Burnout	-0.093 (.052)	-0.258 (.042)***	-0.318 (.045)***
Professional Networking		0.645 (.042)***	0.664 (.042)***
Burnout x Professional Networking			0.122 (.034)***
R-Square	0.009	0.398 [‡]	0.418 [‡]
Adjusted R-Square	0.006	0.394	0.414
F Change	3.146	232.547	12.823
F(sig.)	0.077	<.001	<.001
Maximum VIF	1.00	1.07	1.25

DV is Professional Commitment.

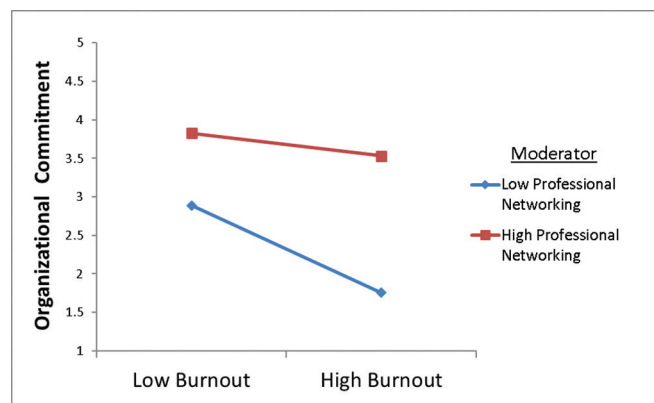
Standard errors are given in parenthesis.

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

**Significant at the 0.01 level.

***Significant at the 0.001 level.

[‡]Denotes significant (at 0.05 level) R-Square change from lower model.

**Figure 2.** Moderation of Burnout and Organizational Commitment.

burnout and organizational commitment is significant (.166; $p < .001$), supporting H6. Specifically, the model shows that as professional networking increases, the negative effect of burnout on organizational commitment is dampened. Figure 2 depicts the moderating effect of professional networking on the relationship between burnout and organizational commitment (H6).

Professional commitment results

Similar to the results for organizational commitment, the hypotheses related to professional commitment, H2, H4, and H5 were all supported via a tiered model estimation. The summary of each model can be found in Table 3.

PC-Model 1 represents the results with burnout and professional commitment. For professional commitment, PC-Model 1 has an R-Square of .009. PC-Model 2 represents the results with burnout, professional networking, and professional commitment. PC-Model 2 has an R-Square of .398, which is a statistically significant R-Square increase from the baseline PC Model 1.

PC-Model 3 has an R-Square of .418, this is also a statistically significant R-Square increase from the previous model. PC-Model 3 yielded support for hypotheses H2, H4, and H5. Hypothesis 2 (H2), professional networking has a significant positive impact on professional commitment (0.664; $p < .001$), (H4) burnout has a negative impact on professional commitment (-0.318; $p < .001$), and as professional networking increases for HR professionals, the negative effect between burnout and professional commitment is lessened (0.122; $p < .001$).

Figure 3 depicts the interaction/moderation of professional networking on the relationship between burnout and professional commitment. Lower professional networking is associated with higher burnout and lower professional commitment. This is also true in the other direction, where higher professional networking is associated with lower burnout and higher professional commitment. As with organizational commitment, the models pertaining to professional commitment, the independent variable, burnout, and the moderating variable, professional networking, all have a significant relationship with professional commitment. In addition, the interaction between the independent variable

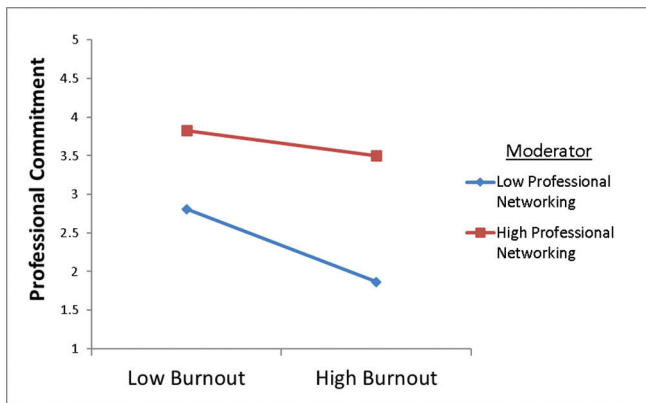


Figure 3. Moderation of Burnout and Professional Commitment.

and moderating variable has a significant impact on the dependent variable, professional commitment.

Ultimately, the results for all six hypotheses are supported, with or without incorporating the control variables. As noted above, professional and organizational commitment have different foci for individual commitment (Singh & Gupta, 2015). However, in this study, at least, the results were the same for analyses conducted on each form of commitment studied separately.

Discussion, limitations, and future research

The demand for HR professionals remains strong in the United States, Europe, and globally (360 Research Reports, 2023; Datawheel, 2019). These professionals work in a variety of industries and depending on the organization in which they work, they may be responsible for a myriad of duties. In contrast to the occupations that historically have been examined in reference to burnout, HR professionals mainly focus on strategies and tasks related to internal organizational needs and constituents. Because of the variance in their duties, industries, and skillsets, analysing this professional group was intriguing.

The results of this study have not been shown before in prior research, and deliver important theoretical and practical insights regarding HR professionals' commitment as it pertains to their profession and organization, related to experiencing burnout. The results also provide confirmation that professional networking has a positive relationship with both professional commitment and organizational commitment, as well as having a positive effect on the relationships between burnout and both professional (0.122, $p < .001$) and organizational commitment (0.166, $p < .001$). What is also important to recognize and acknowledge for practitioners is that while burnout is not fully eliminated, it is significantly lower when professional networking is higher.

The results are similar with organizational commitment, where burnout is lower by half when professional networking is introduced.

Although the impact of burnout on commitment has been found previously in prior research, burnout affecting HR professionals' professional and organizational commitment is noteworthy because the results confirm that burnout is not just contained to hourly, frontline, or service-related occupations. This provides empirical evidence that burnout has negative effects on HR professionals' commitment, both organizational and professional.

As highlighted in the results section, professional networking had a positive relationship with both professional and organizational commitment, and also moderated the effects of burnout on both organizational and professional commitment. That is, the expected negative relationship between burnout and commitment was weaker (less negative) when networking was higher. This is important because this provides evidence that professional networking, in the form of attending workshops, indulging in relevant HR professional literature, 'talking shop with others', and involvement in relevant groups, either via social media or face-to-face, are important in reducing burnout, and in general, improving commitment.

The findings of this study expand Social Capital Theory literature to incorporate professional resources such as individuals connecting via workshops, media groups, or via professional literature. The results also build upon the findings from others that there are positive effects to be gained from social capital elements (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021; Utz & Breuer, 2019).

From a real-world and practitioner perspective, the results lend support to the notion that in order to battle burnout, or when faced with commitment concerns, engaging and providing HR professionals opportunities to network professionally is recommended. Providing resources and opportunities where employees can connect and share on a professional level is found to be important. Quite often, when resources dwindle in organizations, the standard response is to pull back on support for attending workshops, trainings, and other networking and professional development opportunities. With the results of this study, the recommendation is to lean into these opportunities and encourage HR professionals to participate more in connecting with peers and other HR professionals. In essence, promoting and providing employees the opportunity to connect with others in the profession can be used as both a retention tool, as well as a professional development instrument, a two-for-one concerning organizational efficiency. The analyses in the study suggest that professional networking dampens the negative effects of the relationship between burnout and both professional and organizational commitment. Erickson (2011) proposed that professional advantages are expected when there are moral, professional,

and emotional support for individuals. The results in this study support the argument that social capital positively impacts elements related to professional successes (Seibert et al., 2001). The recommendation based on the results of this study is to bolster professional networking for HR professionals.

These results are important because these findings are unique. Professional networking was found to be a significant moderator involving burnout and commitment. From a practitioner point of view, the findings reveal a tool that can be utilized in reducing the negative effects of a phenomenon that has been a major detriment to organizations. Being able to avoid or at least diminish the negative effects of burnout, or to be able to improve low commitment is important, particularly when turnover is high.

From a theoretical perspective, social capital – bonding and bridging literature – is expanded to encompass HR professionals. Explicitly stated, this study provides evidence that through an individual-level perspective of bonding and bridging, there are positive impacts on individuals and their engagement (Utz & Breuer, 2019). Specifically, this study reveals an increase in commitment levels via professional networking for individual HR professionals.

Limitations

Obtaining complete data from 363 HR professionals is a strength of this study. Nonetheless, the scope of this research can be seen as a limitation. Having a broader scope and being able to delve deeper into the why of the supplemental findings would have provided for a fuller perspective into HR professionals. In addition, surveying via Qualtrics provided greater analytic power, but a pure quantitative process also limits the ability to use qualitative or mixed method approaches to gain deeper insight regarding the supplemental results. Having the ability to discuss with or interview respondents regarding the elements that draws them closer to the organization or those which make leaving viable, would make for a fuller understanding of the concerns for HR professionals (Anderson & Fontinha, 2024; Bialek & Hagen, 2022).

We used a positivist approach and ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis to study the relationship between burnout, professional networking, and two forms of commitment. Important questions that were not asked or addressed in this study include whether or not there might be a “dark side” to organizational and professional commitment. For example, Fleming has questioned whether organizations might take advantage of higher levels of commitment (Fleming, 2009; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Further, while our results showed that the negative impact of burnout on commitment was dampened or lessened when professional networking was high, we do not know, and our present research findings

cannot identify, if there is some “tipping point” concerning networking. For example, might a demand or expectation for high levels of professional networking precede or lead to higher levels of burnout?

Future research

Future research on the impact of professional networking on human resource professionals would benefit from using a critical lens (McFadden & Bierema, 2022). The question of “working for whom?” was not addressed in the present study (Gedro et al., 2014). While the findings in this study are important in their own right, it is vital to address these larger issues with both societal and demographic impact.

Based on the results of this study, additional research is needed to explore the industries in which HR professionals work. Does the HR role or industry affect the commitment level. Does organizational size, in combination with the role and tenure impact burnout or commitment? In addition, possibly adding personality to the analysis may add insight or examining personality in conjunction with role and industry and the effects on commitment or if personality moderates the relationship between burnout and commitment. As noted, 59.4% of the sample in this study identified themselves as female, yet gender had no impact on any of the findings in this study. Future research could address such demographic issues in more depth and detail.

The results from this study provide a path forward to better pinpoint where specific issues or concerns may reside within organizations. With knowledge of areas that may be more prone to burnout, deficiencies in commitment, or both, future research can assist organizations in being better situated to move proactively in their approach to resolve issues of burnout and low commitment. Further potential interactions between HRM and HRD research streams appear promising (Byrd, 2021; Ranawakaarachchi, 2021; Werner, 2024), as well as in better connecting employees, managers, and the broader HR management and development communities (Poell, 2022).

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