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Effective Strategies to Reduce Burnout for Employees With High Workload Demands

Michelle Healy
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Michelle Healy

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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Kim Critchlow, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Jodine Burchell, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Strategies to Reduce Burnout for Employees With High Workload Demands

by

Michelle Healy

MS, University of Maryland Global Campus, 2004

BS, University of Maryland, 1990

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2025

Abstract

Ineffective strategies to reduce burnout for employees can decrease productivity and quality of work, and can increase turnover. Event industry leaders who struggle to reduce burnout of employees with high workload demands are at risk of employee turnover. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, the purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry research project was to explore effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands. The participants were eight event industry leaders who had effectively implemented strategies to reduce burnout. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of public websites and documents. Using thematic analysis, three themes were identified: (a) prioritize the employee, (b) nurture communication, and (c) provide resources. A key recommendation is for event industry leaders to commit to a cadence of regular meetings with employees to ascertain their levels of strain and to be prepared to make changes to their workload to prevent employee burnout. The implications for social change include the potential for event industry leaders to promote and influence a community of healthy work balance and personal well-being among their employees, who may also live and work in the communities served by their work.

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Dedication

I would not have had the courage to attempt my doctoral journey without the encouragement and support from my mother, Sandra Doan.

To my husband, John Healy, thank you for feeding me, clothing me, and missing me while I focused on my studies.

To the wonderful and loving Healy Clan, thank you for encouraging me every step of the way.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Some business leaders have struggled with employee burnout due to excessive workload demands, which has resulted in reduced productivity, quality of work, and ultimately led to increased turnover. Employees are the most important part of an organization. Their unique skills and institutional knowledge have contributed to an organization's competitive advantage. Employee turnover, often referred to as employee churn, has increased a company's costs due to the loss of institutional knowledge and the associated expenses of recruiting, replacing, and training new employees (Prajith & Vigi, 2023). Employees have experienced burnout, which has led to issues with employee retention.

Employees in the event planning industry have been at a high risk of burnout due to the complexity of their work. Wallace and Michopoulou (2023) described event planning as complex planning that encompasses project management, stakeholder theory, and event management. The researchers found that event professionals' work often exceeds the complexity of projects, as they deal with a higher level of uncertainty in their work (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Complicated project management has clear goals and timelines. Complex project management, which includes event planning, requires frequent pivoting to mitigate the often-competing priorities and timelines of internal and external stakeholders (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Event planning employees work within project management, budget planning, and creative inspiration to launch a unique experience (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). The dependency upon stakeholders, which

can have complementary and competing goals and timelines, to deliver an event experience, makes their work complex and could increase their risk of burnout.

One symptom of burnout has been the decline in employee engagement, which, in turn, can compromise an organization's competitive advantage (Nazir & Islam, 2020). Lombardi et al. (2024) found that 40% of current peer recovery support specialists (PRSS) employees have been at risk of burnout due to high job demands and low job resources. PRSS employees provide critical community support for people going through drug recovery and reduce the risk of hospitalization. Learning effective strategies to reduce burnout is important for individual employees and can benefit entire teams. Leaders must learn how to reduce burnout, which can spread from one employee to another (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Leaders who implement effective strategies can identify and address burnout in a single employee before it impacts the entire team.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some business leaders lack effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry was to explore the effective strategies that business leaders used to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands. The specific population group consisted of business leaders in the event planning industry. I used a purposive sampling strategy to select a sample size of at least eight business leaders in the event planning industry who have used effective strategies to reduce burnout in their employees. The specific sample had at least 5 years of experience working in the event planning industry and had led a team of at least three employees. I

gained access to participants through LinkedIn and in the National Meeting Planners Group on Facebook. Data sources for this project consisted of (a) semistructured interviews and (b) publicly available data, such as publicly disseminated reports and public websites. The theory for the conceptual framework was Demerouti et al.'s (2001) job demands-resources (JD-R) model.

Research Question

The overarching research question was, What effective strategies do business leaders use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions and limitations describe the parameters of the research. Researchers must disclose assumptions and limitations to ensure transparency in their research (Adler, 2022). Transparency in research enhances the trustworthiness of both the researcher and the project.

Assumptions

Assumptions are concepts or ideas that a researcher has that can remain from the beginning to the end of a research project (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). For my research, I assumed my participants would answer thoughtfully and truthfully. I assumed my participants would attend my interviews as scheduled. I assumed that the number of participants I selected would fairly represent effective strategies to reduce burnout and have adequate experience in the event planning industry to understand the specific demands of the work. I assumed that the inclusion criteria I set would help secure informed participants. I assumed that my data collection, including the number of

interviews and other resources, would provide sufficient information to achieve quality in my research outcomes.

Limitations

The limitations of a research study can restrict the applicability of the research findings. Limitations represent weak points in a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). When a researcher is unclear about the limitations of their research, there can be confusion about how the findings can be or should be applied (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A researcher must communicate the limitations so that others can accurately interpret, apply, and build upon their findings. The qualitative nature of my research project meant that the findings are limited in their generalizability. Additionally, my lack of training and experience conducting qualitative interviews could have limited my effectiveness as a first-time researcher. Limitations in my study may have included time constraints for both my participants and me, which could have impacted the validity of my conclusions.

Transition

Learning about effective strategies to reduce burnout in high-workload-demand jobs can help leaders maintain a competitive edge. In healthcare, reducing burnout has been linked to patient care. Low job resources can lead to a higher nurse-to-patient ratio, which has threatened patient safety and, in turn, increased the chance of burnout among nurses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, to endure the long hours and high demands, many healthcare workers employed quiet quitting behavior to establish rigid boundaries in their work, remaining on the job to avoid burnout (Galanis et al., 2024). Leaders have

leveraged technology to enable employees to stay connected to their work outside regular hours and manage their time effectively, ensuring they have sufficient time to complete their tasks. However, when leaders have tried different strategies without measuring their impact, they have engaged in random experimentation and failed to create real change and improvement.

Leaders must learn practical strategies to reduce burnout, which can affect multiple employees. Burnout syndrome can begin with one employee, spread to another, and eventually to the entire team. Other employees can model the associated behaviors of cynicism and detachment. As more employees experience the symptoms of burnout, their work productivity will decrease, and there is a greater risk to an organization's competitive advantage and patient safety in the healthcare setting. Section 2 reviews the academic literature on burnout and the JD-R. Section 3 provides an overview of my research design and methodology.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

An organizational leader is responsible for keeping employees engaged and motivated to perform well. The specific business problem addressed in this research project was that some business leaders lack effective strategies to mitigate burnout among employees with high workload demands. Disengagement and exhaustion are two key components of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001), and burnout is associated with lower employee retention and performance. To protect business performance, leaders must learn practical strategies to reduce burnout.

This literature review presents a critical analysis and synthesis of the current research on burnout in high-demand jobs, job burnout, strategies for mitigating burnout, high workload demands, and employee retention. The literature review is organized to provide a broad understanding of high workload demand, based on the thematic areas identified in the research, and by strategies that can effectively reduce burnout. I conducted a literature review to assess and compile current research on employee burnout and identify effective strategies recommended to mitigate it. A literature review is a tool that researchers use to synthesize prior research and identify new connections or gaps in the research (Rivard, 2024). The conceptual framework and the literature review create the structure for the researcher to explore the business problem.

Some databases used for researching peer-reviewed journals on burnout in high-demand jobs, job burnout, strategies for reducing burnout, high workload demands, and employee retention included Google Scholar, ProQuest, Ovid, and Scopus. Some

keywords I used in the search were *burnout*, *stress*, *productivity*, *work quality*, *retention*, *job demands*, and *job resources*. To ensure I used a high level of peer-reviewed, scholarly sources, 96% of the resources I selected are peer-reviewed journal articles, and 62% of the articles were published within the past 5 years.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry was to explore the effective strategies that business leaders use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands. Burnout resulting from high workload demands can lead to reduced employee retention. As these effects could negatively impact the organization's financial health and performance, leaders could benefit from learning effective strategies to reduce burnout. In the next section, I critically analyze and synthesize the existing literature related to the conceptual framework, the lens through which the project was viewed.

Conceptual Framework

It is beneficial for business leaders to understand how employees function because their performance can impact overall organizational performance. The JD-R model examined the impact of positive and negative factors on employee burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). In this model, an employee's work environment comprises both physical and psychological factors that contribute to their work experience. The JD-R model provided the lens through which I viewed and analyzed the research project and the data uncovered. Demerouti et al. (2001) asserted that high job demands are associated with feelings of exhaustion, and low job resources are most associated with depersonalization. Leaders can utilize information about effective strategies to reduce

burnout in employees with high workload demands, thereby improving organizational performance.

The JD-R has deep roots in how scholars and practitioners view employee support in the modern workplace. The JD-R was created by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli in 2001. Maslach and Schaufeli (2018) defined burnout as a syndrome that occurs only within human services professions. Demerouti et al. (2001) asserted that there was little empirical evidence to support the notion that burnout occurs exclusively in caring professions. Demerouti et al. asserted that burnout occurs regardless of the profession when limited job resources deplete employees' energy and motivation.

Burnout does not occur as a single factor; instead, it is a complex set of factors that comprise a syndrome. Demerouti et al. (2001) expanded on the earlier work by Maslach (1982). In his research, Maslach defined *burnout* as a syndrome comprising three distinct components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment rather than a singular condition. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended and exhausted due to the emotional demands of work. Depersonalization refers to a feeling of detachment and cynicism towards one's work. A reduced sense of personal accomplishment indicates a feeling of no longer being effective in one's work or job responsibilities. Maslach found that burnout was exclusive to caring professions, such as social work, but Demerouti et al. asserted that burnout was not exclusive to caring professions.

The work environment comprises numerous interactions of job demands and resources. In the JD-R model (see Figure 1), burnout can occur when there is an

imbalance between the job resources (low) and demands (high) (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands refer to the physical, social, and organizational requirements that necessitate continuous effort and can lead to exhaustion. Demerouti et al. asserted that the greater the job effort, the greater the psychological costs to the employee. I explored the participants' feedback and experience with job demands and resources to yield valuable data for leaders to reduce burnout. The JD-R model is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Job Demands-Resources Model

Physical, social, and organizational requirements	Job demands	Balance: Job-crafting and collaboration	Imbalance: Strain – burnout and exhaustion	Retention and Organizational Performance
Physical, psychological, social, and organizational	Job resources	Balance: Support, autonomy, motivation/engagement	Imbalance: Cynicism and depersonalization	

Employees face different job stressors resulting from imbalanced job demands and resources. Demerouti et al. (2001) defined *stress*, or *stressors*, as a negative disruption to one's equilibrium from an external factor. Demerouti et al. defined *job demands* as physical, social, or organizational requirements that require mental effort and thus have a physiological and psychological cost to the employee. The greater the stressor, the greater the cost to the employee.

Job resources can mitigate the psychological and physical costs of the employee. Job resources encompass physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects that enable employees to achieve work goals, mitigate the cost of job demands, or foster personal growth (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources can be individual or grouped to

reduce the cost to the employee; for example, having an empty office to use during a big deadline can provide a quieter environment and improved concentration. Leaders who implement effective strategies to balance work demands and job resources among their employees can reduce burnout.

The JD-R model described two pathways to burnout in employees. Burnout could develop from extreme job demands, resulting in constant overwork and exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). It could also develop from too few job resources, which makes it harder to complete one's work and leads to the employee demonstrating withdrawal behavior. The JD-R model provided a foundation for researchers to continue studying the factors that contribute to burnout.

The JD-R provided a lens through which researchers could explore the relationships between job demands, job resources, and burnout. Like Demerouti et al.'s (2001) expansion of the earlier work of Maslach (1982), Marathe et al. (2019) sought to expand the JD-R by incorporating the dimension of the balance between job demands and personal resources. Marathe et al. defined *job thrust* as work demands and resources, and *personal thrust* as personal demands and resources. The researchers asserted that work engagement occurred when there was a balance between job and personal thrust. This research provided leaders with insights on how to tailor effective strategies to mitigate burnout in individual employees.

When considering factors contributing to employee burnout, the COVID-19 pandemic created unique job demands for healthcare workers. The pandemic has significantly changed the work environment for employees. Numerous office workers

had to adapt to remote work and faced the risk of job loss. Healthcare workers of all kinds worked on the frontline of patient care. The public hailed healthcare workers as heroes, but they often did not feel like heroes in their workplaces. Q. Li et al. (2022) studied healthcare personnel and aimed to expand the JD-R by adding the dimensions of perceived organizational support, employee care, and turnover intention. Understanding how leaders can mitigate job resources through their emotional support was crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic's extreme needs.

During the critical role of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, how leaders cared for their employees was crucial to reducing burnout and protecting patient safety. Li et al. (2021) defined *employee care* as an informal way for managers to listen to employees' concerns, value their work, enhance well-being, and support employees' career development. Li et al. found that high perceived organizational support was associated with a reduced intention to turnover. This research provided hospital leaders with information they can implement to reduce employee turnover intention, often a precursor to burnout.

Healthcare and retail workers have very different responsibilities but share a common problem: they both experience negative customer (or patient) deviance (NCD). NCD consists of harassment or threats directed at an employee by a customer (Mayr & Teller, 2023). In their study on how NCD can increase intent-to-leave among retail workers, Mayr and Teller (2023) found that perceived interpersonal emotional management (IEM) support from a supervisor, as a job resource, can mitigate the job demands of NCD connected to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Understanding the

unique experiences of their employees can provide leaders with insight into practical strategies for reducing burnout.

The increased use of technology has given employees freedom regarding how they work, where they work, and how they communicate. Digitization is an example of technology integrating digital information and communication technologies into work processes to improve productivity. Digitization frees employees from mundane, repetitive tasks, promoting higher thinking and creativity (Scholze & Hecker, 2024).

However, there can also be negative impacts, such as increased stress on employees who must learn and relearn how to complete their work (Scholze & Hecker, 2024). Additional stressors include the expectation that employees maintain connections with work outside of standard hours. Scholze and Hecker (2024) studied 898 white-collar employees and found that digital job demands are positively related to strain, although digital job resources have a positive relationship with motivation. Digital job resources have a mitigating effect on job resources and job motivation. The researchers showed that technology can provide employees with increased resources to meet job demands, which supports maintaining employee engagement. Leaders may want to consider this research during budget and strategic planning to ensure they secure digital resources for their employees.

The JD-R model offers a conceptual framework for examining how leaders can mitigate burnout in high-demand jobs. This model encompasses numerous factors that contribute to an employee's holistic work environment, many of which positively or

negatively impact burnout. In the next section, I critically analyzed and synthesized literature regarding the potential themes and phenomena based on the project's purpose.

Potential Themes and Phenomena and Different Scholarly Perspectives

At its core, the JD-R model conceptual framework posits that employee burnout arises when there is an imbalance between job demands and available resources. Potential themes within the JD-R framework include the unique challenges faced by employees with high workload demands and the job resources that can mitigate burnout. Job resources can come from outside the employee, such as physical factors like office noise or temperature, or from within the employee, such as a proactive personality associated with the ability to adjust work tasks and resources, known as job crafting. The internal resources of optimism, the ability to adjust one's perspective on their work, and the associated stress can make employees more prone to burnout.

High Workload Demands

Understanding the definition of workload is imperative for analyzing how high load demands can lead to burnout. Webster and Weller (2018) differentiated the workload definitions according to the subject's self-reporting level in an editorial about the different workload measurement tools. The authors defined the fundamental concept of *workload* as the demands placed on an individual to meet a task and the individual's skills required to complete it. Employees could reach their maximum physical and mental capacity as tasks increase. Overload occurred when tasks exceeded an employee's available resources. However, not all employees measure the same way.

Employees can differ in how they view their workload. Webster and Weller (2018) compared experienced employees who may be able to complete complex tasks efficiently with newer employees who struggle with more straightforward tasks due to their learning curve. They asserted that workload demands should include a self-reporting dimension on a Likert scale, much like a pain scale, to communicate how employees view their workload. Employees can respond differently to job demands, which could lead to burnout. Employees who worked in life-and-death situations could have an additional dimension to their workload definition. Like many healthcare workers, nurses face high workload demands in caring for patients and their families. Aiken et al. investigated the contributing factors to nurse dissatisfaction and burnout, including nurse staffing levels, patient outcomes, nurse outcomes, and control variables (such as hospital size and trauma level) across 18 hospitals in Pennsylvania. Aiken et al. found that each additional patient per nurse was associated with a 7% increased chance of the patient dying within 30 days of admission. Negative impacts on patient safety had a positive relationship with burnout among nurses. Aiken et al. found that with each additional patient added to the standard nurse-to-patient ratio of one nurse to four patients, the chance for burnout increased by 23% and job dissatisfaction by 15%. When comparing nurses with four patients to one nurse, nurses with an 8-to-1 patient-to-nurse ratio were 2.29 times more likely to experience high emotional exhaustion and 1.75 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. The theme of Aiken et al.'s seminal research on workloads in nursing was that the higher the patient mortality, the higher the burnout, job dissatisfaction, and nurse turnover. Aiken et al. found that increasing nurse staffing,

improving patient safety, and reducing burnout are also beneficial. Understanding the various factors that contribute to employee burnout is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate it.

Job Burnout

Leaders implementing effective strategies to reduce burnout may also effectively strengthen their organization's financial performance. There is a link between the adverse effects of burnout and the positive effects of employees achieving decent work. Burnout is a syndrome of ongoing work stress that employees can no longer manage (Dinis et al., 2022). Dinis et al. (2022) studied the relationship between decent work and burnout in a sample of 727 academics from Portugal and Brazil. Dinis et al. defined *decent work* as the right of all human beings to decent and productive work conditions. Dinis et al. found that decent work dimensions were significantly and negatively related to burnout. Burnout does not occur in isolation, but it can affect many employees simultaneously.

It can be perilous for a leader to view burnout as a one-employee-at-a-time syndrome. Instead, one employee's stress can lead to stress and burnout in another employee. Auer et al. (2024) found that a psychological contagion can occur, meaning that an employee may exhibit stress when observing another employee's stress. The researchers recruited 30 male college students and divided them into two groups: one experiencing a stress-inducing scenario and the other a placebo scenario with minimal stress. The researchers found that when observing stress in a colleague, nonverbal communication, such as the fight-or-flight biological responses, can be present. Shared stress can lead to shared burnout, which in turn can harm employee retention.

A suitable instrument to measure burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). However, Maslach focused exclusively on common themes within the human services profession. Bakker et al. (2002) expanded the scale to apply to non-service professions, such as engineering, to the MBI-General Survey (MBI-GS). Bakker et al. found that within the MBI, depersonalization was a result of burnout. In the MBI-GS that included subjects from non-service professions, the most significant change was that Bakker et al. replaced cynicism with depersonalization. *Depersonalization* referred to the emotional distancing from one's work and a growing cynicism toward care recipients. *Cynicism* referred to distancing oneself from one's work and developing a negative attitude toward it.

Two other differing themes were found in the MBI-GS. In a sample of 2,919 employees from the Dutch workforce, Bakker et al. (2002) found that burnout was more common in younger employees and women. Bakker et al. posited that younger employees had not yet gained the experience necessary to develop their work strategies. Bakker et al. asserted that more women experience burnout than men due to the higher demands at home that are traditionally associated with women. Leaders could use these demographic findings to reduce burnout and implement specific social and organizational support for young female employees. Understanding the distinction between depersonalization and cynicism can enable leaders to implement targeted strategies to mitigate employee burnout.

Employees differ in their responses to job stress. Some react to the full impact of work strain, while others adjust their behavior and response. Bakker and de Vries (2021)

added a dimension to the JD-R model, known as self-regulation. Bakker and de Vries asserted that burnout is more than an imbalance between work demands and resources; it also involves an employee's less adaptive behavior. The additional dimension of self-regulation to the JD-R brings a different level of self-control and decision-making on the part of the employee.

Within the JD-R's focus on imbalance, the employee appeared more like an object, oscillating between balance and imbalance with little control. Bakker and de Vries's (2021) found that employees with proactive personalities and higher emotional intelligence can better adapt to work stressors to make better choices in how they respond. Bakker and de Vries's expansion of the original JD-R speaks more to employees' ability to tap into their internal qualities to adapt to identify solutions and understand their feelings and coworkers' feelings.

When considering how employees experience burnout syndrome, it is crucial to consider their job role. Employees could be encouraged to do additional work or contribute to a team project. Work demands fall into an employee's daily responsibilities and additional responsibilities. Bakker et al. (2004) defined these two kinds of work responsibilities as in-role and extra-role. Bakker et al. found that exhaustion was the most significant cause of burnout related to in-role responsibilities, and that the option to telecommute could mitigate the risk of burnout. For extra-role responsibilities, job resources were the most significant cause of burnout, and social support and opportunities for advancement could mediate the risk of burnout. Leaders should

accurately understand their employees' roles and responsibilities to adjust as necessary to reduce burnout.

Retention

An organization comprises employees, customers, and the physical work environment. Losing and replacing employees costs an organization time and money (Prajith & Vigi, 2023). Prajith and Vigi (2023) analyzed the relationship between turnover intention, working conditions, burnout, and the mediating factor of social support. Prajith and Vigi used a simple sample of 324 healthcare workers in India. The researchers found a positive correlation between turnover intention, burnout, and working conditions. Social support played a mediating role in reducing the relationship between burnout and working conditions. Leaders should consider how to model and reward social support to reduce burnout and intention to turnover.

Retaining employees saves an organization money. Schaechter et al. (2023) investigated methods to enhance retention by fostering a sense of belonging in the workplace. The cost to recruit and hire new physicians was estimated to be between \$25,000 and \$1,000,000 per physician, and can cost as high as \$50,000 for an experienced nurse. Schaechter et al. analyzed a sample of 366 physicians, 99% of whom were women, regarding their intent to leave within two years. Schaechter et al. found that a greater sense of workplace belonging was associated with a reduced intention to leave. Workplace belonging included interpersonal relationships and organizational policies. Leaders can implement social support systems, such as mentoring, to enhance retention and reduce the likelihood of employees intending to leave.

Higher education has high work demands that can lead to burnout. Faculty members must balance the needs of their students with the demands of the academic system, including meeting grading deadlines, attending meetings, and engaging in academic publishing. Understanding how to keep faculty feeling connected to reduce intent to leave is an important business strategy. In a study of faculty in the United Kingdom, Douglas et al. (2024) identified themes that contributed to a sense of well-being, improving retention. The themes centered around support from colleagues and the organization. Douglas et al. also found that the sense of well-being is not stagnant; it can be strengthened and damaged. Leaders can improve retention by viewing employee well-being as a dynamic concept that is continually evolving.

The COVID-19 pandemic put extreme stress on hospitalists, leading to burnout. Hospitalists played a crucial role during the pandemic, overseeing the overall medical care of their patients. Vazirnia et al. (2023) found that the contributing factors to overall burnout included the high number of patients, which necessitated extra shifts, ultimately leading to exhaustion. Extreme bureaucratic requirements and a lack of voice in decision-making by leaders were also factors.

The historic demands of the pandemic created an increased risk of burnout. For specific COVID-19 factors that contributed to burnout in hospitalists, Vazirnia et al. (2023) found that hospitalists faced additional, specific burnout factors during the COVID-19 pandemic, including fear of infecting their families, balancing the demands of homeschooling and childcare, and the overall isolation of the pandemic. Additionally, challenging and unique experiences with their patients included feeling frustrated about

patients who were not vaccinated and witnessing their patients' suffering and dying. Understanding the unique needs of hospitalists during the COVID pandemic was critical to retention. Healthcare leaders can expand their knowledge of effective strategies to reduce burnout by leveraging the unique lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When retention decreases, it can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of more employees leaving. A leader who has not implemented effective strategies to reduce burnout can experience decreased retention, which, in turn, can lead to an attitude of "Why should I stay if everyone else is leaving?" and, thus, decrease retention even more (Donovan & Payne, 2021). Learning about effective strategies to reduce burnout is crucial for retaining current employees and their colleagues who may choose to follow their colleagues out the door.

Reducing Burnout

The negative impacts of burnout in high-workload-demand jobs can be felt by staff and measured by leaders. Reduced retention and productivity are symptoms that impact the business. In the JD-R model, the researchers referred to burnout as an imbalance between job demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Leaders could improve organizational performance by understanding the importance of regulating job resources as an effective strategy to reduce burnout.

Job Resources

Employees can feel overwhelmed due to a lack of job resources. Bakker et al. (2005) examined the job demands of university faculty in a prominent institute for professional education in applied science in the Netherlands. The faculty's job demands

included work overload, student emotional demands, physical demands, and work-home interference. Bakker et al. employed the JD-R as their conceptual framework and the Maslach Burnout Inventory as their measurement instrument. Bakker et al. found that job resources could buffer the impact of workload on exhaustion and depersonalization.

Burnout can occur when job demands exceed job resources. Bakker et al. (2005) found that additional job resources can reduce burnout and that combining resources, such as autonomy and a high-quality relationship with their supervisor, could mitigate high job demands. Bakker et al.'s research demonstrated the importance of the relationship between supervisors and their employees. Leaders could learn about job resources they could apply in combination to mitigate job demands and reduce burnout.

Balance is at the core of an engaged employee. According to the JD-R model, burnout arises from an imbalance between job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Hoare and Vandenberghe (2024) surveyed 364 full-time employees to investigate the relationships between job demands, personal and job resources, turnover intention, and emotional exhaustion. Hoare and Vandenberghe found that job resources had a more significant impact on reducing turnover intention than job demands. Job resources have a significant impact on the increase in emotional exhaustion (Hoare & Vandenberghe, 2024). These research findings suggest that leaders should prioritize ensuring job resources over reducing job demands to reduce burnout.

There was much valuable learning about the impact of increased job demands during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study of 610 hospital workers during the pandemic, Q. Li et al. (2022) examined the impact of complex and changing work

demands, utilizing the JD-R model and the conservation of resources theory. Q. Li et al. found a positive correlation between job complexity and burnout. Q. Li et al. found a negative correlation between job resources and organizational and supervisor support.

Surprisingly, the personal resource of having a proactive personality is positively correlated to burnout as these employees had more difficulty adapting to the change and more complex work demands that arose during the pandemic. X. Li et al. (2023) found that leaders should be aware of the increased need for workers with high job complexity and low job resources and the unique needs of employees with proactive personalities. This research demonstrates that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to reduce employee burnout.

It can be a misconception that burnout happens to employees passively. How an employee perceives their job responsibilities can contribute to burnout. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) reviewed the JD-R model to explore additional factors that could enhance the assessment of employee burnout. Bakker and Demerouti explored the history of research related to the syndrome of burnout, which began with a focus on the employee's contribution to the syndrome stemming from Maslach et al. (2001). Bakker and Demerouti identified contributing factors to burnout among employees, including unrealistic job expectations, inadequate coping resources, and the emotional cost of dealing with customers. Bakker and Demerouti expanded the JD-R model by identifying the relationships between job demands, job resources, exhaustion, and disengagement.

The JD-R is a model of burnout that other researchers have expanded upon to include additional dimensions. From their research on burnout, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) identified seven enhancements to the JD-R:

1. Work characteristics are either job demands or job resources.
2. Job demands and resources are unequal in how they impact an employee.
Demands impair an employee's health and can result in more extended work absences. At the same time, job resources are associated with an employee's motivation and can appear through increased absences.
3. Job resources can buffer job demands.
4. Job resources can influence motivation when job demands are high, particularly in active jobs requiring employees to learn new skills and to motivate them to use new behaviors.
5. Personal resources, such as optimism and self-efficacy, can play a similar role as job resources.
6. Motivation has a positive impact on job performance, and job stressors have a negative impact.
7. Based on their continued research on the JD-R, Bakker, and Demerouti (2017) added the dimension of job crafting.

Employees can make proactive changes in their job demands and resources.

Employees can adjust their daily performance and negotiate processes and resources. It is called "job crafting" when employees modify how they accomplish their daily tasks.

Bakker and Demerouti (2017) found that employees who demonstrate job-crafting

behaviors exhibit improved performance and well-being, creating their own “gain spiral.” Contrary to a gain spiral, Bakker and Demerouti found that when employees felt the strain from job demands, they perceived and created more job demands, which created a loss spiral due to self-undermining behavior that creates obstacles that undermine performance.

Employees can decide how they will respond to work stress and demands. Each employee has different personal resources they can tap into, such as job crafting (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). With this new understanding, recognizing the diverse personal resources of their employees could be a game-changing strategy for leaders to reduce employee burnout and enhance business performance.

When job demands or resources are imbalanced, an employee can choose to make changes to align the demands of their job with the resources. Employees could utilize job crafting, a strategy that allows them to modify their work to align with their personal needs and capabilities, thereby reducing burnout (Martínez-Díaz et al., 2023). Job-crafting can take on two forms: promotion-focused, which involves increasing structural resources to rise to the challenge of the job, or prevention-focused, in which the employee reduces work obstacles or decreases their emotional investment in the work. Martínez-Díaz et al. (2023) analyzed data gathered from 339 administrative employees from a university. The researchers found that promotion-focused job crafting serves as a mediating variable in the relationships between burnout and self-efficacy, as well as between burnout and performance, whereas prevention-focused job crafting does not.

This research provides leaders with essential data, indicating that they should recognize and reward job crafting as a key strategy for effective employee performance.

In addition to how an employee can job-craft during work hours, it is also helpful to consider how they can mitigate work-related burnout outside of work. Pijpker et al. (2022) investigated how employees engaged in off-job crafting before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown. Job-crafting refers to employees' proactive and self-initiated changes in their non-work lives to address the psychological needs of their jobs (Pijpker et al., 2022). Job-crafting could involve responding to emails on Sunday nights to prepare for the upcoming week, rather than working a longer day on Mondays (Pijpker et al., 2022). Employees could utilize off-job crafting to mitigate depleted resources, adjust job characteristics to better align with their skills, and effectively manage their boundaries between work and non-work. The researchers found that off-job crafting can help reduce employee burnout during a crisis (Pijpker et al., 2022). This research was vital to leaders, as it challenged the common notion of 'leaving work at the office' and can be an essential strategy for reducing burnout.

Employees do not work in isolation; they look to their coworkers for social support. Martinez et al. (2023) employed the JD-R model as a conceptual framework to investigate the distinct job demands of remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) operators and their teams. RPA operators are physically distant from conflicts but are constantly exposed to audio and video feeds of live events.

Understanding the importance of social and leader support can be an effective strategy for leaders to reduce burnout. Martinez et al. (2023) investigated the impact of

job demands on burnout and job satisfaction, as well as the role of job resources in mitigating the adverse effects of job demands on these outcomes. The researchers found a significant relationship between job demands, burnout, and job satisfaction. Job resources did not significantly moderate the relationship between job demands and burnout.

However, social and leader support was associated with reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction. The researchers found a significant relationship between high-demand work and burnout, and identified mitigating factors, including social support from team members and leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown led to a surge in the telecommunications industry. Liu et al. (2024) found that as people were required to stay home, the demand for online services increased. Some services did not return after the pandemic, and the heightened need for online services remained. Telecommunications employees face changing technology, increased customer demands, and stiff competition, putting them at risk of experiencing burnout. The researchers explored the perception of stress and its relationship to burnout, the role of social support in mitigating burnout, and the differing experiences of men and women. Liu et al. found that although women had a higher perceived stress, they benefited more strongly from social support than men. Liu et al. recommended reducing burnout by implementing wellness programs to mitigate stress, enhancing job matching to align expectations with the role, and providing social support. Leaders could find these strategies effective and relatively easy to implement.

Unlike office workers, Head Start educators do not spend their days at their desks and face unique risks of burnout. Sandilos et al. (2024) studied 230 educators to explore

how job demands related to classroom behavior affect teachers' experiences with burnout. Sandilos et al. found that the relationship quality between the teacher and the teaching assistant (TA) was significantly and negatively associated with burnout. Director support was also negatively associated with burnout, but to a lesser extent. However, there were caveats to the positive or negative impact of burnout on the relationship between the teacher and the TA.

The classroom environment was a mitigating factor in the significance of the relationship between the teacher and the TA. The quality of the relationship with the TA was no longer significant when there were high behavioral problems in the classroom. Sandilos et al. (2024) found that educators who have a positive relationship with their assistant teachers are at a reduced risk of burnout. Given the social-emotional learning techniques required in Head Start teaching, these employees may benefit more from social support than standard office workers. When developing strategies to reduce burnout, leaders should consider employees' unique needs and engage with students to support their well-being.

As a paradox, not all social support can mitigate burnout. Hughes and Gray (2024) explored unhelpful workplace social support (UWSS) and its negative impact on employees' psychological strain and, potentially, as a contributor to burnout. Hughes and Gray defined UWSS as support intended to be helpful but perceived as unhelpful, encompassing critical support, partial support, conflicting support, undependable support, uncomfortable support, imposing support, and short-sighted support. Hughes and Gray found that critical and uncomfortable support was more impactful in inducing a negative

mood, as the response was immediate. Hughes and Gray also found that partial and unreliable support had a longer-lasting negative impact and could lead to burnout. This data will inform leaders that beneficial and detrimental forms of social support may not be immediately apparent.

It can be tempting to view the solution to reducing burnout as simply balancing job resources and demands. However, many complex factors contribute to the burnout syndrome. For example, when considering workload, a seasoned employee may be able to accommodate numerous complex tasks each week, although a less experienced employee may feel overwhelmed. Additionally, there is a notable difference in how one employee may thrive under the pressure and adrenaline of numerous deadlines, whereas another employee may falter. At the heart of the JD-R is an awareness of an employee's work-life imbalance. The imbalance can come from workload, job resources, or social support. However, the critical element is to understand how each employee reacts. Employees can transmit their stress and burnout to others through their stress response.

Leaders should first assess whether an employee is exhibiting signs of burnout. These can include increased absenteeism, which may indicate emotional exhaustion; increasingly missing deadlines, which could suggest a detachment from their work; or doing the bare minimum on their projects, which may indicate a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. If an employee shows signs of burnout, the leader can reduce the work demand, which is not always possible, or increase job resources.

Rewarding job-crafting behavior is like reducing an employee's workload. With job-crafting, employees personalize specific work processes and prioritize completing

their tasks promptly, even as the workload increases. A leader can either be rigid in overseeing work processes or reward the employee's innovation, understanding that the employee's behavior is warding off burnout. To reduce burnout in an employee who exhibits job-crafting behaviors, a leader should demonstrate increased flexibility in managing work processes. Implementing technology can be viewed as a job resource by employees, for example, access to shared files when telecommuting. Understanding each employee's unique personality and needs is critical for a leader to assess and reduce burnout.

Transition

When considering increasing an employee's job resources to balance job demands, leaders must understand that their behavior, specifically how they demonstrate openness, trustworthiness, and an interest in employee well-being, can help mitigate the stress of job demands and reduce burnout in employees. A leader can also nurture employee social support by forming collaborative pairings for specific work assignments and engaging in team-building activities to reduce employee burnout. However, it is crucial to be aware of negative social support that can exacerbate the strain of high job demands. Social support deemed unreliable, inconsistent, or manipulative by an employee can be viewed as a strain rather than a job resource and can lead to burnout. Employee burnout can be caused by more than an imbalance between job demands and job resources. Personal characteristics within an employee can also contribute. Section 3 will describe the protocol for my study, which employs a qualitative research methodology and pragmatic inquiry design.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

As the researcher, my role was to lead the research process, which included collecting and analyzing data. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Yin, 2011). I used open-ended questions to capture participants' responses and ideas, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of how they experience their environment. I have experience with burnout, having worked as an event planner for 30 years. I did not have a relationship with the participants in my study.

The Belmont Report, issued by the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), provides critical information on conducting research with human subjects in the United States. The guidelines in the Belmont Report, commonly referred to as The Common Rule, pertain to three overarching areas of protection for human research subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). As the researcher, I demonstrated respect for the participants by securing informed consent, beneficence by preventing harm to them and explaining potential benefits, and justice by treating them equally. The researcher's responsibility to secure informed consent is essential.

As the researcher, I secured informed consent before the subject participated in the research, ensured that participation was voluntary, used language that a reasonable person could understand and use to give their informed consent, and began consent forms with a key information section. If a participant elected to withdraw from the study

project, they could contact me via e-mail, and I would destroy any data I had collected from them to date. I did not offer incentives to participants to take part in my research. I removed personal data from the participant data, implemented a simple coding system to identify the participants, and collected only the data necessary for the study. I employed a system to refer to participants as P1, P2, P3, and so on to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. The ethical protection of the participants' data is essential. My Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number is 04-15-25-1015303. I will continue to store and maintain the data under password protection for a period of 5 years.

Nature of the Project

I used a pragmatic inquiry as the research design for my research project. Stompff et al. (2022) described five components of pragmatic inquiry. Researchers use transparency in their documentation and findings to ensure that other researchers can replicate their research. Researchers should include context in their research so that the reader and other researchers can understand the nuances of their participants and setting. Contextualization of one's research ensures transferability to other situations, which differs from simply replicating the research. For example, by incorporating context into practical strategies to reduce burnout among male kindergarten teachers in rural schools, the results will have a specific context. However, they can be applied to further studies of male kindergarten teachers in urban schools. Stompff et al. asserted that a researcher can impact practice, improve a specific situation, and use sound research methods through pragmatic inquiry.

The pragmatic inquiry design was suitable for my research project because I explored the effective strategies employed by business leaders to reduce burnout. This research design enabled me to explore the actions and changes that occur, as they can be experienced differently within various organizational settings. In addition, the pragmatic inquiry approach was suitable for this study, as it did not assume a single finding, but rather multiple findings that could be valid. The pragmatic inquiry takes environmental factors into account, such as systems and activities that are governed by the organization (Nzembayie, 2017). This approach was suitable given the diverse range of organizations that employ event planners.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target population for this research project included eight business leaders in the event planning industry. The criterion for inclusion is that business leaders must have at least 5 years of experience working in the field, have led or managed a team of at least three employees, and have demonstrated effective strategies to reduce burnout among employees with high workload demands. I used purposeful sampling for my study. According to Yin (2011), purposeful sampling enables researchers to secure participants with in-depth industry knowledge from various workplaces interested in sharing their experiences. I gained access to the participants through LinkedIn and within the National Meeting Planners Facebook group. I have leveraged my experience in the event planning industry to establish a strong working relationship with my participants. As potential participants emailed me, I confirmed they met the criteria for inclusion in the project before accepting them.

A researcher reaches data saturation when they gather enough data for others to replicate the study, when the ability to collect new information has been exhausted, and when further coding of keywords is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved data saturation at six participants. I targeted eight participants to prepare for any unanticipated events. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), although it is possible to achieve data saturation with as few as six participants, the quality of the data must remain a priority over quantity. I ensured data saturation by noting in my research journal when I ceased to hear new information during the semistructured interviews.

Data Collection Activities

I was the primary data collection instrument. I used semistructured interviews as the data collection tool for this qualitative research project. Semistructured interviews are grounded in the interpretivist approach in which the researcher seeks to identify patterns and themes of experiences (Chung et al., 2024). Additionally, I gathered secondary data from publicly available Internet resources, including government reports, industry publications, and periodicals. Collected data includes governance, best practices, policies, procedures, artifacts, and other relevant information.

A researcher can perform semistructured interviews in multiple ways, including via phone and face-to-face (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). I conducted the interviews via the videoconferencing platform Microsoft Teams (<https://teams.microsoft.com>) to interview participants outside my local area. I posted information about my research project on LinkedIn, and in the National Meeting Planners Facebook group, and business leaders interested in participating contacted me. I confirmed that the interested business

leaders meet the research criteria, and I emailed the informed consent form to them for their signature. Once I received a signed and returned informed consent form, I scheduled a 40-minute Teams meeting for the semistructured interview.

I followed the interview protocol provided in the Appendix to maintain consistency in the interview process. I emailed my interpretations of the transcripts to each participant to confirm that I had accurately synthesized and interpreted.

I scheduled a brief follow-up meeting to ask the participant to review my interpretation of their responses for accuracy. This process is called member checking. I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection. Member checking involves validating one's interpretation of the data to confirm it has been synthesized accurately (Nassaji, 2020). Member checking is more than a process to validate one's synthesis; it provides an opportunity to solicit participant feedback (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking was an essential step in my research to verify the trustworthiness of the results.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were as follows and can also be found in the Interview Protocol in the Appendix:

1. What effective strategies do you use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands?
2. What were the signs or symptoms you recognized and associated with burnout?
3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to reduce burnout?

4. What challenges did you encounter in implementing your effective strategies to reduce burnout?
5. How did you overcome those challenges?
6. Would you like to share any additional information regarding your effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands that we have not already discussed?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Organizing my data was critical to my research. I maintained a research journal to record my thoughts during secondary research and interviews. After completing each semistructured interview via Teams, I reviewed the transcripts multiple times, making notes about and identifying recurring keywords and themes. I will continue to store the transcripts in a password-protected personal Dropbox account for a period of 5 years. Qualitative research lacks a universal data-organizing protocol (Fusch et al., 2018). I developed and adhered to a consistent research protocol. I assigned a simple numerical code to identify participants rather than using their names in my reviews of the transcripts.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process. Step 1 required that I familiarize myself with the data. I began by reading all the transcripts multiple times. I made notes in my research log about anything that interested me, such as unexpected keywords or those that appear multiple times. Active reading, which involves becoming immersed in the content of the transcripts, is the first phase in thematic research (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). After multiple readings, I formalized my list of keywords and added notes on ideas for coding.

Step 2 in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process involved creating codes for the data. Codes identify semantic content relevant to my research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I created codes to analyze the data, I grouped the codes that shared a commonality and let the data guide me. In addition to creating codes for the extracts from my transcripts, I also utilized codes from my secondary research, which I completed before conducting my semistructured interviews. I used Excel to code the data. Coding the data by tagging and naming text selections is the preferred method using software (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In Step 3, I identified and explored potential themes. During this phase, I reviewed my complete list of codes to identify the groups. It was helpful to create visual representations of the themes to communicate my findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I considered the relationship between the codes, how to group them into themes, and how to group individual themes into more significant, overarching themes.

Step 4 of this thematic analysis process required me to review the themes. There are two steps when reviewing the themes: reviewing and refining (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When reviewing the themes, I reviewed all the extracts in the coding to assess which themes are outliers and which form a pattern. I created a thematic map to list all the identified themes. My next step was to refine the themes. I considered my list of themes concerning the entire data set. Refining the themes aims to assess which themes align with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I discovered new extracts and assigned new

coding. If necessary, I would update my thematic mapping. I was cautious to recognize when I should stop refining my themes. I conducted additional research in secondary sources if deemed necessary.

In Step 5 of the thematic analysis process, I defined and named the themes. It is essential to explain the significance of the themes rather than simply listing them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I provided a detailed analysis of each theme, identifying any sub-themes. Once I developed my themes, I compared them with the current literature, analyzed how they align with the conceptual framework, and compared the themes.

In the sixth and final step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process, I produced a report. The purpose of the report is to present the story of the data and convince the reader of the validity of my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I included meaningful extracts from the transcripts to strengthen my analysis and support my argument concerning my research question.

I performed the thematic analysis using Excel software and also used my research journal to code extracts from the transcripts and secondary data, and then grouped the codes by their similarities. I used my research journal to record any ideas and points I wanted to follow up on for further research. I will continue to store the raw data securely for a period of 5 years.

Reliability and Validity

As I was the instrument for my qualitative research, it was crucial to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my findings.

Trustworthiness is essential in both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative data

requires a researcher to actively demonstrate trustworthiness, as the research is specific to a particular situation and sample (Adler, 2022).

Dependability

In qualitative research, a similar consistency signifies dependability.

Dependability refers to how the researcher documents their study so that others can achieve the same results if they review the data (Nassaji, 2020). I followed the same process in my semistructured interviews to achieve dependability. I followed up on my research questions and used consistent language for my subsequent probing questions.

I used member checking to enhance the reliability of my data collection. Member checking enables the researcher to confirm their interpretation of the data (Nassaji, 2020). Member checking was an essential step in my research to ensure the reliability of qualitative results. Although member checking can involve sharing the full transcript, this method may cause discomfort for the participant by having them hear their own words verbatim (Motulsky, 2021). I summarized my interpretations of the participant's responses with each participant to confirm that I have accurately synthesized and interpreted their key points.

Credibility

Qualitative research aims to understand the meaning of a phenomenon within a specific setting characterized by a higher level of subjectivity (Adler, 2022). In qualitative research, credibility is crucial for strengthening trustworthiness. Achieving credibility in research means achieving believability (Nassaji, 2020). A researcher achieves credibility by providing sufficient information about the participants, the

research context, and the research processes, enabling the reader to understand the research (Nassaji, 2020). I included information about the participants within the parameters of my research and the context of the research process.

I used member checking to enhance the credibility of my data collection. The member-checking process enables researchers to validate their interpretation of the interview data, ensuring it has been accurately synthesized (Nassaji, 2020). Member checking enables the researcher to solicit feedback from participants (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking is essential for verifying the credibility of research results. I reviewed the key points from each interview with the respective participant and asked them to confirm if I accurately represented their responses.

Transferability

Qualitative research focuses on a phenomenon within a specific setting. Transferability refers to the extent to which others can apply the research findings universally across different settings, such as in quantitative research. However, researchers could apply the findings if they chose to (Nassaji, 2020). In reviewing the scholarly literature, I examined employee burnout across various industries. As I analyzed the data collected, I identified effective strategies to reduce burnout that others can apply across various industries. Qualitative research findings offer the opportunity to identify commonalities in other settings.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the instrument and, therefore, is involved with the participants, seeking confirmability rather than replicability. As a

qualitative researcher studies a phenomenon in a real-world setting, it is critical to ensure confirmability in the results (Yin, 2011, p. 7). A researcher can achieve confirmability by accurately describing the data, coding, and explaining the researcher's decisions in interpreting the data (Nassaji, 2020). To achieve confirmability in the research, I included detailed descriptions of the data collected and the coding process in the findings section of the capstone document.

Meaningful research is research that others can replicate and understand. The most important step the qualitative researcher can take is accurately documenting their research protocol (Johnson et al., 2020). The research protocol should include one's rationale for the sampling method, the data saturation point, member checking, and triangulation of data sources (Johnson et al., 2020). I ensured that my research is replicable by documenting my research protocol.

Achieving data saturation was essential in my research protocol. A researcher can achieve data saturation in as few as six participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I obtained eight participants in case one dropped out of the study. Data saturation occurs when gathering data from additional participants yields no new or different results (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I knew I had achieved data saturation when I no longer heard new information during the semistructured interviews.

Transition and Summary

Learning about effective strategies to reduce burnout can empower leaders to improve retention and business performance. The data from my doctoral study can help leaders identify which strategies are more effective than others. With this knowledge,

leaders can improve the performance of their organizations. Ethical research practices protect the privacy and autonomy of the participants and safeguard the researcher's protocol.

Burnout can occur in any industry. My target population was leaders who have employees with high workload demands. I used purposeful sampling to identify leaders in the event planning industry who have employees with high workload demands. I advertised my research project on LinkedIn and within a national Facebook group for event planners. I conducted Microsoft Teams interviews to engage participants from diverse geographical backgrounds. I had six primary interview questions.

A qualitative researcher must enhance trustworthiness. I employed member checking to ensure the reliability of my research. I used a research journal and Excel to analyze my data. I ensured credibility by including pertinent details about the participants so the reader would understand who they are. I ensured transferability by applying my findings to other industries and work settings. I achieved confirmability by clearly documenting my data collection and coding process. I achieved data saturation when I did not hear new information in my semistructured interviews. Section 4 includes my detailed findings and conclusions. I discuss the themes that emerge and apply the identified themes to my conceptual framework.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies to reduce burnout. The literature review provided a deep understanding of the syndrome of burnout, its roots in Maslach's (1982) original description of burnout, which could occur when job demands exceeded job resources, and the conceptual framework of the JD-R (Demerouti et al., 2001) to explore efficient strategies to reduce burnout in employees with high workload demands. Maslach asserted that burnout results in employees experiencing feelings of emotional exhaustion, detachment, cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Maslach also asserted that burnout was exclusive to the human services professions. Demerouti et al. (2001) expanded on Maslach's original work and asserted that burnout can occur in any profession and created the JD-R model. Demerouti et al. and Maslach agreed that burnout has negative implications for leaders, as it is associated with poor engagement, resulting in decreased performance, increased absenteeism and turnover, and lower retention rates. Additionally, Demerouti et al. expanded on Maslach's original model by adding organizational support as a job resource.

In this study, the sample for the semistructured interviews consisted of event industry leaders. This study provides new insights into effective strategies for reducing burnout within the event industry. As event professionals work within complex project management, it is understandable that the themes that emerged from my research are all centered on the needs of the employee. The thematic analysis of the semistructured

interviews revealed three themes: prioritizing the employee, nurturing communication, and providing resources.

The overarching research question was, “What effective strategies do business leaders use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands?” The sources of primary data collection included semistructured interviews with eight participants. The secondary data consisted of journal and digital articles and an industry article and blog, which were used to corroborate the themes identified from the participants’ responses. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality. Data collected from interviews were transcribed using the Microsoft Teams transcription service.

The JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) served as the framework through which the research problem was viewed. In the JD-R model, increasing job resources is effective in offsetting job demands and reducing burnout. An imbalance between job demands and available resources can lead to burnout. The more complex the work, the higher the psychological strain on employees; therefore, job resources become more important (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The participants shared that when they implemented effective strategies to reduce burnout, they were able to maintain highly skilled employees who could meet the demands of the complex work environment. Event planning work is similar to traditional project management, but it has additional complexity (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Whereas event planners work through their chronological timelines, they must also mitigate the changing and sometimes competing timelines of stakeholders (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Event planning professionals can experience psychological strain in

their work as they must excel in both divergent thinking, which they express through creativity, and convergent thinking, which they express through prioritizing their knowledge and resources to establish priorities (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023).

The secondary research further supported the participants' assertions that effective strategies to reduce burnout could retain highly skilled employees. In a study of event management companies located in the United Kingdom, the United States, Greece, and Australia, the researchers found that focusing on the needs of the employee was effective in retaining event professionals and was demonstrated by getting to know the employees, empowering employees, fostering a good level of internal communication, and supporting good work-life balance (Marinakou, 2019). Retaining employees with the skills to complete the complex work required in the event industry is crucial for event industry leaders to ensure the successful execution of their organization's events. The researchers also found that event management leaders took an exclusive approach to retention, creating special initiatives to retain a select group of employees with outstanding talent. The participants identified that employee-centered strategies were shown to be effective in reducing burnout.

The three themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews all centered on how a leader should treat an employee to effectively reduce burnout: (a) prioritize employees, (b) nurture communication, and (c) offer resources. The first theme, *prioritize the employee*, was referenced 23 times by the participants, whereas the second theme, *nurture communication*, was referenced 13 times. The third theme, *provide resources* was referenced nine times. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the themes and their

corresponding references. Following that, I present an analysis of the themes and discuss the findings in relation to the themes. Table 1 lists the themes and the number of times it arose from the coded data.

Table 1

Major Themes

Themes	References
Theme 1: Prioritize the Employee	23
Theme 2: Nurture Communication	13
Theme 3: Provide Resources	9

Theme 1: Prioritize the Employee

The first emerging theme, Prioritize the Employee, was identified by 87% of the participants and refers to focusing on the needs and preferences of the employees. Event industry leaders are responsible for delivering events and services to customers, which is an external focus. Paradoxically, the participants spoke about the importance of their strategy to prioritize the employee, which is an internal focus.

Demerouti et al. (2001) built their JD-R model on the foundation of Maslach's (1982) definition of burnout as a syndrome. Within the syndrome of burnout, employees can experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduction in personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). However, whereas Maslach asserted that burnout is a syndrome specific to the human services profession, Demerouti et al. asserted that burnout could occur in any profession and expanded Maslach's research to create the JD-R. In the JD-R model, organization support has been identified as a job resource

(Demerouti et al., 2001). It fits with the current literature that *prioritize the employee* is the strongest theme in effective strategies to reduce burnout in employees with high workload demands, as it is aligned with the needed support for these employees, as they have complex work. The *prioritize the employee* theme, being the highest occurring theme, aligned with the JD-R model to increase job resources to balance high workload demands to reduce burnout. The participants discussed how they provided job resources and organizational support, which they demonstrated through supportive leadership, to balance job demands, as exemplified within the JD-R model, thereby reducing burnout among their employees.

Event industry leaders who expressed the *prioritize the employee* theme focused on providing supportive leadership to reduce burnout in their employees. The *prioritize the employee* theme aligned with the JD-R model as the leaders supported the physical, psychological, social, and organizational factors that impact an employee's work environment (Demerouti et al., 2001). P2 articulated, "So some of the strategies that we used...was an...over [sic]arching theme of the company that the employees were to be treated...the same as our clients."

As the event planning industry is a service-based industry, customer service is a key focus. However, events are not only built around logistics planning, budgets, room layouts, and contractual deadlines; they are also shaped by subjective factors such as attitude and expression when dealing with the changing priorities and timelines of stakeholders (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). The competing demands of the event planning timeline and the stakeholders' expectations increase the complexity of the work

and can lead to an employee's increased stress at work. Thus, event industry leaders who provide organizational support by treating the internal employees similarly to the external clients can reduce burnout. Providing job resources can help to reduce burnout.

The *prioritize the employee* theme aligned with the JD-R by providing the job resources of supportive leadership, professional development, and organizational support to reduce burnout in employees. The secondary research further supported the alignment between the *prioritize the employee* theme and the JD-R. Masuku et al. (2025) studied the factors that influence employee engagement and satisfaction among 184 administrative employees in the South African municipality of eMalahleni. Masuku et al. found a significant relationship between the work environment and employee engagement, with employee satisfaction improving as the work environment improved. In addition to improving employee engagement, supportive leadership, employee autonomy, and professional development, motivation can lead to employee innovation, which was shown to increase employee satisfaction (Masuku et al., 2025). As the work of event industry employees is complex, innovation is valuable. Employee innovation can lead to increased competitive advantage of the organization by making its services better than its competitors or by creating niche services that are unique within the event industry. Fostering employee innovation can keep employees challenged and empowered. As the work of event professionals is complex, providing job resources to support autonomy and innovation is essential to reduce burnout. Additionally, leaders can reduce employee burnout by supporting innovation in job demands as well.

A leader demonstrates the *prioritize the employee* theme by being open to change in the kinds of resources needed to balance an increase in job demands. When leaders are open to change, they foster psychological safety within their team and offer the job resource of organizational support to balance high-load work demands. The secondary research expanded on the *prioritize the employee* theme demonstrated by leaders being open to change to foster innovation. Brassey et al. (2023) asserted that leaders' emotions can have a multiplier effect for their team, meaning that if the leader is having a bad day and is impatient with an employee, the employee can experience that negative emotion even more strongly due to the power differential. When a leader fosters a safe environment to innovate, challenge current processes, and ask questions, they create an environment in which employees can innovate. By nurturing a safe and creative environment, a leader can support employees' growth from single loop learning, how to solve a problem, to double loop learning, using experience to re-envision the overall landscape in which we work (Brassey et al., 2023). The complex work of employees within the event profession increases job demands.

Event industry leaders must also consider the unique demands of their employees' complex work and provide opportunities for them to improve work processes, thereby reducing job demands. In the JD-R model, employee dissatisfaction can occur when there is an imbalance in job demands and resources. With this in mind, event industry leaders should save space for their employees to have a voice in how they do their work. Leaders being open to change aligned with the JD-R model, as the leader supports the employee's autonomy through job resources, thereby reducing burnout. During P2's interview, they

emphasized the importance of being open to change by supporting employees' suggestions for process and workflow improvements. They asserted that a contributing factor to employee burnout is witnessing a process that is not working well, having to repeat it over and over, yet not feeling empowered to share their input on improvement. P2 described saving space for employee suggestions, testing the recommendations, analyzing the results with the employee, and deciding together whether to keep the improvement. Being open to change by giving employees input on how they perform their work can help reduce job resources by achieving increased efficiency in a work process and also assuring employees their time is not being wasted. Being open to change to employee input can be one factor in the *prioritize the employee* theme. Considering how to support employees during the long work hours required to plan and support events is another factor in the *prioritize the employee* theme.

Employees in the event industry are often required to work long hours, including weekends and holidays. Event leaders demonstrated the *prioritize the employee* theme through the job resources they provided to balance the job demands of their employees' work schedules. The secondary research further supported the alignment of the *prioritize the employee* theme through the effective management of employees' work schedules. In a study examining the impact of shift work on the sleep quality and safety of shift workers, leaders found that improved management of shift work schedules led to increased employee satisfaction (Hulsegge et al., 2023). Different professions encounter work schedules that are unique to their professions, including nurses who work 12-hour shifts, firefighters who work 24-hour shifts, and petroleum workers who can work 14

consecutive days (Hulsegge et al., 2023). Hulsegge et al. (2023) found that limiting the number of successive night shifts and avoiding short intervals between shifts increased employee satisfaction. Event professionals can work long hours to finalize the event's planning and then work even longer hours to support the event on-site. On-site support includes event set-up, providing logistics support during the event, and breaking down the event. P2 spoke about trying to avoid assigning an employee to work a late shift to support an event, and then also an early morning shift to set up for the next event. When event industry leaders attempt to schedule employees' work shifts to provide rest and recovery, they align with the JD-R model by seeking to reduce job demands and thereby minimize strain, burnout, or exhaustion. When leaders demonstrate organizational support by trying to balance long work hours by avoiding scheduling employees to work back-to-back late nights and early mornings, they are aligning with the *prioritize the employee* theme. Wallace and Michopoulou (2023) asserted that conflicts in the chronological timeline of events, how they are planned, and when they are held, can conflict with stakeholders' timelines. The conflict of the different timelines is referred to as Kairos (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Kairos describes the qualitative aspect of time, in contrast to Chronos, which represents the chronological aspect of time (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). An example of the qualitative aspect of time in event planning is a last-minute request from a stakeholder that requires additional work hours for employees. Encouraging employees to take time off to rest and recover is an example of a job resource to balance job demands.

Event industry leaders should be aware of the time their employees are taking off and, often more importantly, when they are not taking time off from work. The secondary research further supports the *prioritize the employee* theme when leaders maintain their employees' work-life boundaries to reduce the risk of burnout, and some employees may require assistance in adhering to these boundaries (Kloepple, 2023). P6 articulated,

When we are on-site, I kick my staff out as soon as they're done with their work. I do not want them just sitting in the staff office with us to be there because I'm there. So I try to make sure they know my expectation is not [sic] that they are working to a point of burnout.

When employees fail to take time off from work to rest and recover, they may begin to exhibit signs of burnout, such as a cynical attitude or feeling detached from their work and colleagues. Leaders demonstrate the *prioritize the employee* theme by encouraging their employees to take time off. P2 spoke about clarifying that when employees are off, they should not call into meetings or send work emails, so they are truly off from work. The *prioritize the employee* theme aligned with the JD-R model by leaders providing organizational support as a job resource by demonstrating a supportive work environment to reduce job demands. Demerouti et al. (2001) posited that high job demands can lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion, burnout, and turnover. P6 articulated,

You are the best employee if you [sic] have burnt yourself, which is *not* [emphasis added] something I think is actually a good brag. I think that is counterintuitive to actually staying around for a long time. ... I'm not. I'm not

gonna give you [sic] a prize for being the most [sic] burnt-out [sic] employee I have.

The participant prioritized the employee by actively working to prevent overwork and burnout among their staff. Although it may not always be possible to reduce job demands, leaders need to create a positive work environment by seeking additional resources, negotiating deadlines and priorities, or providing supportive leadership to acknowledge the peak times for job demands. Monitoring how employees feel when job demands are high is critical to reducing burnout, but it is not a one-size-fits-all approach for all employees.

Encouraging employees to take time off to rest and recover is aligned with the current literature about the complexity of the work required of employees. Wallace and Michopoulou (2023) described the skills required of event professionals to excel at complex project management, which include managing stakeholders' changing priorities, as well as social and communication skills, and emotional intelligence. The complex work of these employees increases job demands, which could lead to psychological strain. When leaders demonstrate the job resource of organizational support by encouraging employees to take time off from work to rest and recover, they are reducing job demands.

Another way a leader demonstrates the *prioritize the employee* theme by treating employees with respect, which in turn demonstrates organizational support. The secondary research further aligned with demonstrating the *prioritize the employee* theme by treating employees with respect because when employees feel respected, they are

more resilient (Gallup, n.d.). Resilience can be associated with the positive personal job resources included in the JD-R model that include support, autonomy, motivation, and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). P7 articulated,

You know, most of the people that we have are really great professionals, and when a mistake is made, it's a mistake. And we try to correct that, of course, any mistake that's made, but we don't need to berate the employees or treat them disrespectfully because a mistake was made.

In their study of resilience in event professionals in Poland, Kwiatkowski et al. (2023) identified four kinds of resilience: (a) resilience as resistance, holding the line to prepare for the crisis, disaster, or hazard; (b) resilience as bounce-back, with a focus on returning to normal or denying anything is happening; (c) resilience as adaptation, adjusting to the changes and shoring up prior weak spots to prevent the same experience happening again; (d) resilience as transformation and owning the need to change to be able to meet future disasters. Due to the complex nature of their work, event professionals find resilience to be a valuable personal resource. Demonstrating respect for the employee as a factor in the *prioritize the employee* theme aligned with the current literature. As event professionals have complex work to achieve the success factors of a live event that include not only quality, budget, and meeting the timeline, they also have to achieve more subjective measurements that can include how the event enhances the image of a local community or an organization, how it fosters relationships, or how the event creates an identity that attendees want to return to (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Leaders who

expressed the *prioritize the employee* theme expressed the importance of demonstrating respect for their employees to reduce burnout.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in March of 2020, the event industry almost ceased to exist as in-person events were prohibited. Both individual event professionals and the event industry needed to be resilient in order to pivot to digital events and podcasts, find alternative work temporarily, or change careers altogether. Event industry leaders can support the personal job resources of motivation, autonomy, and engagement that contribute to resilience by getting to know the needs of their employees.

The *prioritize the employee* theme can also be demonstrated by getting to know the different preferences of employees to reduce burnout. Employees can react to increased job demands with strain, burnout, or exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001). P7 described an employee who felt strongly about the difference between using vacation time after working over a weekend on an event and being given time off to acknowledge the weekend days. P7 articulated, “I came to the conclusion that we can change our thinking. And not everybody thinks like us, but the goal is to keep an employee, keep them around, and keep them engaged.” The secondary research further demonstrated the alignment between the *prioritize the employee* theme with the importance of understanding the different needs of employees, Parker and Knight (2025) introduced a proactive work environment model called the SMART Work Design model, which stands for stimulating work, mastery, autonomy, relational work, and tolerable demands. The researchers combined elements from the Job Characteristics and the JD-R models to

support employee well-being (Parker & Knight, 2025). The SMART Work Design elements include stimulating work, based on a variety of tasks; mastery, clarity in role within the organization; autonomy, giving the employee control over how they work, innovate, and make decisions; relational work, fostering a supportive environment from peers and leaders; and tolerable demands, ensuring a manageable level of effort in the employees workload (Parker & Knight, 2025). The common thread running through all these factors is the leader's need to understand the preferences of each employee and adjust to their needs to reduce burnout. An employee's preferences for a supportive environment may differ from those of another employee. A leader cannot effectively demonstrate organizational support as a job resource if they do not understand the different needs of the employees, both in the work environment and in communication.

Theme 2: Nurture Communication

The second emerging theme, *Nurture Communication*, was identified by 62.5% of the participants. This theme aligned with the current literature, which describes the complex project management that employees must execute within the event industry (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Event professionals must balance their chronological event planning work with the changing priorities and timelines of stakeholders (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). This complex work increases the potential for psychological strain (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Nurturing communication by saving space for it – both in time and intention – aligned with the need for additional job resources to balance the job demands for these employees to reduce burnout. Leaders who nurture

communication, specifically positive communication, with their employees working on complex project management can reduce burnout among their staff.

Whereas communication can occur in formal meetings, onsite during events, or during informal hallway chats, the participants spoke about how they prioritized a regular cadence of one-on-one meetings so they could be aware of what was happening with the employee. The secondary further supported the participants' assertions about the need for leaders to be intentional in their communication to reduce burnout. Young et al. (2024) investigated how burnout in employees can be reduced by implementing training for leaders in positive communication through a program called *Positively Energizing Leadership*. The study subjects were radiology employees working in a breast imaging department at an academic medical institution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers performed a pretest survey in 2021, introduced the new leadership training over the next two years, and performed a post-test survey in 2023. The researchers found a significant reduction in burnout and intent to leave, as well as improved engagement. Maintaining a balance between job demands and job resources is at the heart of the JD-R model. Young et al. found that implementing the positive leadership program improved the employees' perception of job resources, which the employees perceived as improved transparency and more frequent and consistent communication. The participants emphasized the intentionality behind creating opportunities for communication as a key differentiator in their effective strategies to reduce burnout.

A leader demonstrates the *nurture communication* theme by committing to a dependable cadence of meetings with employees. By nurturing regular communication, a

leader can build relationships with their employees, better understand employees' needs and act, and positively contribute to improving retention (Marinakou, 2019). P3 talked about the importance of holding regular one-on-one meetings with employees and asking about work-related and non-work-related topics. P5 described how important it is to know about the employee's home life because of the long hours required to support events. P7 articulated,

So I think one of the most effective ways is to make sure that open communication is available and an employee is [sic] welcome to raise their hand and say, "Hey. I need a break. I need help. I need a little time off. I need to re-energize, regroup. I'm burned out."

The common thread through the *nurture communication* theme was that of intentionality on the part of the leader in how they planned and executed their communication with employees to reduce burnout. P7 spoke about their technique of sometimes meeting with an employee without an agenda, just to talk and get to understand the employee. P3 spoke about the importance of using the meeting time with employees to acknowledge with the employee that the work is stressful. P8 spoke about asking the employee what topics they would like to discuss to get the support they needed. By nurturing communication with employees, leaders can create an open, supportive environment, and employees can feel comfortable coming to their leader when they are beginning to experience the symptoms of burnout (Arnold, n.d.). When employees feel they are being heard, they feel more engaged, motivated, and can have higher job satisfaction (Arnold, n.d.). These findings align with the JD-R model to reduce

burnout by increasing job resources to offset job demands. Demerouti et al. (2001) asserted that job resources could be internal resources within the employees, such as cognitive abilities, or external resources, such as organizational support. Nurturing communication is a type of organizational support.

Theme 3: Provide Resources

The third emerging theme, *provide resources*, was identified by 50% of the participants and could include additional personnel, technology, or anything that decreases an employee's workload. Job resources are crucial in the event industry, as employees often work long hours during peak times. Leaders should focus on personal and job resources as they can reduce employee turnover intention (Hoare & Vandenberghe, 2024). Within the JD-R model, job resources can be personal characteristics within the employee, such as optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience, or resources made available within a supportive work environment (Demerouti et al. 2001). P1 explained that when they see signs that an employee is feeling overwhelmed, they look to increase resources. Increasing resources can involve a long-range strategy to add headcount or, in the short term, redistributing work among current employees within the team or seeking assistance from employees in other departments. Adding job resources to balance high job demands aligned with the JD-R model. A leader can also increase job resources by supporting the employees' personal resource of autonomy.

When leaders support the personal job resource of autonomy in employees, they can mitigate or buffer the imbalance between job demands and resources, thereby reducing burnout. In a study of 1,912 employees at an Australian higher education

organization, Bakker et al. (2005) investigated the buffering capability of reducing burnout among employees. The researchers found that job resources are not a linear single addition to peak work time but instead can work in combination to reduce employee strain. Autonomy was found to be the most common buffering resource, and a leader could support autonomy best by providing process and role clarity. Clarity in process and role is essential to support employee autonomy. When an employee has autonomy, they can avoid spending time waiting for their leader's approval or feedback. Also, the employees feel empowered to move forward with their work tasks and projects. Another positive aspect of employee autonomy is the foundation of trust between the employee and the leader, which aligned with the JD-R model to create a supportive work environment as a valuable resource. When a leader introduces technology or empowers employees to adopt it to solve simple, redundant tasks, the leader supports the employee's autonomy in higher-level planning and decision-making, thereby buffering job demands.

Event industry leaders demonstrated the *provide resources* theme by offering tools and technology to their employees to make their work smoother and more efficient. Technology is an example of how a leader can support an employee to buffer the risk of burnout when job demands and job resources are out of balance (Bakker et al., 2005). P2 articulated, "So one of the things [sic] that we did really well [sic] is we made sure that [sic] if they ever needed anything to do their job, [sic] we got it in their hands as quickly as possible."

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be positioned as a job resource to increase efficiency in simple, day tasks. One participant mentioned using AI daily to create initial drafts of event planning documents. By freeing employees from these mundane tasks, they can have more time for other, more thoughtful work, which can reduce job demands and lower the risk of burnout. AI can also be used as a tool to detect and reduce burnout in employees.

As burnout is a syndrome of characteristics rather than a single factor, it can be challenging to judge if an employee is at risk of burnout. The secondary research expanded on P2's use of AI as a job resource to reduce burnout. Omore and Ikuyinminu (2024) explored the introduction of AI-powered predictive analytics into corporate environments to detect signs of burnout before it occurs in an employee. Over the course of 3 years, predictive AI monitored data including email response times, meeting attendance, absentee trends, and engagement scores. Using AI-powered predictive analytics, cases of burnout, 40% in the first year, were reduced to 25% in the second year, and 10% in the third year. The diverse preferences, work styles, and personalities of employees mean that reducing burnout is not a one-size-fits-all approach. During peak times, one employee can feel challenged, trusted, and in their flow, whereas another can feel pressured, targeted, and overwhelmed. Using predictive AI in the workplace can provide leaders with an earlier warning that an employee is at risk of burnout. With an earlier warning about signs of burnout, a leader has an improved opportunity to avoid the associated negative behaviors rather than planning how to recover from them. Reducing burnout can also decrease employee turnover, thereby reducing the extra costs associated

with recruiting and hiring new employees. When comparing the three themes—prioritize the employee, nurture communication, and provide resources—to the current literature, similarities and differences are evident.

Empowerment, which is associated with the job resource of autonomy, can reduce burnout. In the JD-R model, autonomy is considered a personal job resource that can balance high job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). The secondary research further supported the job resource of autonomy to reduce burnout. In a study of female public-school principals, Smadi et al. (2025) found a significant relationship between job empowerment and reduced burnout. Some of the examples of how the principals felt empowered included establishing formal programs for information sharing among female principals. This was like my findings in the participants' responses in the *prioritize* theme, which described the effectiveness of being open to change by implementing employees' ideas. Additionally, supporting the autonomy of employees was also identified as effective in reducing burnout under the *provide resources* theme.

Reducing an employee's workload to mitigate the risk of burnout aligned with the *provide resources* theme; however, the secondary research findings about the buffering effect of help from coworkers in reducing burnout differed from my research. Goebel et al. (2025) studied hospitalists in a community hospital who were experiencing burnout due to their workload. Whereas their finding that doctors identified workload as the cause of their burnout was like my research, the role of teamwork in reducing burnout differed. The hospitalists cited the work required to complete exit paperwork for each patient, specifically Form 3122, as a strain because it took a significant amount of time and was

not directly related to patient care. Members of different teams in the hospital offered to complete parts of the forms; for example, the social workers took responsibility for completing the section of the form that dealt with patients' activities of daily living, required therapies, and home care needs. During my semistructured interviews, some leaders described asking for help from other teams during peak times, taking on some of the work themselves, and redistributing work within the team to demonstrate organizational support to reduce workload. However, none of the participants discussed how support between coworkers can help reduce workload and mitigate burnout. Resources to reduce burnout can also be found in technology.

Implementing AI technology as a resource to support employee mental health aligned with the *provide resources* theme. In the JD-R model, leaders who can assess when an employee is feeling out of balance with their job demands and resources can take action to reduce burnout. The secondary research supported the theme of *provide resources* by leaders providing AI as a tool. In their research on how AI chatbots and wearable technology can reduce employee burnout, Tito and Arefin (2025) found that providing employees with AI resources can enable them to address mental health strain before it develops into burnout. The researchers found that employees could avoid the perceived stigma of reaching out for help and valued the anonymity offered by the chatbot model. This secondary research expanded on my findings from one participant regarding how AI can be utilized to automate simple tasks and reduce burnout, which aligns with my previous discussion on how predictive AI can mitigate burnout in the workplace.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The project findings in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project offer critical business contributions and recommendations. Leaders who understand effective strategies to reduce burnout can retain employees. One participant described their business goal as keeping employees and keeping them engaged. The participants discussed the high job demands on employees in the event industry, which included long hours spent planning and supporting events. These demanding schedules are multiplied during the peak times of event planning, when employees must work long hours in back-to-back shifts to support numerous events. Business leaders need to maintain a team of employees to complete the work required to plan and support events, while also meeting their customers' needs. Focusing on the needs of employees to reduce burnout is aligned with the JD-R model. During peak times and long hours required in the event industry, increased job demands and limited job resources can lead to burnout. Leaders who focus on increasing job resources will be more effective in reducing burnout and retaining employees.

The significant economic impact of the event industry makes it worthwhile to understand effective strategies for reducing burnout among event professionals. In the 2023 Global Economic Significance of Business Events study (Events Industry Council, 2023), business events supported a total global impact of \$2.8 trillion in business sales, \$27.5 million in jobs, and \$1.6 trillion of GDP (contribution to global gross domestic product in the U.S. in 2019 (Events Industry Council, 2023)). The COVID-19 pandemic created a historic standstill across the event industry, as travel was prohibited and shelter-

in-place directives were in place, resulting in a loss of \$1.9 trillion in event spending from 2020 to 2022 (Russell, 2023). The event industry is not only characterized by its economic reach, but it is also comprised of highly skilled employees who operate within distinctive job demands and resources. Understanding effective strategies to reduce burnout will enable event industry leaders to retain and support their employees.

The project findings aligned with the JD-R model, which emphasized the balance between job demands and resources to reduce burnout. The findings showed that the most effective strategy to reduce burnout in event professionals with high-demand jobs is to prioritize the employee. The three themes identified for effective strategies to reduce burnout included *prioritize the employee*, *nurture communication*, and *provide resources*. The most important takeaway was that central to the three themes was the need for event industry leaders to support their employees in reducing burnout, which in turn helped reduce turnover and improve engagement.

The most prominent theme identified by the participants in the study was the *prioritize the employee* theme to reduce burnout. One participant described treating employees like clients, which is an example of using supportive leadership to reduce burnout among employees. The secondary research further supported the *prioritize the employee* theme. Sørengaard and Langvik (2022) investigated the effect of fair and supportive leadership on reducing burnout and insomnia among Norwegian police employees. The researchers found that the scales for fair leadership and supervisor support were highly correlated, so they combined them in their study (Sørengaard & Langvik, 2022). The researchers found that fair and supportive leadership had a

significant impact on reducing burnout but not on insomnia (Sørengaard & Langvik, 2022). Additionally, the researchers found that fair and supportive leadership could buffer the adverse effects of high job demands, thereby reducing burnout, which aligned with the JD-R model. Event industry leaders could demonstrate supportive leadership through their work processes, such as understanding the work cycles and peak times for event planning.

Another example of the *prioritize the employee* theme was for leaders to be thoughtful in how they create work schedules to support long hours for events and when multiple events occur. Participants shared examples of trying to avoid scheduling the same employee for late-night work and then for early morning work the next day. The goal was to provide employees with an opportunity to rest and recover between work shifts. Developing work schedules was an example of how to prioritize employees. Offering a compressed work schedule would provide employees with more time off and could contribute to reducing burnout. Interestingly, the secondary research did not align with the participants' assertions. In a study of IKEA employees in Belgium, du Bois et al. (2025) found that although a compressed work schedule improved the employees' ability to detach from their work responsibilities, it did not reduce burnout. The researchers found that, because the contributing factors to burnout—namely, an imbalance in job demands and resources—continued to exist, there was no reduction in burnout. Encouraging employees to take vacation time can improve their psychological renewal from work, but this can also be a challenge for leaders.

Event professionals must excel in meeting the changing priorities of both internal and external stakeholders. One example shared by a participant on how to prioritize the employee was to be open to change. A leader could be open to change by giving employees a voice in planning and negotiating deadlines to manage their workloads. The secondary research further demonstrated the participant's assertion of being open to change to reduce burnout. Event professionals can feel outnumbered by opinions from C-suite leaders. Managing expectations for timelines and deadlines could reduce burnout (Cvent, n.d.). The project timelines for events are interconnected with multiple dependencies. Although it can be satisfying for employees to check items off the list, a leader must also monitor a healthy flow of work to reduce the risk of burnout among employees. Like monitoring workflow, leaders should monitor an employee's time off to reduce the risk of burnout.

Another example of the *prioritize the employee* theme shared by the participants was to encourage employees to take time off to reduce the risk of burnout. P2 articulated that they asked staff not to call into meetings or respond to emails when the staff were off. The secondary research further supported encouraging employees to take time off to demonstrate the *prioritize the employee* theme. To fully rest, employees need to be fully off (Saunders, 2025). Leaders can prioritize their employees' needs by demonstrating organizational support in different ways during regular work and also during a crisis, such as a global pandemic.

The themes *prioritize the employee*, *nurture communication*, and *provide resources* that emerged from the participants' responses align with the JD-R model. The

secondary research further supported the alignment of the themes with the expanded JD-R dimensions identified by Q. Li et al. (2022) among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Q. Li et al. expanded the JD-R model by adding the dimensions of perceived organizational support, employee care, and turnover intention. During the critical role of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, how leaders cared for their employees was crucial to reducing burnout and protecting patient safety. Q. Li et al. defined employee care as an informal way for managers to listen to employees' concerns, value their work, enhance well-being, and support employees' career development. Q. Li et al. found that employees' perception of a high level of organizational support was associated with a reduced intention to turnover. Q. Li et al.'s research aligned with the project findings in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, which highlights the importance of focusing on employees' needs through thoughtful leadership, effective communication, and adequate resources to reduce burnout. Losing employees due to burnout can be costly to the organization. Reducing burnout to retain employees is crucial for both business performance and its impact on the community.

Implications for Social Change

Planning events fosters meaningful engagement, allowing people to come together and connect. Event professionals design experiences to bring people together to learn, connect, and grow their businesses. An event creates communities – both the short-term community that is formed during the event and a larger, shared community connected by the common interest of the attendees. People come together during an event to advance industries, innovate, and adapt as the world continues to change (Events

Industry Council, n.d.). By understanding effective strategies to reduce burnout in event professionals, event industry leaders can ensure the event industry thrives and continues to create opportunities for people to come together.

When people attend events, they can further their careers. Events offer people opportunities to learn about new job opportunities and expand their professional development, preparing them for a new role. Networking opportunities are a key component of events, enabling attendees to grow their businesses.

Scientific conferences and tradeshow are the cornerstone for the sharing of research and furthering academic knowledge. Healthcare professionals, such as physicians and nurses, attend conferences to complete continuing education that is required to maintain their licenses. Healthcare professionals can apply their new knowledge to enhance the care they provide to patients in their community.

Recommendations for Further Research

The qualitative nature of the research limits the generalizability of the findings. The event industry encompasses a wide range of events. There is an opportunity in future research to explore effective strategies for reducing burnout within specific event types, such as comparing academic events with incentive events. Event industry leaders could learn about new ways to reduce burnout from other kinds of events.

As large annual events are cyclical, event leaders often hire seasonal or contract employees. Because of this, there is an opportunity to explore reducing burnout in seasonal or contract employees, as this study explored effective strategies to reduce burnout in full-time employees. Seasonal and contractual employees provide critical

expertise in the planning and execution of annual events; retaining them is valuable for the leader. Finally, given the high number of women working as event professionals, it would be valuable to expand on this study by exploring how effective strategies to reduce burnout differ for male and female employees with high workload demands. This new learning could benefit event industry leaders in understanding how to prioritize employees differently.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands. The project included semistructured interviews with eight participants who were event industry leaders with a minimum of 5 years of experience and at least three employees. I used Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis to identify three themes: *prioritize the employee*, *nurture communication*, and *provide resources*. The three themes are aligned with the JD-R model to reduce burnout.

The key finding was that the most effective strategy to reduce burnout is to prioritize the employee's needs. Participants shared their experiences of prioritizing their employees by providing supportive leadership, being open to change, and managing work schedules to allow for rest during periods of high activity. Participants also shared how they have demonstrated prioritizing their employees by respecting them, showing the organization's support, and getting to know their different preferences.

The second theme was *nurture communication*. Participants discussed both informal and formal communication, highlighting how these approaches helped them

understand what was happening in their employees' lives and enabled them to be aware of the risks of burnout. The participants demonstrated the *nurture communication* theme by committing to a dependable cadence of one-on-one meetings with their employees. The participants emphasized this as a crucial component for maintaining strong relationships with their employees.

The third theme identified was *provide resources*. The participants shared their experiences providing additional headcount, when possible, to reduce job demands on employees during peak times. The participants also provided resources by redistributing work within the events team and asking colleagues for help. Using AI to increase efficiency in simple, repetitive tasks was also described as a resource. Additionally, interviews identified supporting the personal resource of autonomy in employees as an example of providing resources.

The project builds upon the current understanding of how to mitigate burnout in employees. The project's findings provided theoretical insight and actionable knowledge for practitioners by connecting practical strategies to the JD-R model. The findings were intuitive to the creative nature of event professionals, as the most effective theme identified was prioritizing *the employee* theme. Future researchers should expand on the project's findings by increasing sample diversity to compare how effective strategies to reduce burnout can differ across different segments of the event industry or types of events. Event industry leaders can utilize the findings from this project to mitigate burnout among their employees, enhance engagement, and reduce turnover.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Exemplar Interview Protocol for Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Research Project

Interview Protocol	
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage. Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview, thereby setting the stage.</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Michelle Healy. I am a Doctoral Candidate with Walden University. The purpose of this interview is to identify and explore the effective strategies used by business leaders to reduce burnout in employees with high-demand workloads. I am going to ask you six questions, which I would like your responses to. Then, I will conclude the interview. Do you have any questions?</p>
<p>Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase the participant response. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth</p>	<p>Interview Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What effective strategies do you use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands? 2. What were the signs or symptoms you recognized and associated with burnout? 3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to reduce burnout? 4. What challenges did you encounter in implementing your strategies to reduce burnout? 5. How did you overcome those challenges? 6. Would you like to share any additional information regarding your effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands that we have not already discussed?
<p>Wrap up the interview thanking participant.</p>	<p>Thank you for participating in the interview, an integral part of my research project.</p>

<p>Schedule a follow-up interview to perform member checking with the participant.</p>	<p>I will contact you in a week to schedule a time for us to review the accuracy of my interpretations of your interview responses.</p>
<p>Follow-up Member Checking Interview</p>	
<p>I will introduce myself and the purpose of the follow-up interview to set the stage.</p>	<p>Hello Participant, Thank you for taking the time to meet with me again to review the accuracy of my interpretations of your interview responses.</p>
<p>I will share a copy of my succinct synthesis for each individual question.</p> <p>I will review my summary of my follow up questions related to my interview questions. I understand the information must be related so that I am probing and adhering to the IRB approval.</p> <p>I will walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Is my interpretation correct? Did I miss anything? Or Would you like to add anything?</p> <p>At the end of the member checking call, I will thank each participant for taking part in my research study.</p>	<p>I will read the questions one at a time and my interpretations of your responses to them and ask you if my interpretation is correct.</p>
	<p>1. What strategies do you use to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p>
	<p>2. What were the signs or symptoms you recognized and associated with burnout? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p>
	<p>3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your strategies to reduce burnout? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p>
	<p>4. What challenges did you encounter in implementing your effective strategies to reduce burnout? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p>
	<p>5. How did you overcome those challenges? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p> <p>6. Would you like to share any additional information regarding your effective strategies to reduce burnout for employees with high workload demands that we have not already discussed? I will read my summary and ask if my interpretation is correct.</p>