

2015

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Kara Chan

Hong Kong Baptist University, karachan@hkbu.edu.hk

Katharina Krainer

Sandra Diehl

Ralf Terlutter

Anqi Huang

This document is the authors' final version of the published article.

APA Citation

Chan, K., Krainer, K., Diehl, S., Terlutter, R., & Huang, A. (2015). An exploratory study on burnout among communication professionals in Hong Kong. *International Conference on Environment, Health, and Media*. Retrieved from https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/hkbu_staff_publication/4663

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An exploratory study on burnout among communication professionals in Hong Kong

Kara Chan, Ph.D., Professor¹
Katharina Krainer, Ph.D. student²
Sandra Diehl, Ph.D., Associate Professor³
Ralf Terlutter, Ph.D., Professor²
Anqi Huang, Research assistant¹

1 Department of Communication Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University

2 Department of Business Management Marketing and International Management,
Alpen-Adria Universitaet Klagenfurt

3 Department of Media and Communication Science, Alpen-Adria Universitaet Klagenfurt



- Work stress and work-life imbalance have negative impacts on staff performance and health conditions of the staff.
- A survey among 1,027 employees: 82% of them suffered stress; 75% suffered from lack of exercise; nearly 46% felt exhausted from jobs; 27% took sick leave

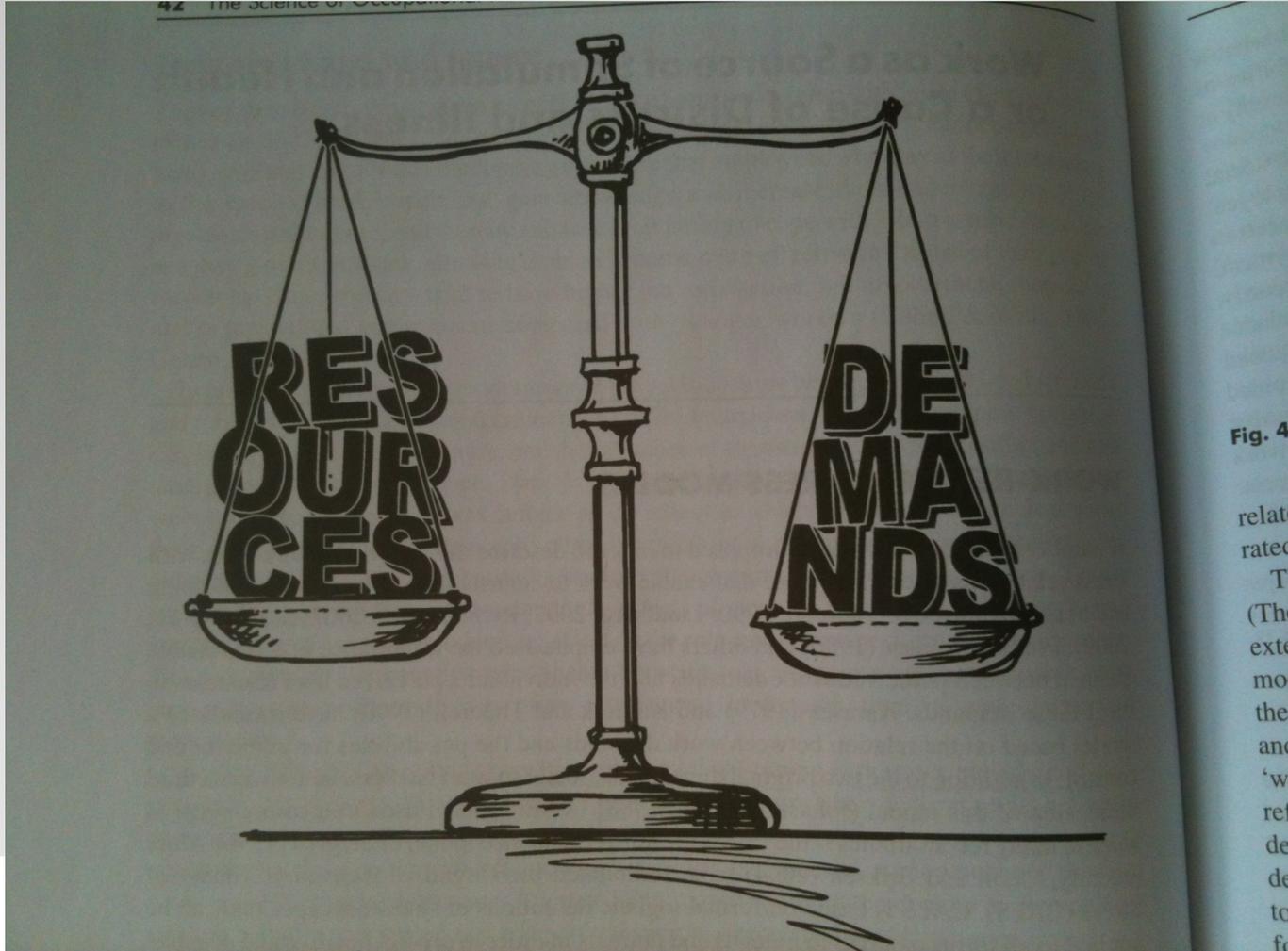
Background

- 32,243 persons in mass communication industry in Hong Kong - 0.8% of the total labor force (Vocational Training Council, 2014)
- High turnover rate: 12% changed jobs in the past 12 months (Vocational Training Council, 2014)

Background

- Burnout: a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among employees (Maslach, 1982).

- The JD-R model by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli (2001).



- Job demands: physical, social, or organizational aspects of the jobs that **required physical or mental efforts**
- Job resources: physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that might **help the employee to achieve work goals, or reduce job demands, or stimulate personal development**

- With modern communication technology, work can be conducted anytime anywhere
- Knowledge workers and freelance communication professionals employed in the knowledge – intensive industries are vulnerable of overworking
- The communication industry is an example of a knowledge – intensive industry

- to identify job demands of the communication industry that is related to burnouts
- to identify job resources of the communication industry that are related to burnouts;
- to investigate the role of ICTs in the job demands and resources

Research objectives

- An interpretivist approach using a qualitative methodology
- Individual face-to-face interviews
- 13 Chinese interviewees (5M, 8F) aged 20-45 recruited using quota sampling (advertising, public relations, journalism)

data analysis using Nvivo version 10

METHODOLOGY

- 21 to 66 minutes for each person
- Conducted in Cantonese or in Mandarin
- Conducted from February to April 2014

METHODOLOGY

Job demands

Freq

Difficult clients	6
Heavy workload	5
Tight deadline	4
Strive for perfection	4
High standard/expectation from supervisor	3
Coworkers not friendly	2
Not being appreciated/valued	2
Conflicting views with supervisor	1
High standard/expectation from colleague of another department	1

RESULTS

- “Clients are always picky until the last moment before deadline. However, the picky clients wouldn’t make me burnout. If time permits, I can revise the works according to the clients’ requirement. However, the clients are always very busy. Sometimes, they are too busy to check our work. But we have no rights to make final decision. I think the pressure mainly comes from deadline.”

Job Demands-difficult client

- “Boss is boss. He/she won’t consider if you have had a lot of take on hand. Man power has been reduced a lot in media industry. However, the workload hasn’t been reduced. The workload of 6 people in the past may now load onto 2 employees or even one.”

Job Demands-heavy workload

- “We are required to do accurate reporting in a short period of time. As journalists, we collect information, arrange it and report it to superior. For example, I have to work on a longer version when a shorter version was approved by the superior. After ROV and SOT, the following work is video editing. I need to finish all this work within 2 hours. It is very rush.”

Job Demands – tight deadline

- “Even the quality is not required by them, I have my own standard. I don’t like to do the copy and past work. I want to have interviews and add new ideas. I am serious in writing style and the word choice. It should not be that casual”

Job Demands – strive for perfection

Job resources

Freq

Social support from colleagues	6
Social support from management	4
Social support from supervisor	3
Job variety & autonomy	3
Compensation leave	2
Monetary reward and bonus	1
A permanent contract	1

Job Resources

- “My colleagues are also helpful. The cooperation is important. For example, the news clipping should be announced at 6 pm. However, I am still working on it.... Some colleague would offer help if they are not busy. They would help me listen to the sound bite and type the subtitle first. Then, I can do the editing work. Help from colleagues can release my pressure. .”

Job Resources

- “Colleagues of other departments also support us. Our account servicing department cooperates with creative, production or even the finance department. The colleagues understand us. They understand the toughness of our work. They would not make things more difficult for us.”

Job Resources

ICT as job demand

Freq.

Extend work to non-office hour

5

Accessible by boss or client anytime

4

Information overload

1

Intrude private life

1

Need time to learn the functions of ICT

1

Role of ICT in the JD-R model

ICT as job resources

Freq.

Better communication with colleagues at different locations	4
Able to access relevant documents anyplace anytime	3
Better communication with clients	3
Better connection with informants	3
Save time for face-to-face meeting and business travel	2
Better connection with suppliers	1
Informed about job progress instantly	1
Monitor public opinion	1

Role of ICT in the JD-R model

- “I have a client who contacts me in the morning every day. He starts to work at 8:30 am, but I work from 10:30 am. He gives me ‘morning call’ when he arrives at his office. He doesn’t want to disturb me and send me WhatsApp messages. Every morning, besides turning off the alarm clock I would see his message. He writes ‘call me back’ every day. Before my working hour starts I have been office already.”

ICT as job demand

- “My boss can disturb me anytime. Once I had an interview in Mainland China. It was already difficult to make observations. I had limited time for only one day and had to write the article at night. He/she kept asking me find the core of the issue and dig out the manipulator behind the scene. He/she sat in the office in Hong Kong and typed these words on phone, but I was busy in asking questions on the spot. It is very annoying.”

ICT as job demand

- “These ICTs are very efficient. My company has a Whatsapp group with a dozen of colleagues. For example, I am in a press conference. Once I receive the press release, I would take a photo of it and send it to my company. Or I would summarize it and make it to a 30-second news article. At the same time, the camera man is shooting the scene. The editor is able to revise the article at the company. Both the colleagues inside and outside has a concept on what is going on in the press conference.”

ICT as resources

- “In the past we used fax or courier (for delivery). Emails help a lot. People now are used to communicate via WhatsApp even in business. For example, we can't find someone immediately via email. He/she may have a conference, but he/she is able to check the WhatsApp message. We can inform them immediately. These make the working efficiency higher. It shortens the time of communication.”

- the work stress related to serving an external client seemed to be higher than that to serving an internal client.
- external client involved: the deadlines seemed to be extremely demanding as well as non-negotiable.
- little respect for the personal life of the employees in the advertising and public relations industry.

Discussion

- social support was perceived as the most important job resources
- little expectation for organizational changes initiated by the employers. Companies could do very little to improve the working conditions drastically to combat the burnout issue.

Discussion

- interviewees expressed hate-love relation to the use of ICT.
- The convenience and improved productivity came with a price that the employees were deprived of buffer for relaxation that was created in the past because of waiting for new information

Discussion

- ICT increases the job demand because of a tighter deadline and more frequent last-minute changes. When information becomes instant, the employees were not able to enjoy any rest during the work process.

Discussion

- Main job demands: management of clients' expectation; deadlines; striving for perfection
- Main job resources: social support from colleagues and seniors
- ICT was perceived more often as job resources than as job demands

Conclusion

The End

Thank you