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THE BURNOUT CONVERSATION:

**Co-creation workshop series on work stress
for NGO employees supporting immigrants**

ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the development and execution of "The Burnout Conversation", a series of two workshops rooted in co-creation and design thinking frameworks. The workshops were designed to promote open discussion and facilitate collaboration on burnout prevention strategies among NGO employees working with immigrants. The need for this development project was determined through academic literature, previous surveys done in Finland, as well as dialogues with professionals in the field. The project was conducted in collaboration with Moniheli, a Finnish nationwide multicultural network.

The discussions that took place during workshops emphasized the complex and multilevel nature of burnout in the social sector. The factors affecting well-being and suggested solutions highlight the collective responsibility in tackling burnout. In the context of this project, the participants extensively discussed the role of NGOs in fostering the well-being of their employees. The key outputs of this project included a digital document detailing the workshop discussions, workshop programs and materials, as well as recommendations for future co-creative initiatives addressing burnout in social services.

As demonstrated by the thesis, there is an interest and a need in the multicultural social welfare sector for open discussion and collaborative problem-solving on the topic of burnout. The insightful observations and ideas from the workshop participants showed the value and potential of initiatives rooted in collaborative creation. Future projects utilizing the framework of co-creation could offer innovative pathways to address the pervasive issue of burnout in the social sector.

Keywords: Burnout, Burnout in Social Work, Burnout Prevention, Work-Related Stress, Workplace Well-Being, Non-Governmental Organization, Immigrant Social Work, Co-Creation, Mental Health

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Alena Gurshchenkova, whose care, knowledge, and advice have been invaluable. Thank you for keeping me grounded and encouraging me to do my best without compromising my well-being. Your belief in me makes all things possible.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	4
1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2 KEY CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS.....	8
2.1 Occupational burnout and work-related stress.....	8
2.2 Workplace well-being.....	9
2.3 Co-creation and design thinking frameworks.....	10
3 THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS.....	13
4 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT.....	16
4.1 Burnout and workplace well-being in Finland.....	16
4.2 Legislation and occupational health.....	17
4.3 NGO funding in Finland.....	18
4.4 Workplace support in the social services field in Finland.....	19
4.5 Working life partner, Moniheli.....	21
4.6 Target group.....	21
5 PROCESS DESCRIPTION.....	24
5.1 Initiation.....	24
5.2 Planning.....	26
5.3 Execution.....	31
6 PROJECT OUTPUTS.....	33
6.1 “The Burnout Conversation” Workshop Series.....	33
6.2 Outcomes Document.....	36
7 FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION.....	39
7.1 Evaluation methods.....	39
7.2 Participant feedback.....	40
7.3 Working life partner feedback.....	42
7.4 Reaching objectives.....	43
7.5 Implementation of the co-creation framework.....	44

8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	47
9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	50
9.1 Conclusions	50
9.2 Professional development	51
9.3 Recommendations.....	53
SOURCES.....	56
APPENDIX 1. “The Burnout Conversation” Workshop Outcomes Report	61
APPENDIX 2. Workshop Presentation Slides	71
APPENDIX 3. The Wheel of Balance Workshop Structure	75

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of burnout in the academic discussion was first articulated in the context of social and health care fields by H. B. Bradley in 1969 and H. J. Freudenberger in 1974 (Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996, pp. 311-312). Over the decades, the subject of burnout has been examined in various professional fields, gaining considerable attention in media and academia. Despite years of public discourse, research, preventative measures, and treatment, it remains a prevalent issue around the world. Finland is not exempt from this: one in four respondents of the survey “How is Finland doing? (“Miten Suomi voi?”) experienced signs of work burnout (Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2023).

The demanding working environments of social services workers put them at a heightened risk of burnout. Talentia Union of Social Workers reported that nearly half of social workers feel exhausted from their work and are considering a change of field (Karsio, 2022). Burnout, a consequence of long-term stress, significantly impairs the mental and physical well-being of professionals. Burnout can manifest in cynicism, concentration and reasoning problems, and emotional dysregulation (Schaufeli et al., 2019, p. 8-9). These symptoms compromise the quality of support that social welfare professionals can provide to their clients.

Citing words of one of the professionals of the social services field, A. Kuosti (personal communication, 2023), “Social non-profit organizations act as society's nervous system, being the first to detect early shifts. To promote well-being, we must embody it ourselves”. When the nervous system's health deteriorates, society's ability to function properly might suffer. Therefore, I believe that prioritizing the well-being of social sector professionals and finding solutions for mitigating work-related stress and burnout is crucial.

Narrowing down the scope of the project, I decided to turn its focus towards burnout and work-related stress within Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that work with immigrant communities. I implemented the project in collaboration with

Moniheli, a Finnish nationwide multicultural network. Moniheli focuses on developing the Finnish multicultural environment for ensuring immigrant well-being through strengthening cooperation within the immigrant social work sector, advocacy, and lobbying, as well as direct client work (Moniheli, n.d.).

The aim of this thesis was to develop, implement, and evaluate two workshops that foster dialogue on work-related stress and burnout among NGO employees working with immigrants. Based on the frameworks of co-creation and design thinking, I designed the workshops in a way that would promote open discussions about burnout and to facilitate collaboration on solutions for work-related stress reduction and burnout prevention. The outcomes were documented for Moniheli's future use. Besides hoping to foster burnout conversation in the social services field, the purpose of conducting this small-scale project was to test the co-creative approach to the topic and provide recommendation for future initiatives.

2 KEY CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, I delve into the key concepts and frameworks that served as a foundation for this project. I provide the definitions and factors of occupational burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being. I also introduce and justify two frameworks that informed the execution of this project: co-creation and design thinking.

2.1 Occupational burnout and work-related stress

In this thesis, the discussion is centered around occupational burnout, a subject of research for over half a century. Burnout was defined and redefined within various contexts – medical, psychological, sociological, corporate. The lack of consensus on the definition complicates research, prevention, and treatment. Guseva Canu et al. (2021, p. 104) attempted to synthesize different understandings of burnout in a harmonized definition. The resulting definition, approved by experts from 29 countries is: "In a worker, occupational burnout or occupational physical AND emotional exhaustion state is an exhaustion due to prolonged exposure to work-related problems".

Emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion are the most referenced when talking about burnout (Guseva Canu et al., 2021, p. 102). Besides exhaustion, The Burnout Assessment Tool (Schaufeli et al., 2019, p. 8) lists mental distancing, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment as core symptoms, and psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints as secondary symptoms. These manifestations can lead to disengagement at work and increased rates of sick leaves and absences (Awa et al., 2010).

It is important to note that within this project I was not aiming to diagnose burnout or prescribe professional interventions. Instead, I was focusing on burnout awareness and prevention by creating a conversation about the causes of the condition and ways to address them. The leading risk factors of burnout are overwhelming

job demands, time pressure, role ambiguity, prolonged work stress, lack of agency at work, an imbalance between effort and reward, unfair treatment, and lack of managerial communication and support (Awa et al., 2010).

The nature of social services work, as well as the personal qualities of people drawn to this field, can increase risk factors for burnout (Smullens, 2015). When addressing burnout in social work, Smullens (2015) lists related phenomena such as compassion fatigue, counter transference, and vicarious traumatization (also known as secondary traumatic stress). Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017, p. 131) list drivers of burnout and engagement in physicians, which might also be relevant for social services professionals: workload, efficiency, personal meaning in work, culture and values, control and flexibility, work community, and work-life balance. They also point out that the abovementioned dimensions are affected by factors at personal, work unit, organizational, as well as national levels.

I was using the term "burnout and work-related stress" throughout the thesis to indicate that the focus was not on diagnosing occupational burnout but on addressing the preceding factors. Workplace stress has been defined as "the change in one's physical or mental state in response to situations (stressors) that pose challenge or threat" (Zimbardo et al., 2003, as cited in Colligan & Higgins, 2006, p. 90). While some stress can be positively challenging, a prolonged exposure to intense stress can lead to burnout, emotional distress, and physical illness (Colligan & Higgins, 2006, p. 90).

2.2 Workplace well-being

The opposite of burnout is engagement and well-being at work (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017, pp. 131-133). Well-being at work is a multidimensional concept. According to Fisher (2014, pp. 10-14), overall well-being in life is a combination of hedonic or subjective well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and social well-being. In the context of work, subjective well-being includes job satisfaction and positive experiences at work. Eudaimonic well-being includes feelings of professional fulfillment, purpose, and competence. Social well-being refers to

satisfaction in relationships with colleagues as well as management. (Fisher, 2014, pp. 14-22)

Burnout prevention and ensuring employee well-being should include different methods of support. In their model of creating a culture of wellness at the workplace, Scholars of Wellness at Northwestern Medicine highlight the importance of approaching the topic from three angles: supporting the individuals, enhancing the work environment, and building a community within their institution (American Medical Association (AMA), 2022).

Within this project I put the emphasis on discussions of workplace well-being, in addition to addressing burnout and work-related stress. Mänttari-van der Kuip (2015, p. 68-69) underscores the importance of this balanced approach, advocating for the tackling of negative factors and the fostering of positive aspects in the practice of social service workers. Additionally, envisioning a healthy and supportive work environment can act as a motivating factor for participants, fostering idea generation, strength-focused and solution-oriented thinking.

2.3 Co-creation and design thinking frameworks

The design and execution of the workshop programs for this thesis project drew inspiration from two frameworks: co-creation and design thinking. Despite not strictly adhering to these methodologies, I aimed at incorporating key principles and stages within the workshop series.

Co-creation is a participatory approach to the development of services that actively involves various stakeholders, including the end-users, in designing and sometimes initiating a project (Brandsen et al., 2018, p. 13). As Bason (2010, p. 8) puts it, it's a "a creation process where new solutions are created *with* the people, not *for* them". Co-creation leverages diverse perspectives to address a problem, using the insights, experiences, and ideas of direct stakeholders to create practical solutions.

Throughout his book, “Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society”, Bason (2010) argues that co-creation is essential in designing social services effectively, especially in the age of wicked problems – problems that are complex, consist of interconnected and conflicting factors, and do not have “correct” solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973, pp. 161-167). Occupational burnout fits the definition of a wicked problem.

The paradigm of co-creation addressed the central question of this project process – how to attempt burnout prevention in a way that aligns with the real-world needs of social service professionals? Bason (2010, p. 198) suggests that a solution that is made with the people is more likely to be used by them, and to lead to more successful outcomes.

Designing the workshops, I was using the principles of co-creation as guidance. The participants, being the people who are most likely to be affected by burnout in multicultural NGO work, were central in defining the sector’s needs and ideating potential prevention strategies. From the stages of the co-creation process described by Bason (2010, p. 174), Framing, Knowing, Analyzing, Synthesizing, Creating, Scaling, and Learning, my ideas were most guided by the first four stages due to the project’s small scope.

Design thinking, as Bason (2010, p. 135) puts it, is “the intellectual and practical foundation of the co-creation process”. It is a systematic and collaborative approach to creative problem-solving (Luchs et al., 2015, p. xxi) that, like co-creation, emphasizes a human-centered approach. Design thinking aims to develop an expanded understanding of the end user, define concrete problem statements, challenge assumptions, and identify strategies that are not immediately apparent. It typically consists of five stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. In this project I integrated the first three stages into the workshop design, drawing on existing design thinking workshop models and tools.

Implementing a co-creative process in its entirety would require a greater amount of resources, extensive multi-stakeholder cooperation, a wider time frame, and a long-term commitment from the participants (Fox et al., 2021, p. 8; Liedtka et al.,

2017, p. 9) – resources beyond the reach of a bachelor's thesis project. Consequently, in this project I decided to focus on implementing the initial stages of co-creation and design thinking and adapting the frameworks to the project context. Having explored the later stages during project planning for a comprehensive understanding of the methods, I did not include them in the workshops' scope. If this project had a larger timeframe, the target group would ideally be involved from the initiation stage, participating in the workshop planning. Due to time constraints, I planned the workshop together with the working-life partner, and the framework of co-creation was only realized during the workshops.

The aim was to understand the experiences of potential end users of burnout prevention initiatives in the multicultural NGO sector, define problems, and ideate solutions. Future projects could extend this work by also brainstorming, refining, testing, and implementing strategies based on the outcomes of these workshops. This focused approach ensured the workshops remained productive and made the most effective use of available resources.

3 THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

The aim of this thesis project was to develop, implement, and evaluate two collaborative workshops designed to discuss and ideate possible solutions for work-related stress and burnout among NGO employees working with immigrants. The sessions were focused on recognizing burnout signs, identifying factors that cause stress or promote well-being in the multicultural NGO sector, and brainstorming possible burnout prevention strategies. The project was conducted in collaboration with Moniheli, a network supporting NGOs working with immigrants. Moniheli recognized the pressing need for addressing burnout in the high-stress field of immigrant social work.

Interactive and collaborative workshops on these topics can benefit the social sector by promoting open mental health discussions among NGO workers and addressing the topic of workplace well-being at multiple levels: personal, organizational, and structural. Such initiatives are needed to ensure that social sector workers can continue to support their clients sustainably without harming their own well-being. The purpose of conducting this development project was to plan and test a workshop series on a small scale to provide recommendations for future development projects on burnout prevention in the NGO sector.

To define the objectives for reaching the aim, I used the SMART method and analyzed whether each objective is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (Yemm, 2012). For the full assessment, see TABLE 1 and TABLE 2. The objectives for reaching the aim were:

- Foster an open discussion about burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being among participants from various organizations in the social sector.
- Facilitate collaboration for actionable solutions to potentially reduce stress and prevent burnout at the workplace.

TABLE 1. SMART analysis of the first objective for this thesis project.

Objective 1: Foster an open discussion about burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being among participants from various organizations in the social sector.	
Specific	<p>Research the literature on signs and causes of burnout and work-related stress, as well as factors of workplace well-being to define specific conversation points.</p> <p>Facilitate a structured conversation in the specific context of NGO employees working with immigrants.</p>
Measurable	Aim to get 3-5 participants for the workshop series and enable each participant to contribute at least once during each of the main conversation topics.
Achievable	<p>Provide a safer space through discussing common group rules which include confidentiality and respect.</p> <p>Prepare plans for the workshops outlining themes for the discussion and activities to engage participants.</p>
Relevant	<p>Address the need for open discussion on the topics, which was identified through needs assessment and confirmed by the work-life partner.</p> <p>Ensure that the sessions are personally relevant for the participants by asking them what is most important for them to discuss in the beginning.</p>
Time-bound	<p>Accomplish the facilitation of discussion within the time frame of the two scheduled workshops.</p> <p>Give time for the participants to think more about the topics in the week between the workshops.</p>

TABLE 2. SMART analysis of the second objective for this thesis project.

Objective 2: Facilitate collaboration for actionable solutions to potentially reduce stress and prevent burnout at the workplace.	
Specific	Direct workshop participants towards generating possible practical, implementable burnout prevention solutions suitable for their work environments during the second workshop.
Measurable	Aim to produce at least three ideas for burnout prevention solutions and strategies. Prepare a report summarizing the key discussion outcomes and suggestions from the workshops in the form of a digital PDF document.
Achievable	Use the Wheel of Balance tool to effectively narrow down the areas of focus and enable participants to ideate constructively within their work contexts.
Relevant	Focus the brainstorming on the areas that the participants define to be most relevant for their workplace well-being, and most currently lacking.
Time-bound	Facilitate collaboration during the second workshop session. Deliver the final report document at the latest on 7 th of August.

4 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the following chapter, I offer an overview of the social context in which this thesis project was developed. “Why?” is a critical question for every project, underscoring the importance of understanding the problem before ideating ways to approach it (Dobson, 2015, p. 22). To define why the project addressing burnout is needed, I begin with looking at the current situation of workplace well-being in Finland, and particularly in Finnish social services. As discussed in Chapter 2, burnout and workplace well-being extend beyond the individual level, encompassing also organizational and structural levels. Therefore, I also cover the legislative and financial conditions in which NGOs operate and provide workplace support. Lastly, I provide information about the working-life partner and the target group of the project.

4.1 Burnout and workplace well-being in Finland

Burnout is a pressing issue in various professional fields around the world, including Finland. Burnout in Finland has been continuously increasing since the year 2020, according to a research project “Miten Suomi voi?” conducted by Työterveyslaitos (Kaltainen & Hakanen, 2023). At the end of 2022, one in four respondents experienced signs of work burnout. According to the Young Professional Attraction Index survey, 87% of young professionals in Finland have reported experiencing burnout or being very close to experiencing it (Academic Work, 2022).

The data collected by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health between 2017 and 2021 shows that work engagement is most common in interpersonal positions that include high demands and responsibility (Hakanen, 2023). 68% of respondents in the social welfare sector reported experiencing high levels of work engagement. According to Hakanen, work engagement has positive implications for health, well-being, and productivity.

Despite the reported high level of work engagement, the Talentia survey found that 48% of social workers are exhausted because of their work (Karsio, 2022). In the social sector, which already suffers from a labor shortage (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2022), 49% of Talentia survey respondents are considering a change of field, reporting ethical conflicts at work, unsustainable workload, and bad management as the main issues. According to the Kunta10 study conducted by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 42% of social workers' sick leaves were caused by mental health disorders, while for the people employed in other fields, this number was only 14-26% (Salo et al., 2016, p. 10).

The contrast of caring deeply for the work while at the same time feeling exhausted and demotivated is reflected in the Social Work Flashmob that took place in 2012 in Finland. The flashmob featured people singing a children's song about a sinking ship. This was a metaphor for how social workers in Finland felt exhausted, overworked, and insufficiently resourced while trying to support their clients (Mänttari-van der Kuip, 2015, p. 11).

Research by Mänttari-van der Kuip (2015, p. 68-69) highlights the coexistence of positive and negative dimensions in the well-being of frontline social workers. She stated that it is necessary to address the causes of decreased mental well-being, such as the reduced ability to practice social work ethically due to increasing demands, budget constraints, and organizational and legislative restrictions. However, she also reported that continuing to support employee engagement and positive well-being, namely through caring for the work community and providing quality supervision, could also yield positive outcomes.

4.2 Legislation and occupational health

The Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act (Työturvallisuuslaki) (23.8.2002/738) explicitly states the employer's responsibility towards maintaining employees' well-being and safety. Section 8 elaborates that the employer needs to take into consideration all the matters related to the job, working conditions, work environment, and employee's personal circumstances. If a problem is

present, the employer must make and execute a plan to better the working conditions. Section 25 also mentions that if an employee is stressed at work to the extent that it may impair their health, the employer is required to find the root causes of the stress and reduce or resolve them with the means available.

The legislative framework guides the role of employees in preventing burnout among their staff. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health has further outlined practical recommendations on burnout prevention at the workplace. First, regular performance appraisals should be held by supervisors to keep track of the employee's progress and plan future work. Second, an early support model, including the list of early signs of burnout and measures preventing the work ability risk, should be used. Third, different actors at the workplace such as supervisors, employees, HR management, occupational safety, and occupational health personnel should actively cooperate to maintain psychological well-being and ability to work of employees. (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, n.d.)

In the context of the thesis project, these legislative guidelines and recommendations help in informing the workshop discussions. They also emphasize the necessity of assessing the current factors contributing to work-related stress of NGO employees and identifying possible solutions. The need to prevent burnout is not only individual; burnout prevention is also a responsibility of the employing organization.

4.3 NGO funding in Finland

Funding for non-governmental healthcare and social welfare organizations in Finland comes from a variety of sources. These include membership fees, participation fees, donations from companies and private individuals, and public grants. Government grants are primarily issued by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations (STEA) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Some of them are provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency for Education, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Municipalities, Regional State Administrative Agency, ELY Centres, and private foundations

participate in the funding of local associations. (SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health, n.d.) Grants can also be received from the European Commission through the European Social Fund (European Commission, n.d.).

Despite the variety of funding sources, future financial stability is a concern for many NGOs. The Järjestöbarometri 2022 report highlights the changes in government funding in 2023-2024 and the health and social services reform (Sote-uudistus) as major factors causing uncertainty, particularly for local associations that receive grants from municipalities. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the income in 63% of the NGOs has decreased. Most of the local healthcare and social welfare NGOs in Finland operate on a small budget. Six out of ten local associations are working on a budget which is under 10,000 euros per year. Most of the associations are relying on volunteer work: only one-sixth of them had paid employees at the beginning of 2022. (SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health, 2022, pp. 174-177.)

Understanding these financial constraints and uncertainties is key to properly addressing work-related stress and burnout in this thesis project. It informs the resources available for interventions and the overall work environment in which NGO employees operate.

4.4 Workplace support in the social services field in Finland

When conceptualizing the project, I had informal conversations with practicing social services workers and social services students in internships. According to those conversations, there is workplace support. However, the practices have significant variations across the social services field.

As it was previously stated in this thesis, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Act (23.8.2002/738) employers are required to take care of employees' well-being. The legislation itself does not provide specific details on what this support is supposed to look like. According to information from workers in the field, in practice, the support could include regular team group meetings

(tiimiaika), group and individual supervision (työnohjausaika), development discussions (kehityskeskustelu), job guidance, and access to a work psychologist. Depending on the type of support, it may be provided by a supervisor, a social worker, a nurse, a psychologist, or as peer support.

In problematic cases, an employee, supervisor, or an occupational health representative can request an occupational health consultation (työterveysneuvottelu) to discuss possible work arrangements to support employee well-being. On its own, diagnosed burnout does not entitle an employee to sick leave, medical treatment, or getting Kela support. However, if the consequences of work exhaustion meet the criteria of medical conditions such as depression, anxiety disorder, or sleep disorder, the employee is entitled to medical support. (Uusitalo-Arola et al., 2022.)

While severe burnout stages with serious medical implications qualify for medical support, preventative and supportive measures are not universally implemented. My discussions with social service workers and students across various workplaces indicated that while government organizations and large NGOs may have robust work-life support practices, the same level of support is not always available in smaller NGOs. According to the reflections of students and professionals, factors such as understaffing, underfunding, and excessive workload could contribute to unstructured and irregular supervision sessions, resulting in the lack of necessary support. Some discussions also referred to the lack of experience of the management in creating a healthy workplace.

While this project cannot directly respond to issues such as difficult client cases, insufficient management, staff shortage, low wages, and large workload, the facilitated workshops provide space for open dialogue. The discussions between members of various organizations in the social sector can help identify gaps, exchange existing practices of support, and collectively brainstorm new solutions. Initiatives that bring attention to burnout in social services can help foster a deeper understanding of workplace well-being, as well as cultivate a culture of proactive measures of workplace support in the sector.

4.5 Working life partner, Moniheli

Moniheli is a Finnish nationwide cooperation network and an expert on immigration. Moniheli is focused on developing the Finnish multicultural environment for ensuring immigrant well-being. The organization is working to achieve these aims through supporting multicultural member organizations, strengthening cooperation within the immigrant social work sector, engaging in advocacy and lobbying work, as well as offering services directly to immigrants. (Moniheli, n.d.)

The contact person from Moniheli reflected that burnout and work stress are relevant issues in NGOs working with immigrants, so this is an area of interest to the organization. After discussions at the planning stage, the cooperation agreement was signed. The working-life partner supported the thesis development through collective brainstorming and advice to refine the project plan to the needs of the organization and make it relevant and accessible to the target group.

Moniheli offered the space for the workshops, materials, and a budget for refreshments. The organization assisted in finding workshop participants through spreading the advertisement on its communication channels, as well as inviting people through professional networks. The contact person was present during the workshops and was able to provide feedback after each workshop.

4.6 Target group

After verbally agreeing to collaboration with Moniheli, the target group of this project was narrowed down to paid NGO employees doing direct work with immigrants. This target group was in the area of interest and expertise of the working-life partner. The ability to narrow the group to a common field is valuable, since the shared professional context of participants makes common understanding and focused discussions more achievable within the scope of the project.

Research on the workplace well-being of social services professionals in the migration and integration field is lacking, so I relied on first-hand experiences. During the needs assessment stage, dialogues with actors from the field raised common concerns. One such issue that may affect well-being of social services professionals is dealing with privilege guilt, a feeling commonly experienced when working with marginalized groups such as, for example, refugees and homeless immigrants. Another stressor is having to plan projects and support clients in a changing socio-political environment. Governmental decisions affect all social welfare fields, however changing migration and integration policies place additional pressure on the migration social welfare field. Specifically, members of NGOs working with immigrants expressed concern about getting funding and proceeding their activities considering the results of the Finnish parliamentary elections in April 2023. This concern was later exacerbated by the news about planned migration and integration policy changes in the Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government programme (Finnish Government, 2023).

The professionals also observed that many NGOs start as volunteer initiatives, and some of their staff members come from volunteering and activism backgrounds. As a result, certain challenging aspects of volunteering and activism may permeate the organizational culture, such as overworking due to passion for the cause, or taking on many professional roles at once. Additionally, individuals who initially start out as activists might sometimes lack formal training or experience in management, leading to an inability to create sustainable structures and administrative practices, as well as provide adequate support for their staff.

The decision to focus on paid employees was made since they are under the protection of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (23.8.2002/738), which means that they are entitled to workplace support for well-being. Due to the limited funding that NGOs receive, it was important to focus on discussions about effective solutions to burnout prevention that could enable the organizations to effectively realize the legislation in practice.

The Moniheli network includes around 120 organizations working on integration from around Finland. Besides that, it is a prominent actor in the field, cooperating

with other multicultural organizations. The reach of Moniheli was invaluable for making the project visible to the target group and finding workshop participants.

The workshop advertisements and invitations specified that they were targeted for NGO employees working with immigrants. The registration was open for everyone. Due to the sensitive nature of the workshop theme, the participants were not required to share personal information, and were informed that no identifiable information would be shared publicly. In the beginning of the workshop, the participants introduced themselves and shared their professional backgrounds. Four participants were employed at NGOs, and one participant came from a private organization which closely cooperated with NGOs. The participants were engaged in various forms of direct work with immigrants, including provision of guidance and support for refugees, development of specific job skills, employment coaching as well as projects in community work. Three of the participants knew each other, having worked together. All the participants had years of experience in the field of migrant social services.

5 PROCESS DESCRIPTION

The project process is based on the five component process groups described by Dobson (2015, pp. 7-11): Initiation, Planning, Execution, Closeout, and continuous Monitoring and Control. Projects do not always follow a straight line and may include some iterations, as Dobson points out. This was the case in this thesis project: the process changed course and adapted guided by ongoing monitoring and control.

The project was originally started in collaboration with the other student. The initiation and the beginning of the planning stages were conducted together, but diverging study schedules made it unfeasible to continue as a group. After deliberation, we decided it would be best to separate our thesis work. Under the supervision of Diaconia UAS professors, the rights to the text of the thesis, as well as the next steps of the processes were decided. Due to the split, the scope, objectives, responsibilities, and resources for the project needed to be reexamined, effectively resetting it to the early planning stage.

5.1 Initiation

The initiation stage, as defined by Dobson (2015, pp. 23-24), sets a project's direction and scope, outlining preliminary schedules, responsibilities, and resources, and identifies stakeholders. It is also where collaborative relationships begin to form.

The idea for this thesis, centered around burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being, was informed by my studies in Diaconia UAS, Finland, and Hannover UAS, Germany, as well as practical placements. Personal interest and discussions during in educational and working life environments fueled the development of this thesis topic, supported by my then-thesis partner.

Throughout the initiation phase, conversations with peer students and experienced professionals from the social services sector provided insights into burnout's multi-faceted nature, which was also reflected in academic literature (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017, p. 131). Client work emerged as a significant stressor, but organizational and institutional factors also played crucial roles. Burnout turned out to be a very relevant concern in the field, potentially preventing the professionals from supporting their clients sufficiently, or even causing them to consider leaving the social services field, contributing to the labor shortage (Karsio, 2022; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2022).

This stage in the thesis process illustrated the concepts of assumptions and constraints outlined by Dobson (2015, p. 29-33). Initially, we assumed that facilitating peer group sessions would be the most effective way to tackle burnout in social services, given our project's time and resource constraints. However, as our needs assessment and discussions unfolded, the complexity of the issue called for a more comprehensive approach.

Following the split in the thesis group and subsequent guidance with my thesis supervisor, the project idea transformed. Drawing from co-creation literature, I chose to conduct workshops with social services professionals, gaining valuable context and potential solutions for burnout prevention directly from the field. Given the time and resource constraints, I prioritized these workshops over developing a product. In doing this, I hoped that the project's results would lay groundwork for future initiatives in burnout prevention and stimulate dialogue among social service professionals.

During this stage, a collaborative opportunity with Moniheli emerged. After an informative discussion about burnout in NGOs with A. Kuosti, a project manager at Moniheli, I reached out to him with a proposal and we agreed that their organization, which supports multicultural NGOs, would be an excellent partner for a project targeting social service professionals. Moniheli's management preliminarily approved our collaboration, and Kuosti became my working life contact person, defining our project's target group as NGO employees working with immigrants.

Throughout the rest of the project, I received continuous support from Moniheli's team.

5.2 Planning

Project planning is an iterative phase where the team defines foundational aspects of a project, such as scheduling, budgeting, communication strategies, risk management, and more (Dobson, 2015, p. 80). The planning of the workshop series started after the final project idea was approved by the working life partner organization. It began with a meeting with my work-life supervisor on April 17th. During the meeting, we discussed key logistics including timing, participants, budget, space, and preliminary workshop program ideas. The planning and implementation coincided with my internship at DigiUp, Moniheli, simplifying communication with the organization's employees. This allowed for easier information gathering, setup of workshop practical matters, and promotional materials.

Time constraints posed a challenge due to the late change in project direction, leaving limited room for workshop planning and execution. The decision was made to hold the workshops in the first two weeks of June. We took into consideration the circumstances of our target group. The end of May was a time for applying for the STEA grant, which could occupy many NGO employees, restricting their ability to participate in our workshop series. Scheduling the workshop later than the first weeks of June would also not be fitting for the target group, since many employees go on holiday at this time.

To develop the workshop programs, I referred to literature on co-creation and design thinking. For understanding my role, I referred to the recommendations of Haataja et al. (2018, p): keep own opinions out of the process to keep neutrality, create trust, orient the discussion towards concrete objectives, navigate group dynamics, ensure participation, and summarize.

Within this project's limitations, the workshops were aimed to follow the initial stages of the co-creation process suggested by Bason (2010, pp. 174-191):

Framing, Knowing, Analyzing, Synthesizing. The first workshop session focused on problem framing and understanding, while the second facilitated the synthesis of gathered knowledge into potential solutions.

The foundational "visualize" and "emphasize" stages of the design thinking process, typically directed at envisioning service users, were adapted to encourage the sharing of personal experiences of the workshop participants, key stakeholders of the work-related stress and burnout issue. These stages foster innovative solutions by encouraging the generation of ideas from personal perspectives and experiences (Luchs, 2015, p. 3z). In the first workshop, I decided to use Resilio (OH Cards, n.d.) picture cards for this purpose.

The second workshop was planned around the Wheel of Balance method (Byrne, 2005, pp. 127-128). With the guidance from a career coach A. Gurshchenkova (personal communication, 2023), the tool was adapted to the topic of workplace well-being. The resulting workshop structure is described in APPENDIX 3. This tool facilitated the design thinking stages of "defining" and "ideating" solutions. Participants would identify critical workplace well-being factors through dot-voting, rate them on a scale 1 to 10 based on their experiences, and brainstorm solutions to enhance these protective factors. This structured approach aimed to prioritize issues and generate solutions in an engaging, personalized, and visual manner.

Drawing from various frameworks, group and workshop facilitation literature, I designed the two workshop programs. At this stage, I sought the expertise of a career coach experienced in working with burnout and facilitating workshops. Additionally, I presented my plans during a meeting arranged by my supervisor, garnering feedback from him and two Moniheli interns. Given that I was the sole planner, external perspectives proved invaluable for improving the workshop plans.

The duration of the workshops was selected based on the advice of a Moniheli employee experienced in hosting workshops for our target group. For the best results, it is recommended to hold 2-3 hour long co-creation workshops in the

morning (Haataja et al., 2018, pp. 41-40). Considering the circumstances of the target group, the chosen time was Saturday, 11:00-13:00 on two consecutive weekends.

Bason (2010, p. 178) suggests that in the ideation stage of a co-creation project, the number of participants should ideally not exceed 6-8 people to foster optimal and comfortable communication. Considering the complexity of the topic and the short time frame of the workshops, I aimed to have around five participants for the workshops. This would ensure that everyone had enough time to contribute to the discussions.

A comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis (Gürel & Tat, 2017, pp. 995-999) was performed and iteratively reassessed throughout the planning phase of the project to manage the risks and take full advantage of the available opportunities. The analysis was particularly crucial given the changing operational environment and project's objectives. The final iteration of the SWOT is presented in TABLE 4.

TABLE 4. SWOT Analysis.

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interest and knowledge about burnout and workplace well-being in social work, acquired from academic literature, and discussions. • Skills and competences developed from group facilitation and project management courses, as well as prior experience. • Co-creative approach fosters comprehensive and innovative solutions. • Application of both theory (burnout prevention, workplace well-being), and practical approaches (co-creation, design thinking, workshop tools) improves the workshop content and effectiveness.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of the project during internship at Moniheli streamlines communication with work-life partner. • Support, guidance, and resources from the work-life partner, thesis supervisors, and a professional career coach.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient time and resources to conduct the full co-creation process. • Short time for project planning and execution due to student's study schedule. • Having a single person carry out the project adds significant constraints, limits the range of perspectives, and makes illness and personal circumstances significant risk factors. • Lack of prior experience in conducting a co-creation workshop.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low costs of implementation due to a small scale and utilization of work-life partner's premises. • Available literature on burnout, burnout prevention, and work-related well-being, particularly in the social sector. • Relevancy of the topic (burnout among NGO employees) can attract stakeholders and participants. • The workshop outcomes document, shared with the work-life partner and published in this thesis, can serve to increase awareness of burnout in the NGO sector and possible solutions. • Participants of the project can network with each other for support and ideas exchange after the end of the project. • The project report could serve as a reference for future projects in the field, by students or professionals. • Learning from the project contributes to the author's professional development.

Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential difficulty of finding enough participants due to the busy nature of the NGO sector. • Project schedule can conflict with participants' availability due to work and holidays. • Since the workshop series consists of two meetings, not all participants may be able to attend both. • The sensitive nature of the topic may affect comfort and participation of the workshop attendees, which may undermine reaching the objectives. • The group dynamics and comfort of the participants might be negatively affected by possible existing relationships due to the interconnectedness of the multicultural NGO field.
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The SWOT assessment supported understanding of the full context of the development project, which ensured that I was prepared for navigating the challenges. From the table, it is evident that the project faced significant limitations and threats. However, it also had resources and support, and a potential for impact, which supported my motivation and resolve to continue the project. I scaled the scope of the project to manage the abovementioned constraints realistically. I utilized the available support and resources to execute the project to the best possible extent despite the obstacles.

In the planning phase, the objectives for each workshop were determined. The first day of the workshop series, "Identifying Needs", was designed to explore the issue of burnout, discuss current support resources, and identify challenges and needs within the NGO sector. The second workshop, titled "Co-creating Solutions", aimed to facilitate collaborative brainstorming to create change in the organizations. After solidifying the objectives and contents of the two workshops, signing the work-life cooperation agreement, and confirming logistics, the project proceeded to the execution stage.

5.3 Execution

I started promoting "The Burnout Conversation" workshop series to the target demographic starting late May, using various channels such as Moniheli WhatsApp group, LinkedIn, Facebook, and an email newsletter. Additionally, personal invites were sent out by me and my supervisor.

In the lead-up to the workshop days, I was refining and rehearsing the specific plans for the workshops, preparing necessary materials, presentations, printing, and refreshments. In the week before the workshop, I had a final call with my supervisor to confirm the plans. The supervisor was present during both workshops. Before the workshops, I had an assistant to prepare the space and meet the participants downstairs, after which the person left. The workshop programs are detailed in Chapter 6.1.

The first workshop took place at Moniheli premises from 11:00-13:30 on June 3rd, 2023, with five participants. The session began with introductions and discussion of safer space rules. The focus was confidentiality and respect for all opinions, and I asked the participants to add any other rules they could think of. To support the discussions and common understanding, I prepared and presented several informational slides about burnout and workplace well-being, rooted in academic literature (see APPENDIX 2). However, the slides were made and explained in a short and accessible way for participants that may have different levels of understanding of the topics, keeping in mind that English might not be the first language for most. I used interactive word clouds as a tool for starting the topics of conversation. Most of the workshop time was dedicated to participant discussions. As a facilitator, I did not share my personal opinions. Occasionally, I summarized what was said and asked questions to stimulate discussion. To re-engage the participants after the break and ground the well-being discussion in personal experience, "Resilio" (OH Cards, n.d.) image cards were used.

The program underwent some adjustments to cater to the discussion dynamics set by the participants. The participants were given space to discuss the topics they found most relevant. To save time, I decided to ask the participants to write

down the problem statements about burnout in the field and then briefly elaborate on them. Managing the time allocation for engaging and complex conversations proved challenging, resulting in the workshop running overtime. I asked the participants if they were willing to stay for longer to discuss, and the majority agreed while being free to leave at any time.

Post-workshop, I summarized the discussions and sent a PDF document with the outcomes to the participants, including a link to a Burnout Assessment Tool (Schaufeli et al., 2019) that they were interested in. The outcomes from this first session formed the basis for the second workshop.

The second workshop was rescheduled to accommodate participants' requests and took place from 13:00-15:30 on June 11th. However, due to last-minute issues, only two participants were able to attend the second program. While the reduced number of participants narrowed the diversity of perspectives, it also allowed for even deeper engagement in the topic from the participants, who now had more time to give input. For this session, an adapted version of the Wheel of Balance structure (see APPENDIX 3) was used to choose the most relevant and problematic areas of focus and brainstorm possible solutions.

I sent the final document summarizing the workshop series' outcomes to the working life partner on August 1st, and later to the participants. During the holiday season in June-July, many Moniheli employees would be away, so there was no urgency. The extended timeline allowed for a thorough synthesis and organization of the workshop discussion outcomes.

In conclusion, the project's primary aim was achieved through the facilitation of the two workshops and the provision of discussion outcomes document. Although the practical execution deviated from the original plan, the workshops generated valuable insights that aligned with the project's objectives. The co-creation framework was primarily used during the two workshop sessions. Throughout the rest of the project process, I was planning and arranging the activities with the support of working life partner, thesis supervisors, and other professionals.

6 PROJECT OUTPUTS

The outputs of this project were two workshops and a report on digital workshop outcomes, which summarized the discussions. The workshop sessions utilized the frameworks of co-creation and design thinking and focused on burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being in NGOs working with immigrants.

6.1 “The Burnout Conversation” Workshop Series

The main output of this project was a two-part workshop series the “Burnout Conversation” which took place in June 2023. The participants were employees of different NGOs working with immigrants. Each session took around 2,5 hours.

The first session, “Identifying Needs”, was held on 03.06.2023 with five attendees. After establishing safer space rules, the main program started with a general discussion of burnout and work-related stress in the field to build common understanding. Following a personal sharing image cards activity, the participants talked about workplace well-being and concluded with creating a list of current challenges and needs in the NGO sector. See TABLE 5 for the workshop program.

TABLE 5. The First Workshop Implementation: Identifying Needs.

Program	Workshop Experience
Introduction and group rules (20 min)	<p>The participants introduced themselves, sharing their professional backgrounds. I reiterated the goals of the workshops and the use of anonymized outcomes in thesis. The participants then signed the consent forms.</p> <p>The safer space group rules were established, with emphasis on confidentiality and respect.</p>

Burnout and work-related stress (30 min)	First, the participants were asked what is most important for them to discuss today on the topic, which was accounted for during the workshop. Then, participants discussed their associations with "burnout" and shared their experiences and observations about burnout in the multicultural NGO sector. The flow of the discussion was led by the participants while I used prepared guiding questions when the engagement was lower.
Break (10 min)	
Personal sharing (15 min)	The participants shared their current personal experience at work. They chose and discussed "Resilio" image cards with the prompt "Tune in with how you are feeling at work currently. Find a card that represents this feeling".
Workplace well-being and defining current gaps (30 min)	Participants shared what "workplace well-being" means for them. In the end, the participants were asked to conclude what was discussed by writing down and later elaborating on the problem statements: "What current issues lead to reduced workplace well-being and burnout?".
Closing (15 min)	The participants were asked for feedback on the workshop. Due to active discussions running overtime, the closing session was shortened, so some participants who had to leave only gave short feedback.

On 11.06.2023, two people attended the second session "Co-creating solutions". According to an adapted Wheel of Balance structure (see APPENDIX 3), the participants outlined the factors affecting well-being in NGO work, reflected on their workplaces, and brainstormed practical solutions. See the workshop program in TABLE 6.

TABLE 6. The Second Workshop Implementation: Co-creating Solutions.

Program	Workshop Experience
Introduction (15 min)	The goal for the second workshop was stated. I presented the results of the first workshop and initiated a discussion with “Since last week, have you had any new thoughts and ideas?”.
Identifying focus areas (15 min)	Based on the first workshop outcomes, the components of a workplace that affect well-being were put on the wall on sticky notes and discussed. After adding the components that the participants felt were still missing, they voted to select the eight most relevant factors.
Determining common understanding (30 min)	The participants discussed what each of the components means for them if it was 1/10 (the worst scenario) and 10/10 (the ideal scenario). The participants developed a common understanding of the desired state in these focus areas, as well as got initial ideas of solutions.
Break (10 min)	
Ideation of solutions (35 min)	The participants rated each component as it is right now in their working life on a printed picture of a wheel. Starting with the components with the lowest rating, a brainstorming session followed with the question: “What needs to happen that you would raise your vote by 1 point?”. The participants went through four components. The proposed solutions were discussed and recorded on sticky notes.
Closing (15 min)	At the end, the participants responded to the question “Which of these actions could be implemented at your organization?” and gave feedback: “What was important for you in this workshop series?”, “What worked well or didn’t work well?”.

The outcomes of the workshops were observations and ideas from work experience of professionals in the NGO field working with immigrants. Later I compiled

an outcomes document using the conclusions from those discussions. Additionally, the workshops encouraged conversations and reflections about burnout, as the participants shared that they would continue them outside of the workshops. The workshop discussions motivated some participants to take proactive steps in caring for their own well-being. The workshop series brought professionals with common values together, which led to new professional connections being built.

Overall, the workshop series achieved the objectives set for this thesis. Besides those objectives, it provided personal and professional value to the participants. Lastly, the interest and active contribution from all participants suggest that the topic of burnout is very relevant for the sector, and they also highlight the potential of co-creative methods in challenging this issue.

6.2 Outcomes Document

The written outcomes of the workshops were detailed in a 9-page digital document which I sent to the working-life partner and the workshop participants (see APPENDIX 1). The document described conclusions from the discussions that the participants had. In the beginning, I included concise summaries of the most important points of each workshop, followed by more detailed versions. The purpose of the document is to represent the needs and solutions offered by the employees of NGOs supporting immigrants. I aimed to keep the information structured and simple, without including additional academic analysis, so that it is strictly relevant to the field and understandable by a wide audience. The report does not include identifiable information and is attached to this thesis with consent from participants and the working life supervisor.

The described outcome of the first workshop is a list of issues that lead to work-related stress and burnout in the NGOs working with immigrants. It includes examples of how the issues manifest in practice and what gaps they indicate. The problematic areas discussed encompassed personal, organizational, and structural dimensions. Most of the factors were said to be intertwined on all levels: personal factors influencing social dynamics at work, organizational culture

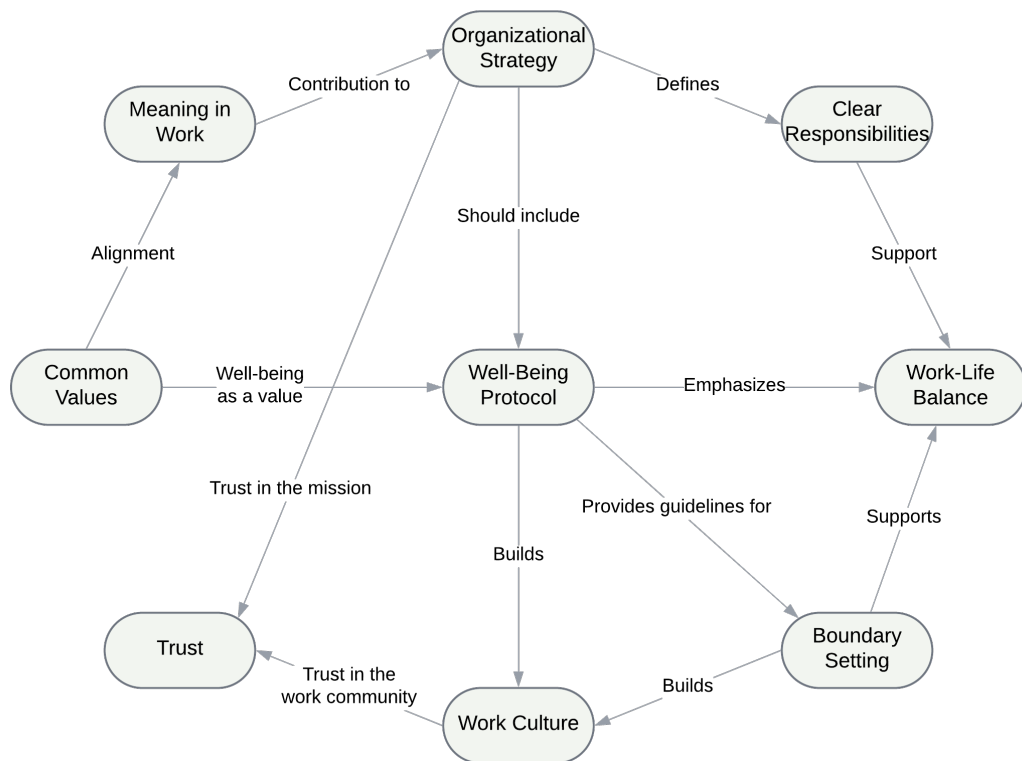
affecting personal experiences, political decisions affecting organizational operations. The main topics were lack of burnout awareness, limited resources, high workload and role ambiguity, culture of overworking, challenges in communication and boundary setting, lack of organizational strategies, insufficient well-being protocols, work-life imbalance, privilege guilt. This part of the document was shared with participants in the week between the workshops and used as a basis for the second workshop.

After the second workshop, I completed the outcomes document with a list of 22 key elements of a healthy workplace in NGOs working with immigrants and suggested solutions for improving workplace well-being. The elements were derived from the problem statements made during the first workshop and were completed with new elements that the participants felt were missing. Eight elements chosen by the participants were discussed in more depth along with possible practical solutions. The brainstorming of solutions was focused on the areas that the participants felt were most challenging in their workplaces. The solutions touched on the process of creating an organizational strategy and a well-being protocol, definition and adjustments in roles and responsibilities, encouraging safer space and boundary setting in organizational culture. Notably, all these solutions were on the work unit or organizational levels. One of the workshop participants emphasized the responsibility of the NGOs to support the well-being of their employees:

If the employees of an organization can only rely on themselves rather than the support of the organization, they might be able to sustain their energy for 1-2 years and work well. But what should you lean on when there's nothing left to lean on within yourself?

During the workshop, one of the participants expressed a wish to compile the interconnected elements of workplace well-being into a diagram. There was no time in the workshop program for that, but in the report document I attempted to create a visual representation of the connections that participants made to highlight the importance of each element in creating a burnout-free workplace (see FIGURE 1).

FIGURE 1. Elements of a healthy workplace, diagram from the outcomes document.



In the complete framework of co-creation an outcomes report would be compiled in collaboration with the participants. Due to the time limitations of this project, I did the summarization and description on my own. In the creation of this report, I refrained from including personal opinions and analysis, only relaying the content of discussions based on the materials written during the workshops, my notes and recollection.

The outcomes report has several potential uses. For the workshop participants, it defines possible next steps to take or suggest in their workplaces. For Moniheli, it provides the areas where multicultural NGOs may need more support, informing the future activities of the network. For all stakeholders and readers of the report, it can further stimulate discussion about burnout in the NGO sector and give ideas for future projects.

7 FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

The final phase of project management – project closing – ensures that all deliverables are completed and meet the satisfaction of the target group and partners (Dobson, 2015, p. 158). During this phase, I reported the results of the workshop to my working-life partner and the participants and evaluated my project process and outcomes. The evaluation of this project was based on feedback from the participants, feedback and discussion session with the working-life partner, as well as observation and self-evaluation.

HyvänMitta (n.d.), identifies three types of quality indicators: processive, resultative, and effective. Processive indicators gauge the procedural quality: activities undertaken, number of participants, deliverables. These indicators were described in Chapter 5 and 6. Resultative indicators reflect the small-scale impact of the project. They depend on the goal and target group of the project, measuring the participants' satisfaction and the reaching of objectives. In this chapter, I evaluate the project according to resultative indicators. The effectiveness indicators reflect societal change. The last type is not applicable to this project. (HyvänMitta, n.d.)

7.1 Evaluation methods

To gather the feedback from the participants and the working-life partner, I used open-ended questions. The feedback from the participants was gathered at the end of the workshops in an oral form, using the questions “What was important for you in this workshop/workshop series?”, “What solutions from this workshop could be implemented at your workplace?”, “What went well and what did not go well?”. I took written notes of the comments. After each of the workshops, I also informally talked to my supervisor about their execution to support my self-reflection.

Following the submission of the workshop outcomes document, I scheduled a meeting with my working-life supervisor for the final closing and feedback. In this session, I utilized a framework of questions by Posner and Applegarth (2019, p. 108): "What went well in the project?", "What did not go well?", "What would we change for the next project?", "What was missing?". Additionally, I asked "How could the results of the project be used in the future?".

Throughout the project process, I reflected on the planning and execution of the workshops through writing notes and discussing my experiences with the working life partner and peers. In my personal project evaluation, professional development reflection, and recommendations (See Chapter 9), I referred to the project management literature. My goal was to conduct a "project salvage", which Dobson (2015, p. 164) defines as going through the project process to recover useful lessons for future projects. I used the project salvage list of questions (Dobson, 2015, p. 165). Additionally, I reflected on the same questions that I used in the evaluation meeting with my working-life supervisor. To evaluate achieving the objectives, I used the SMART method. I referred to my earlier SMART analysis of objectives to confirm that each planned element was realized during the project.

7.2 Participant feedback

Participants unanimously emphasized the importance of addressing burnout, particularly among multicultural NGO workers and within the broader social sector. The participants valued the opportunity to discuss the issue in a circle of other NGO professionals. Many expressed a desire for more platforms to discuss this topic, as they previously lacked the time for it at their workplaces.

Attendees praised the workshop's format, which prioritized discussion over lecture-style presentations. They compared it favorably to other events where only 15-30 minutes were given to open conversation among participants. They expressed that they would wish for more events where they could take an active role, such as in this workshop series.

The participants also appreciated that the workshop provided them with a safer space to discuss personal challenges and frustrations openly. Some revealed a deeper reflection on their relationship with the issue both during and post-workshop.

A lot of the critical feedback that came from the participants was related to the timing and advertising of the campaign. The timing – after the STEA applications and right before the holidays – was not optimal. According to the participants, at that time NGO workers want to conclude their working responsibilities in a more relaxed state. Participants felt early autumn would be a more productive time frame.

Feedback indicated that the advertising campaign was insufficient both in terms of timing and visibility. Additionally, they felt that the title and text of the advertisements were not clear enough to understand the purpose and structure of the workshops. Even though “The Burnout Conversation” implied active discussion in a literal sense, due to how similar titles were used in participants’ experiences, it still sounded like it could be a lecture.

Another point of critical feedback was related to the workshop facilitation. The engaging nature of the topic meant everyone had much to share. Some attendees felt that time constraints made them hold back their input. Suggestions included incorporating a timer to ensure equitable input.

A few participants found the English discussions challenging due to the topic's intricate nature. While organizing the workshops for all mother tongues takes a lot of resources, it is still a point that could be considered to respond to the needs of multicultural NGO employees.

The participants expressed that depending on the connections between the participants (if they are working or have worked together before, if they know each other), the dynamics and level of comfort in the group vary in both positive and

negative ways. This highlights the need for an experienced professional to facilitate such workshops so that they can account for these circumstances.

To conclude, the participants confirmed the relevance of workshops on the topic of burnout in NGO employees working with immigrants. They emphasized the need for these workshops to be participant-focused, providing enough space for discussion and ideation. The participants' feedback gave me a lot of considerations for my professional development and future projects management and workshop facilitation.

7.3 Working life partner feedback

On the topic of project management, my supervisor highlighted the need for more time. It would be best to talk to more professionals about this project and have a test session with the target group – for example, within Moniheli. That way, I could get more feedback, have a clearer perspective on time management, and gain confidence. He also said that for better focus, it is usually a good idea to have two team members in a working life scenario: one for workshop facilitation and another to handle logistical concerns.

During the workshops, my supervisor observed that I was occasionally overly self-reflective about my performance while facilitating. It would be good to learn to be more present during the workshop as I gain more experience. At the same time, he praised the structure of the workshops, the organic flow of topics, and my ability to steer discussions in the right direction. He also commended the content tailoring: I balanced the information to not be too academic, making it accessible to the target group.

The working life partner envisions the workshop structure being adapted for projects aiming to combat burnout within NGOs. He found that the Wheel of Balance (See APPENDIX 3) tool would be fitting for this purpose. In his opinion, it would be especially useful to hold it within organizations to address specific contexts. Preferably as a part of a prolonged collaborative support relationship.

The final report document was also evaluated. The supervisor found that I summarized, structured, and presented the information accurately, and the document is valuable for consideration of Moniheli and within the field.

To conclude, the working life partner deemed the project a success, achieving its intended objectives. Burnout is not a topic that already has available universal solutions, and initiatives like this are valuable.

7.4 Reaching objectives

To evaluate the results of the project, I revisited the aim and objectives stated in the beginning of the thesis, and then analyzed how well each of the objectives was met. The SMART assessment of the objectives included the measurements for assessing their achievement, which served as the foundation for this evaluation.

The overarching aim of the project was to “Develop, implement, and evaluate two collaborative workshops designed to discuss and ideate possible solutions for work-related stress and burnout among NGO employees working with immigrants”. During the execution stage, both planned workshops were successfully facilitated, and their results documented.

The first objective was to “Foster an open discussion about burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being among participants from various organizations in the social sector”. Based on my observations and feedback, this was achieved. At the first workshop, all attendees actively participated in every topic. Participants found the discussion highly relevant and appreciated the opportunity to engage in it. However, the time-bound aspect could be improved with more experience of facilitation and time management skills of the facilitator.

The second objective, “Facilitate collaboration for actionable solutions to potentially reduce stress and prevent burnout at the workplace”, was also met. Since

the assessment of the effectiveness of solutions was out of the project scope, the measure of success was that at least three ideas of burnout prevention solutions and strategies were produced. The attendees of the second workshop suggested several practical solutions suitable for their contexts. However, due to the small number of participants, the relevance for the broader multicultural NGO context could be limited. Time constraints also meant that the ideas were not developed into detailed plans for action. The suggested solutions, along with the main topics of discussion, were described in a digital report document (see APPENDIX 1).

In conclusion, the project successfully fulfilled all its objectives and the overarching aim. The feedback from participants highlighted additional achievements of the workshop series. The workshop series was supportive for the participants: the discussions increased their awareness of burnout signs and provided them an opportunity for sharing their experiences in a safer environment. They also made new professional connections and felt motivated to carry the conversation forward after the workshops, considering more solutions.

7.5 Implementation of the co-creation framework

“The Burnout Conversation” project was partially based on the co-creation framework. In the last part of the project evaluation, I refer to the recommendations from literature on co-creation and compare them against my project management and workshop execution process.

This project was conducted within a narrow time frame and by a single student. This limited the extent to which the co-creation and design thinking frameworks could be applied. Ideally, the planning and execution of the co-creation process should have a larger time scale. Both Fox et al. (2021, p. 8) and Liedtka et al. (2017, p. 9) stress that co-creation led by the end users is a very long process. It may consist of many iterative sessions, preferably with a dedicated group of participants at the ideation stage (Bason, 2010, p. 178). The decision to narrow down the scope and focus on the first stages of co-creation and design thinking proved to be appropriate for the project, making the reaching of objectives possible.

The time frame for this project did not allow for meeting the participants before the sessions. However, to better understand the participants' contexts, expectations, and wishes for the workshops, it could be beneficial to contact them prior to the workshop through a survey or even a short interview. This could be especially helpful for workshop series that would require a commitment for several sessions from the participants.

The number and diversity of participants depend on the focus of the project. Co-creation often brings together actors from diverse fields (academics, workers, clients, etc.), enriching the solution-building process. However, a diverse participant group requires a lot of attention to group dynamics, the ability to solve possible conflicts and manage the program to stay on track. While group facilitation skills are necessary in all kinds of workshops, choosing one group made the process go smoother in a small-scale project such as this thesis.

A higher participant number could be fitting for conducting a needs assessment, to get a wider picture of the topic. Brainstorming can also be effective with input from many participants. However, if the workshops aim for focused work on prioritizing and developing solutions, Bason (2010, p. 178) recommends not having more than 6-8 participants within the main working group. "The Burnout Conversation" workshops had 2-5 participants, which turned out to be a fitting number due to discussions being active and easily going overtime.

As a facilitator of a co-creation workshop, my role was to create flow for a solution-focused discussion and ensure participation (Haataja et al., 2018, pp. 33-37). Without stating my opinions on the topic, I provided starting points in the form of short slides about burnout and workplace well-being, asked questions to stimulate discussions, and summarized the discussions. While being flexible to allow the participants space to discuss issues relevant to them, I steered the discussion back to the workshop goals when necessary. The planned workshop structure ensured that each of the participants was able to give their input on the themes.

Haataja et al. (2018, p. 33) highlight the importance of the facilitator having long and diverse work experience. Experience is important not only in ensuring a structure for a focused discussion, but also in creating an atmosphere of trust and courage. I received feedback that there was a distance in my emotional presence during the workshops since I seemed too self-reflective and concerned about facilitation and time management. As a student with little workshop facilitation and social services experience, I found it intimidating to lead a workshop for professionals that had been working in the social welfare field for years. I recognize that my limited experience and resulting self-consciousness were obstacles in creating the atmosphere for co-creation to the best extent. Additionally, trust is cultivated throughout several dialogue sessions (Haataja et al., 2018, p. 34), while the time frame of my thesis project did not allow to have a higher number of workshops. Still, I compensated for the lack of experience and workshop limitations with preparation and the use of facilitation techniques, which helped the workshops to reach their objectives.

Creating a welcoming environment was essential to foster participation and cohesion. One way to achieve this is through shared meals or providing enough savory and sweet refreshments, to support comfort and mental activity. Haataja et al. recommend holding workshops in the morning, with breakfast or lunch (2018, p. 41). At these two workshops I provided refreshments which included both vegan and non-vegan options. During the second session the refreshments were moved to the main table from a nearby table so that the participants feel free to take food without disturbing the flow of conversations and activities.

Overall, the participants and the working-life partner spoke favorably about the participant-centered and format of the workshops. The project resulted in the creation of practice-based knowledge and ideas for solutions to burnout. As the project manager, I feel that taking a co-creative approach, even on a small scale, was a better decision than developing a tool to address burnout with insufficient input from the target group.

8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When conducting the project and writing this thesis, I have ethical obligations towards participants in my project, my work-life partner Moniheli, Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, as well as the professional field and society (Finnish National Board of Research Integrity TENK, 2019). This chapter explores the ethical considerations of this thesis project.

The academic and work-life environment supported the ethicality of my thesis process through lectures, recommended resources, feedback, and advice. The work-life collaboration in this thesis project was confirmed by signing the thesis agreement form. This form delineated our respective roles and the project's preliminary goal and objectives. The working life partner was kept informed of the progress and outcomes of the project.

Prior to conducting the project, I assessed the fundamental aspects of ethical thesis work based on the guidelines and checklist by Arene (2020, p. 15). Given the nature of the project, its target group, and the absence of personal data handling, an external ethical review was unnecessary (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019, p. 20). Additionally, I considered the ethical questions related to the topics and format of the workshop series.

At the beginning of the workshop series, all the participants were informed of it being a part of a thesis project. They were briefed on the aims and objectives, as well as made aware that the anonymized results will be used in a publicly accessible thesis and could be used for future development projects. The participants consented through signed forms.

In the report document, I summarized the outcomes of the workshops without referring to specific people and contexts. The document was created with respect to the participants' expertise, striving to include as much of their input as possible without sacrificing clarity and confidentiality. I asked for consent before including the quotes in the report document and in the text of this thesis.

During one of the meetings with the working life partner, the ethical dimensions of the workshops were discussed. We considered the comfort of the participants with sharing information about their current and past workplaces within a group of other professionals, as well as the sensitivity of sharing personal experiences of burnout and work-related stress. The concerns were that the professionals could feel the pressure of representing their organizations or fear being judged personally. These concerns were taken into consideration when planning safer space discussion and the workshop program flow.

To foster a comfortable environment, at the beginning of the session I established the safer space rules, highlighting confidentiality, sharing only what is comfortable, and value of all kinds of input (e.g., professional, personal, observational). Participants were asked to contribute additional rules they felt were necessary. Utilizing tools like anonymous word clouds ensured that participants did not feel pressured into immediate personal sharing. The discussion was planned to progress from a general conversation about understanding burnout to more personal and organizational contexts. As the facilitator, I was paying attention to the participants' engagement and reactions to be able to adapt the program in case the activity or topic did not work for the participants. Fortunately for this project, the participants were very open about their experiences and opinions, so no major changes were needed during the programs.

Importantly, within this project I was not aiming at diagnosing burnout or conducting professional interventions. Instead, it was focused on raising awareness and promoting preventative measures against burnout through collaborative input. It was also necessary to not oversimplify or generalize the issues of burnout, work-related stress, and workplace well-being. It was emphasized that all narratives and experiences are respected and valued for the holistic approach of this project.

This thesis project does not serve as a comprehensive representation of a co-creation process due to limited resources. The workshop series was inspired by the principles of co-creation and the ethical value of involving end users in

development projects. I believe that it is ethically necessary for the social services field to also turn the focus inwards and co-create solutions for supporting the well-being of professionals, benefiting both them and their clients.

In conclusion, ethical principles were upheld throughout this project. Throughout each phase of the project, I ensured the protection of participants, the validity and integrity of the research process, as well as respect for the social services field and society.

9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I describe the conclusions made from the project process and reflect on the development of my professional competences. I end this thesis with recommendations for additional research and development projects in the academic and social welfare fields.

9.1 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to develop, implement, and evaluate two collaborative workshops designed to discuss and ideate possible solutions for work-related stress and burnout among NGO employees working with immigrants, in collaboration with Moniheli. The project's objectives were to foster open discussions about burnout and well-being and collaborate on solutions for stress reduction and burnout prevention. Through workshop structures inspired by the frameworks of co-creation and design thinking, the project successfully reached its objectives.

The project demonstrated that there is an interest and a need in the multicultural sector for safer spaces for open discussion and collaborative problem-solving on the topic of burnout. The participants' observations from professional practice aligned with the statistical data: substantial portions of social welfare sector employees experience high levels of work engagement, but also high levels of exhaustion (Hakanen, 2023; Karsio, 2022). The workshop discussions recognized factors of work-related stress and well-being on various levels from individual to organizational and structural, which is in line with the findings of Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017, p. 131). The solutions that were suggested during the workshops (see APPENDIX 1) were aimed at improving the organizational environments, emphasizing the pivotal role of employing organizations in fostering well-being in their employees.

The insightful observations and ideas from the participants of the workshops support the value and potential of initiatives rooted in collaborative methods such as

co-creation and design thinking. As Bason (2010) argues, co-creation is an essential approach to designing social services in the modern age.

While the project achieved its aim and objectives, it had a small scope due to resource limitations. As an experiential initiative, the project had multiple areas for improvement, which were detailed in this thesis. This limits the generalizability of the results, as well as the replicability of the workshop structure. However, I want this thesis to serve as an encouragement for further development of such initiatives within the social services sector, by students and professionals.

In conclusion, this thesis project highlighted the importance of proactively addressing work-related stress and burnout in the high-stress field of social services. The project's positive results, despite its limitations, offer valuable insights and recommendations for the continuation of this work. I believe that only by prioritizing the mental health and well-being of professionals, can we ensure sustainable and ethical social services practice.

9.2 Professional development

This thesis project significantly stimulated my professional growth, expanding my understanding of the social sector. The practical experience, learning, and introspection contributed to shaping my future perspective in this field. Describing my experience in the text of this thesis has helped me deeply integrate these professional developments.

This project started in a group of two students, but we had to separate due to incompatible circumstances. This experience has forced me to reflect on communication, group dynamics, and ethical conflicts. The necessary split led to modifications in the project's execution, but it was an important point of professional development for me.

In terms of project management, the project taught me to operate within restrictions and align my ambitions with reality. Adapting my strategies to match the

operational context honed my skills in flexibility, prioritization, and critical thinking. I learned to proceed in uncertain circumstances and hold my motivation in the face of difficulties and limitations. Throughout my working life cooperation, I learned to steer a project within a work community and align my goals with the goals of other stakeholders.

In planning, facilitating, and analyzing the workshops, I developed my group facilitation experience and confidence. It was daunting to conduct workshops independently, especially among professionals in the social field. While I believe that the workshops could have gone better if I had more experience, I am proud of the outcomes achieved. I could learn a lot from self-reflection and feedback, and my confidence was reinforced by the support from my work-life partner and other professionals.

One of my internship goals at Moniheli was to learn the structure of a STEA application and create a draft. My supervisor and I chose to use my experience and findings from this thesis project as a basis for the draft. In this way, this thesis project supported my learning of an important skill in the social sector. Depending on the need, the resulting draft of a project on burnout prevention in multicultural NGO employees could be used and improved upon by the working life partner, which would be a very inspiring benefit of this work.

The transformation of the project towards a more co-creative approach with the support from my thesis supervisor fostered my ethical competence. Researching a better way of service development made me pay careful attention to basing my practice on collaboration with the people I wish to support and following social services values in all aspects of work. Learning about co-creative and design thinking frameworks also fostered my research-based development and innovation competence. These frameworks are useful in both improving service provision for clients and solving current issues that cause burnout in social welfare professionals.

Throughout the project, I gained extensive insights into burnout and workplace well-being in the social sector and NGOs specifically. Besides the academic

literature, I familiarized myself with the current Finnish context through various sources – surveys, legislation, and articles by actors in the occupational health and public funding field. Conversations with professionals in the field, classmates, and workshop sessions further enhanced my understanding. I came away from this project with a developed multi-dimensional view of the social welfare sector, and a perspective on how much I have yet to learn.

9.3 Recommendations

Despite decades of recognition of the problem of burnout in the social welfare sector, the professionals still feel that they lack the support and conditions to ensure their workplace well-being. This contradiction highlights the complex interplay of factors that resist simple solutions. The persistence of this issue points to systemic causes, including heavy workloads, role ambiguity, unclear strategies and well-being protocols, culture of overworking and self-sacrifice, often in the constraints of tight budgets.

In preparation for this project, I faced a gap in burnout research in Finnish NGO employees. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of burnout and workplace well-being, tackling the issue requires a comprehensive understanding of the region-specific cultural, political, and economic conditions. The working conditions in organizations from the Finnish public, private, and third sector vary and may require different interventions. The workshop discussions also suggest that there is a need for research on the effects of volunteer and activist roots on NGO organizational culture and work-life balance of employees.

Despite the presence of the concept of burnout in the public discourse, this project demonstrated that there is still a reported lack of burnout awareness in NGO employees. The specific symptoms and manifestations of work-related stress and burnout, as well as practical ways to prevent and treat it are not well-known. Personal boundaries in the workplace are another workplace well-being-related topic which is often dismissed as a buzzword. The organizations within the social

sector could benefit from practical training and strategies on topics related to workplace well-being.

While personal awareness and resilience are important for preventing burnout, the interventions should happen on various levels. Employing organizations have a duty to ensure workplace welfare (Työturvallisuuslaki, 23.8.2002/738). Leadership and management must move beyond mere recognition of the issue and actively facilitate dialogue on issues that lead to burnout and create change in workplace culture and processes. In practice, addressing burnout on a team and organizational levels might look like clear role delineation, realistic and fair workload distribution, streamlined processes, and effective communication strategies. Organizations should also avoid the culture of overworking, instead actively promoting work-life balance, psychological safety, and personal boundaries through mindful leadership and personal example.

Employees are experts in their working conditions, and so spaces need to be created where they feel safe to express their concerns and seek support, as well as offer contributions to organizational strategies and well-being protocols. By doing so, organizations can not only find issues that need to be addressed, but also foster a culture of trust where employees feel valued, heard, and supported. See APPENDIX 1 for the list of issues that lead to burnout and practical suggestions for organizational change given by multicultural NGO employees during the workshop series.

Nevertheless, some NGOs might lack the tools and understanding of how to apply practical well-being strategies within resource limitations. Solutions for this issue need to be developed in collaboration with other actors in the field, through experience-sharing and collective problem-solving. Projects that focus on supporting NGO employees and providing guidance to organizations' management may also be beneficial.

The political uncertainty of social welfare funding further exacerbates the situation. Policy and structural changes are slow and are not always in line with the needs of the sector, with funding being dependent on the government currently

in power. This not only creates an environment where support for employees is limited by resource constraints, but also adds psychological stress for the professionals in the field. In my opinion, tackling the structural issues requires sustained advocacy for the provision of social welfare to the population. The well-being of social welfare professionals is a prerequisite for the effective service provision, which is why it needs to be one of the priorities of the advocacy agenda.

Throughout this project, I found that the topic of burnout prevention was relevant and attractive to multicultural NGO employees. Small-scale projects like “The Burnout Conversation” workshop series do not require a lot of resources and can target specific teams, organizations, network members. Larger projects with funding have a higher potential to facilitate co-creation by social welfare professionals, as well as students, academics, and politicians. In my opinion, similar projects, as well as other innovative interventions, have a lot of potential for impact and should be continued on smaller and larger scales. The experience of conducting this project underscored the efficacy and ethical imperative of co-created strategies, tailor-fitted to the unique environments in which social service professionals operate. This approach is necessary for ensuring sustainable and effective social services, provided by healthy, resilient, and engaged professionals.

In conclusion, tackling burnout in multicultural NGOs and the social welfare field in general requires a holistic approach involving individual support, organizational change, policy reform, and cultural shifts. The transformation is a slow and gradual process, which might lead to people losing hope and interest in the issue. Just because small-scale individual interventions, while necessary, did not cause global change, burnout should not be accepted as inevitable, as “just the way it is”. There are still available solutions that were not attempted to the necessary extent due to their complexity and resource requirements. There is still a possibility to develop innovative solutions by centering the voices of social welfare professionals. I want this project to serve as a call to action for all stakeholders to accept our collective responsibility to address the urgent problem of burnout in the social welfare sector, for the benefit of the whole Finnish society.

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APPENDIX 1. "The Burnout Conversation" Workshop Outcomes Report

“The Burnout Conversation” Workshop Series: Outcomes

“The Burnout Conversation” workshop series was conducted in June 2023 as part of the thesis project by a Diaconia UAS student Timofei Tikhomirov in collaboration with Moniheli ry. The project aimed to address work-related stress and burnout among NGO employees who work with immigrants. Five professionals from the multicultural NGO field participated in the sessions. The workshops were designed to foster open dialogue about workplace well-being and facilitate collaboration on burnout prevention strategies.

This document describes the outcomes of the discussions that took place during the workshops.

Summary



During the first workshop on June 3rd, 2023, attendees explored the issues that lead to elevated levels of stress and potential burnout in NGO employees working with immigrants.

- **Lack of Burnout Awareness.** There is a lack of understanding of the early signs and prevention strategies for burnout among NGO employees.
- **Limited Resources.** Insufficient funding and high staff turnover can lead to increased workloads, job insecurity, and a lack of focus on employee well-being.
- **High Workload and Role Ambiguity.** Unclear roles, unrealistic expectations, inadequate instructions, and multitasking can contribute to a high-stress environment.
- **Culture of Overworking.** The “I’m really busy” culture within NGOs can lead to employees feeling pressured to overwork, potentially resulting in burnout.

- **Challenges in Communication and Boundary Setting.** Disorganized communication, lack of boundaries, and inability to express work-related concerns can contribute to an uncomfortable work environment.
- **Lack of Organizational Strategies.** An absence of clear communication strategies and policies can lead to internal conflicts and increased stress.
- **Insufficient Well-Being Protocols.** Current protocols do not provide adequate protection for employee health and well-being.
- **Work-Life Imbalance.** NGO employees' passion for their work makes it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- **Privilege Guilt.** Employees may prioritize work over their well-being due to feelings of guilt related to privilege.



During the second workshop on June 11th, 2023, attendees explored the key elements of a healthy workplace. The participants identified the most relevant components for their organizations and discussed actionable steps towards improvement.

- **Organizational Strategy.** A clear and actionable strategy that is inclusive of all employees and projects is crucial. Each employee should understand the strategy and feel their work contributes to it.
- **Clear Responsibilities.** Clear role definitions reduce overwork risk. Changes in responsibilities should lead to adjustments in role definitions and salaries.
- **Well-being Protocol.** A practical protocol for maintaining employee well-being should be part of the organizational strategy. When assessing the well-being of employees, assessments need to be made throughout the year.
- **Boundary Setting.** Setting healthy boundaries safeguards employees' personal space, psychological safety, and work-life balance. Organizational discussions about boundaries can help create respectful practices.
- **Work-life Balance.** Protecting personal time and maintaining a flexible work schedule with enough breaks during the workday is beneficial for well-being. Overworking should not be considered the norm.

- **Trust.** A culture of trust assumes positive intent and encourages the open sharing of concerns without fear of negative consequences.
- **Work Culture and Values.** Positive work culture fosters employee well-being, engagement, and professional development, promoting a sense of collaboration based on shared values.
- **Meaningful Work.** Aligning work with personal values and goals makes it meaningful and fulfilling.

“The Burnout Conversation” Workshop 1, 03.06.2023



During the first workshop, attendees explored the issues that lead to elevated levels of stress and potential burnout in NGO employees working with immigrants.

Lack of Burnout Awareness

- NGO employees often only recognize signs of burnout when it progresses to severe stages.
 - There needs to be more awareness about the early signs of burnout, how to prevent it, and what to do in case of possible burnout.

Limited Resources

- Funding and resource constraints lead to employees taking on large workloads and wide ranges of responsibilities.
- The uncertainty around project funding contributes to stress and insecurity about job continuity.
- High staff turnover rates and short-staffing issues lead to increased workloads for remaining employees.
- Some organizations set unrealistic objectives and unnecessary measurements when applying for funding, which leads to additional workload.

- There is a need for a more sustainable, realistic, and strategic approach to funding applications.
- Employee well-being is often not included sufficiently in financial decision-making.
 - There is a lack of clarity on how much budget could be allocated for employee well-being, and how to incorporate it into financial decisions.

High Workload and Role Ambiguity

- Unclear responsibilities, unrealistic expectations, and inadequate instruction create stressful work conditions.
 - There is a need to implement clear role delineation, reasonable workload expectations, and effective onboarding and instruction procedures.
- Mismanaged division of labor may lead to unequal distribution of work and potential overwork for some team members.
 - It is not always clear how the workload can be delegated, indicating a need for delegation strategies.
- Employees are often required to multitask, and it is unclear when multitasking becomes harmful to well-being.
- There is a need for more effective solutions for managing high workloads.
 - A common suggestion in cases of overwhelm and burnout is working fewer days. However, that often leads to the same amount of work having to be done with less time and pay, which is not helpful for improving well-being.
- It is unclear when it is appropriate for employees to take sick leave due to mental health reasons. This leads to employees not taking needed time off.

Culture of Overworking

- The prevalent “I’m really busy” or hustle culture in NGOs promotes overwork and can lead to burnout. Stress, exhaustion, and symptoms of burnout may be seen as “normal” in the NGO field.
 - When being busy is seen as a status symbol or a measure of commitment, employees may feel pressured to overwork, compromising their well-being.

Challenges in Communication and Boundary Setting

- Disorganized communication during work time can cause distraction and cognitive overload.
- Employees may feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or ashamed expressing their concerns about work stress and burnout.
- Employees in NGOs may benefit from support and guidance in setting professional and emotional boundaries.
 - Without discussions around boundaries, employees might feel additional emotional responsibility when faced with oversharing from a colleague.

Lack of Organizational Strategies

- The lack of clear communication strategies and policies can lead to internal conflict and confusion, increasing stress levels.

Insufficient Well-Being Protocols

- Existing general standards of well-being protocol (Federation of Special Service and Clerical Employees ERTO) fail to provide adequate protection for employee health and well-being.
 - There is a need for more comprehensive and effective well-being protocols in NGOs.

Work-Life Imbalance

- NGO employees' passion and feeling of responsibility for their work make it challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
 - Employees may find themselves working extra hours and thinking about work during their free time.

Privilege Guilt

- Employees may struggle with feelings of guilt related to their privilege, potentially prioritizing work over personal well-being.
 - There is a need to develop effective strategies for coping with feelings of privilege guilt in the workplace.

“The Burnout Conversation” Workshop 2, 11.06.2023



During the second workshop, attendees explored the key elements of a healthy workplace. The participants identified the most relevant components for their organizations and discussed actionable steps towards improvement.

Components affecting workplace well-being

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Organizational strategy | 6. Work culture | 12. Open communication | 17. Work-life balance |
| 2. Decision-making and leadership | 7. Common values | 13. Boundary setting | 18. Flexibility |
| 3. Funding and resources | 8. Burnout awareness | 14. Recognition and gratitude | 19. Professional growth |
| 4. Clarity of responsibilities | 9. Meaning in work | 15. Support | 20. Emotional Management |
| 5. Workload | 10. Well-being protocol | 16. Trust | 21. Caring for the body |
| | | 17. Recreational activities | 22. Rest |

From these components, attendees selected eight for deeper discussion, describing their ideal scenarios and proposing actionable steps for improvement.

Organizational Strategy

A clear and actionable strategy provides direction and purpose. Ideally, every employee should be able to explain the strategy to outsiders and feel that their work contributes to it.

- The strategy should be internally developed to be based on what is real, relevant, and achievable, encompassing all employees and projects.

- Outside support, through workshops and trainings, can aid in strategy formation, but strategy making should not be fully outsourced.
- All employees should have a chance to contribute to devising a practical plan based on the strategy.

Clear Responsibilities

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities ensure everyone knows what is expected of them and reduces the risk of overwork.

- Changes in responsibilities should be monitored and, if needed, lead to adjustments in role definitions and salaries.
- Project objectives may need to be adjusted if team members are overloaded with responsibilities.

Well-being Protocol

A well-defined well-being protocol outlines steps to maintain employees' mental and physical health.

- Employee well-being should be part of the organizational strategy.
- Creating and following the protocol should be prioritized, even when other important organizational tasks come up.
- Employees can be involved in the creation of the well-being protocol by discussing their personal well-being needs.
- To assess the well-being of employees, regular short assessments need to be made throughout the year — to capture the full picture over time.

Boundary Setting

Healthy boundaries protect employees' personal space, psychological safety, comfort, and work-life balance. Ideally, each employee should know their boundaries and how to respect those of their colleagues.

- Rules of safer space need to be raised on an organizational level (e.g. in a yearly meeting), taken seriously, and reassessed if needed.
- An anonymous boundary questionnaire for all employees of an organization can help identify areas of discomfort and create respectful practices.

Additionally, it can highlight the need to think deeply and practically about boundaries, not dismissing them as a “trend”.

Work-life Balance

An ideal situation would include a flexible work schedule with sufficient breaks. Personal time is protected, and overworking is not considered the norm.

Trust

A culture of trust assumes positive intentions and encourages open sharing of concerns without fear of negative consequences, between colleagues or between employees and their management.

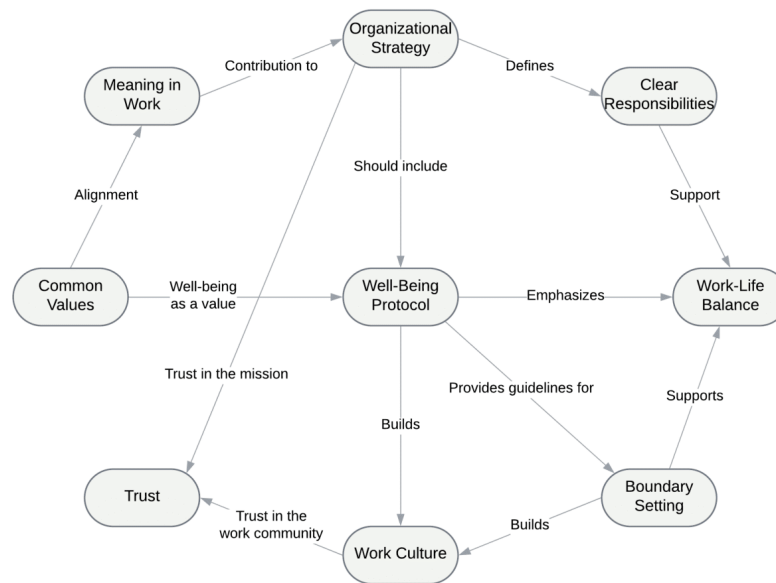
Work Culture and Values

A positive work culture promotes employee well-being, engagement, professional development, and a collaborative atmosphere based on shared values.

Meaningful Work

When work aligns with personal values and goals, it becomes meaningful and more fulfilling.

Throughout the discussions, participants highlighted the interconnectedness of workplace well-being aspects. Some of the connections are illustrated in the following image.



Conclusion

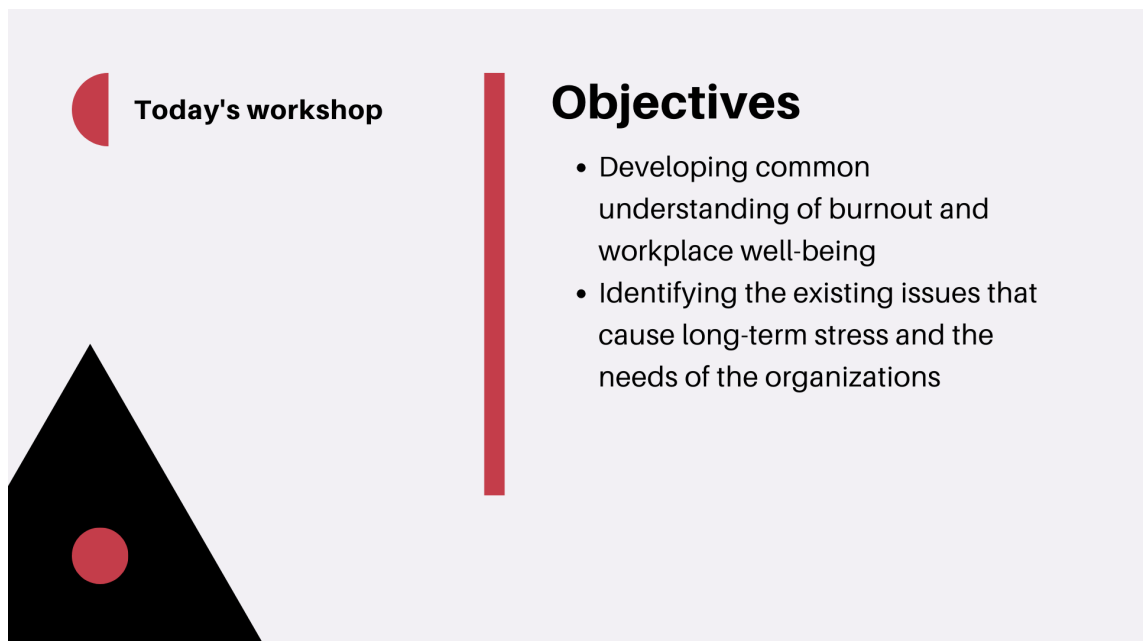
“The Burnout Conversation” workshop series examined the complex web of factors contributing to stress and burnout among NGO employees working with immigrants. The process highlighted a need for proactive organization-wide strategies for burnout prevention and promoting overall workplace well-being.

More initiatives discussing and ideating solutions to the issue are needed in the future. Only by prioritizing the mental health and well-being of professionals, can we ensure sustainable and ethical social services practice.

When discussing the role of NGOs in supporting their employees, one of the workshop participants reflected:

If the employees of an organization can only rely on themselves rather than the support of the organization, they might be able to sustain their energy for 1-2 years and work well. But what should you lean on when there's nothing left to lean on within yourself?

APPENDIX 2. Workshop Presentation Slides



What words or phrases come to mind when you hear "burnout"?



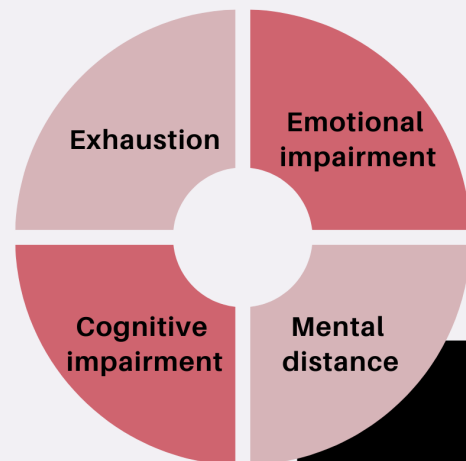
Link to Menti.com interactive wordcloud



Burnout

Secondary signs: psychological distress, psychosomatic complaints, depressed mood (from Burnout Assessment Tool)

Core signs:



What words or phrases come to mind when you hear "workplace well-being"?

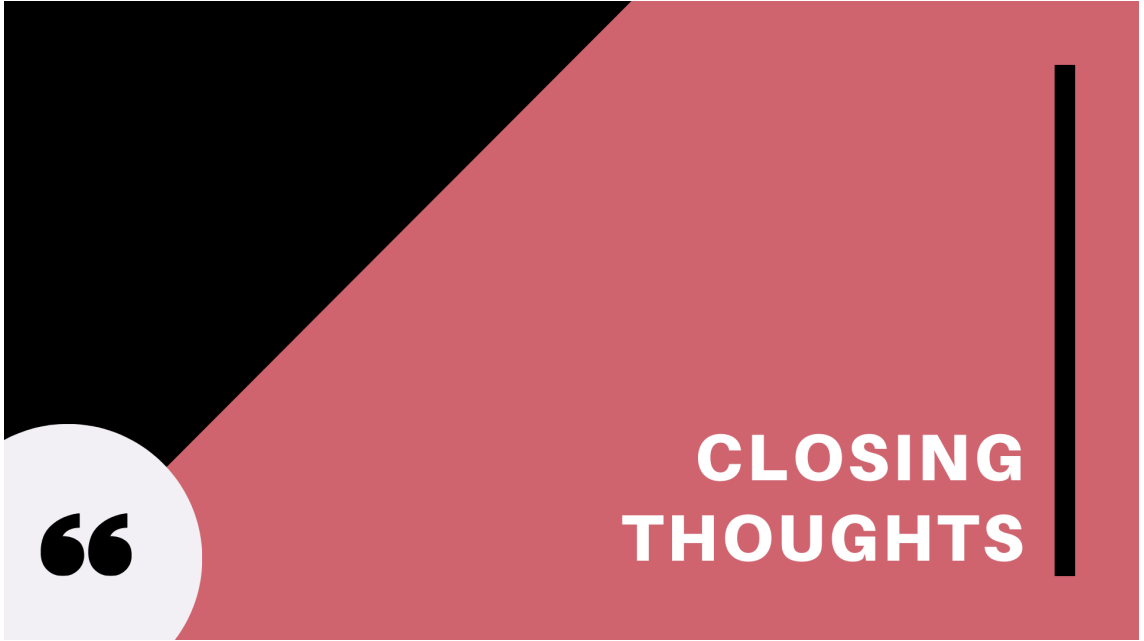


Link to Menti.com
interactive wordcloud



Workplace well-being





“

**CLOSING
THOUGHTS**

APPENDIX 3. The Wheel of Balance Workshop Structure

Part 1.

1. Start with a question: e.g., What makes a healthy workplace?
2. Discuss and add components which contribute to the question on sticky notes. Have at least 10-20 prepared beforehand. Time: 10 minutes.
3. Give everyone 8 votes to vote for the components which are the most important for them. Time: 5 minutes.

Question:
What are the components that affect stress and well-being in the workplace?

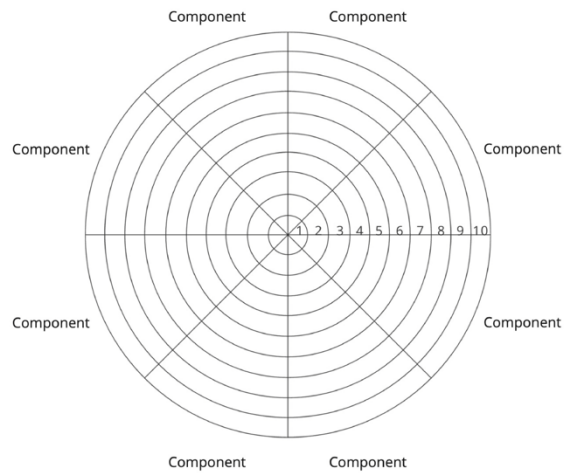
Example components were taken from "The Burnout Conversation" workshop series discussions.



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Part 2.

4. Each participant places the chosen 8 components on a printed image of the Wheel of Balance.
5. Discuss what each of the components means for the participants if it was 1/10 (the worst scenario) and 10/10 (the ideal scenario). Develop a common understanding of the components and ideal states. Time: 30 minutes.
6. The participants place votes on each of the components how they feel it is right now for them in their workplaces. Time: 5-10 minutes.
7. Place all of the participant votes on a common Wheel of Balance image.
8. Look at the wheel: start with the component which got the lowest votes. Ask the participants: What needs to happen that you would raise your vote up 1 point? Time: 30 minutes.
9. Record possible actions.
10. (Optional) Ask the participants: How would component X change if component Y will be up by 1 point? The component which if raised would raise others is the most impactful.



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