

Manager Perspectives on the Prevalence, Impact, and Management of Work-Related Burnout in Academic Library Technical Services Workers

Sean P. Kennedy, Melanie P. McGurr, and Kevin R. Garewal

Work-related burnout has been studied for decades across multiple industries, including librarianship. However, few studies have evaluated burnout in technical services workers. This study surveys academic library technical services managers to learn their perspective on the prevalence and impact of burnout on technical services workers. Managers observed a high incidence of burnout in their direct reports. The negative impacts of burnout on employees (e.g., personal health) and the organization (e.g., performance decline) are discussed. Managers' typical practices are evaluated through the lens of burnout prevention and mitigation. Documentation of the typical practices of academic library technical services managers is provided to assist current managers in self-evaluating their practices with peers. Overall, technical services managers are using thoughtful and research supported practices that can have a positive impact on the mitigation and prevention of work-related burnout.

Sean P. Kennedy (skenne20@kent.edu) is Collection Strategies Librarian and Assistant Professor at Kent State University. **Melanie J. McGurr** (mmcgurr1@uakron.edu) is Associate Dean of Technical Services and Associate Professor of Bibliography at the University of Akron. **Kevin R. Garewal** (kevin.garewal@rochester.edu) is Vice Provost and Andrew H. and Janet Dayton Neilly Dean of Libraries at the University of Rochester.

Several surveys and studies have been published recently on the topic of work-related burnout in libraries. Despite the growing coverage of burnout in libraries, a study focused on the impact of burnout in technical services departments has not been published. Research exists on burnout in public services, reference services, and the general feeling of burnout in academic libraries, but studies about technical services are mainly represented by articles specifically about cataloging, stress, and/or burnout.¹ The present study aims to leverage current findings about work-related burnout in libraries and apply it directly to technical services through an analysis of academic library technical services manager's observations, beliefs, and practices related to burnout.

When working with a construct like work-related burnout, it is important to establish an understanding and definition of the phenomenon being measured. Burnout is a construct that has been operationalized in different ways by researchers throughout the years. Brenninkmeijer and VanYperen define burnout as “a state of mental exhaustion resulting from chronic stress in the working situation.”² Christian states that burnout is “a prolonged exposure to workplace stressors that often drain an employee’s vitality and enthusiasm, and lead[s] to less engagement and productivity.”³ This study uses the definition of burnout put forth by Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, and Christensen who define work-related burnout as “the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion that is perceived by the person as related to his/her work.”⁴ This definition is based on the operationalization of work-related burnout in the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory. This specific view of burnout is preferred over other significant burnout measures (i.e., Maslach Burnout Inventory, Forbes Burnout Survey, and Staff Burnout Scale for Health Professionals) due to it being used extensively in the research of burnout in libraries. This definition of burnout was provided to study participants to create uniformity among responses by eliminating the use of individual understandings of what is meant by the term “burnout.” While this study does not utilize the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, future planned studies in this line of research will use the tool to quantitatively measure burnout in technical services workers.

Literature Review

The construct of burnout has been studied for decades and measured across many industries, especially the service and helping professions. A 1981 study by Maslach and Jackson, creators of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and a later study led by Maslach in 2001, found three main components lead to burnout: “Overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.”⁵ These three components are common causal factors referenced across the burnout research.

Causes of burnout are unique to each individual, but research repeatedly unearths similarities in the overall general causes of work-related burnout. Many of these causes can have cascading effects and lead to downstream consequences. For example, budget cuts at an institution have been cited as a cause of burnout and these cuts can lead to changes in the workplace like decreasing resources and reductions in force.⁶ The reductions in force can lead to heavier workloads when the same amount of work needs to be accomplished with fewer employees. Heavier workloads can be a cause of burnout when library employees

feel overwhelmed when given increasing levels of responsibilities that are often not accompanied by a pay raise.⁷ Relatedly, academic library employees are often expected to become “a multitasking, boundless expert.”⁸ Changes in technology, an almost constant in technical services, is another cause of burnout.⁹ The term for the pressure to keep up with rapidly changing technology, technostress, also appears in burnout studies.¹⁰ Some studies have reviewed the burnout literature to identify causes and posit solutions to the problem of burnout in libraries. Caputo’s book, *Stress and Burnout in Library Services*, covers how to recognize, combat, and address burnout from the staff and manager’s point of view.¹¹

The teaching demands of librarians are at the center of several articles about burnout in academic libraries. Affleck found that instructional librarians experiencing burnout felt they were not adequately prepared to teach coming out of their library school programs.¹² Nardine’s research on occupational burnout of liaison librarians concluded that burnout may be mitigated by the high match in the personal values of liaison librarians with the values of institutions.¹³ Baer’s study of academic instruction librarians found susceptibility to burnout due to stressors such as overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict, but concluded that instruction librarians often have the flexibility and individual agency to make changes to their practices and improve their overall situation.¹⁴ Sheesley looks to former studies to gauge burnout in academic teaching librarians and emphasizes librarians need help from their administration to reduce burnout.¹⁵

Closely related to these studies are investigations into stress and burnout in reference librarians. Smith and Nelson found that job challenges for academic reference librarians were not leading those individuals to experience burnout.¹⁶ In contrast to those findings, Haack, Jones, and Roose surveyed attendees at a conference on reference services and found 42% of their sample were experiencing or nearing burnout.¹⁷ However, these studies on reference librarians are dated.

Research on work-related burnout of individuals working in public libraries has also been completed. While public libraries differ in many ways from academic libraries, these studies provide additional insights about burnout among the broader profession of librarianship. Lindén, Salo, and Jansson studied burnout in Swedish public librarians and found the burnout factors of cynicism and emotional exhaustion were predicted by high workload, low quality social interactions, and conflicts between the values of the librarian and their organization.¹⁸ Smith, Bazalar, and Wheeler studied California public library employees and found that patron issues were the biggest work stressor and workload was the predictor most discussed with burnout.¹⁹ Salyers et al. surveyed public librarians in Indiana concerning their levels of

stress and burnout and re-visited 70 of those respondents six months later. The authors used a variety of scales to measure and correlate burnout, autonomy, role clarity, coworker support, work pressure, and attitudes about technology. Their six-month check-in with participants showed that only changes in role clarity helped improve employee burnout.²⁰

Articles on burnout in public services and reference far outpaced technical services in the 1980s and 1990s. That trend still holds true today. The authors did not find articles solely focused on technical services and burnout, but have reviewed articles on catalogers, stress, and job satisfaction. Leysen's research on job satisfaction among catalogers at ACRL libraries showed that a majority of catalogers were satisfied with their current position and comfortable with their changing roles within the library.²¹ However, this study preceded both a major change in cataloging standards (i.e., RDA) and developing workforce issues such as relying on temporary labor in cataloging departments. Leung evaluated stress from a technical services perspective and directly discusses burnout and three main categories of stressors: stressors that come with the job (e.g., workload and time pressure), the individual's relationship to their work (e.g., role conflict and workplace politics), and the organization and work climate (e.g., communication and involvement in decision making).²² Leung provides many strategies for coping with job stress including working to improve yourself (e.g., seeking training to help with self-identified stress areas) and reflecting on the work environment to better understand unique stressors and how to address them.²³ McClellan surveyed catalogers who moved from basic cataloging to more advanced cataloging and created a measurement for work stress, but does not focus on burnout.²⁴ Colon-Aguirre and Webb's analysis includes all roles in academic libraries, including technical services, but they did not find that technical services staff were impacted by burnout in a significant way.²⁵

Although research has been steadily published on the overall burnout trends in libraries, causes of burnout, recognizing burnout, etc., few studies have followed through on how to mitigate and prevent burnout. Qualitative studies sharing experiences, ideas, and opinions on how to prevent and mitigate burnout in libraries are much more common than quantitative approaches. This study aims to better understand the incidence and negative impacts of work-related burnout on academic library technical services workers from the perspective of their managers. The observations and firsthand experiences of managers provide a unique lens to view how burnout is impacting academic libraries. Technical services manager's beliefs and opinions related to burnout and other work stressors will be collected to understand how library managers approach these issues. The typical management practices of managers will also be collected and analyzed. These practices will be compared

to the existing burnout literature to evaluate any successes, or needed changes, within library management practices to help prevent or mitigate burnout. Information about management practices from technical services managers is also intended to achieve the pragmatic goal of helping managers understand the practices and techniques deployed by their colleagues across the United States. This information can help managers gain new ideas and/or reinforce their current management practices.

Methodology

Participants were invited to take part in this online study during the summer of 2021 through email distributed to eight academic library and technical services listservs (ALA Core, ACRL Tech Srv, ACRL ULS, AUTOCAT, EriL-I, OCLC-CAT, OVGTSL, and Core Metadata). Complete data was collected from 126 participants. Study participants were made aware of their rights, given IRB information, and provided informed consent before starting the survey. All 126 participants confirmed they are currently an academic library manager who supervises employees within traditional technical services roles. For the sake of clarity, traditional technical services roles were defined as including, but not limited to, cataloging, acquisitions, collections, electronic resources management, and preservation.

Participants

To evaluate the representativeness of this study's population to the overall librarian profession, the race, gender, and age of participants (who consented to providing demographic information) has been compared to the most recent demographic report on membership from the American Library Association Office of Research and Statistics.²⁶ This comparison can be found in table 1. The racial diversity of the study population is fairly representative of the profession although there is a notable lack of African American or Black and American Indian or Alaskan Native participants. The population also has an elevated percentage of females. The age of participants in this study is significantly older than the profession's average but this is not unexpected due to the participants being managers. In general, managers are more advanced in their career and likely older.

Participants work in an academic library at both public (62.7%) and private (37.3%) institutions. A strong majority of participants are employed by a four-year institution that offers doctorate degrees (71.43%), followed by four-year institutions that offer graduate degrees (17.46%), four-year undergraduate only institutions (7.94%), and two-year institutions (3.17%). The academic librarian experience of participants ranges from 3 to 40 years with a mean experience

Table 1. Study population demographics compared to the 2017 ALA Demographic Study.

Variable	Present Study	ALA
Race		
African American or Black	1.71%	4.40%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.0%	1.20%
Asian	3.42%	3.60%
Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin of any race	0.85%	n/a
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.85%	0.20%
Two or more races	4.27%	n/a
White	88.89%	86.70%
Other	0.0%	4.0%
Gender		
Female	87.27%	81.0%
Male	12.73%	19.0%
Age		
Range	24–70 years old	n/a
Mean	49.41 years old	n/a
45 years old or older	82.24%	59.0%

of 18.34 years. The participants' number of years in their current supervisory role ranges from 1 to 30 years with a mean years in the current supervisory role of 8.17 years. The number of technical services employees supervised by participants ranges from 1 to 38 employees with a mean of 5.83 employees supervised.

Measures

This study's accepted definition of work-related burnout was provided to all participants to ensure a uniform burnout construct was being used while responding to survey questions. Participants were told the core underlying attributes of work-related burnout are fatigue and exhaustion. Burnout was fully defined based on Kristensen et al. as "the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion that is perceived by the person as related to his/her work."²⁷

Participants were instructed to answer all questions about their typical management practices. This is an important distinction as data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many new stressors and changing work arrangements have arisen during the pandemic. This study features librarian observations and management practices during typical times (i.e., pre-pandemic). Certain data points in the study (e.g., workforce attrition) have certainly been influenced by the pandemic and may have created new permanent changes for academic libraries.

The survey questions used in this study were developed by the authors. The goal of the survey is to understand the

level of work-related burnout observed by technical services managers, the characteristics of that burnout, managers' attitude towards burnout, and management practices that impact burnout. The survey questions are informed by the existing literature on work-related burnout and developed to further the understanding of the impact of burnout in academic library technical services departments.

The survey includes standard response choices provided to all participants (results expressed as a percentage of total participants) and the ability to provide additional information via open text boxes (results expressed as count of total incidences). Open text box answers were reviewed, coded, and standardized into discrete themes. Any broader themes that emerged from standardized response data (e.g., performance decline) are accompanied by the common responses within the theme (e.g., missing deadlines, presenteeism, carelessness, and loss of creativity).

Results

Burnout Incidence and Observations

The observation of work-related burnout in technical services employees was common among managers with 73.02% indicating they have observed burnout in the individuals they supervise. These participants were provided with an open-ended response box to share the characteristics of burnout they have observed. These answers were standardized and coded. The most frequent observation was disengagement (e.g., motivation decline, lack of motivation, off-task behaviors, lack of interest, lack of participation in meetings/committees/activities, boredom, and apathy), followed by performance declines (e.g., missing deadlines, presenteeism, carelessness, and loss of creativity), and frustration (e.g., anger, quick to anger/short temper, impatience, irritability, overreacting to minor issues, and crying at work). A full list of burnout observations can be found in table 2.

Participants were asked if they have observed a difference in burnout incidence based on demographics or group membership of the employee (e.g., age, work experience, underrepresented or minority status, etc.). Only 23.02% of participants observed this type of difference and all observations related to increased burnout incidence. Participants were provided with an open-ended response box to indicate the differences observed. The most frequently observed difference is older employees experience more burnout. The second highest group difference observed

Table 2. Manager observations of burnout’s impact on employees.

Count	Burnout Observation
39	Disengagement (e.g., motivation decline, lack of motivation, off-task behaviors, lack of interest, lack of participation in meetings/committees/activities, boredom, and apathy)
34	Performance decline (e.g., missing deadlines, presenteeism, carelessness, and loss of creativity)
32	Frustration (e.g., anger, quick to anger/short temper, impatience, irritability, overreacting to minor issues, and crying at work)
21	Physical health manifestation or illness (e.g., headaches, fatigue, and tiredness)
15	Concentration issues (e.g., forgetfulness and lack of focus)
14	Overwhelmed (including task prioritization issues)
11	Absenteeism
10	Feeling mistreated
10	Low morale (e.g., unhappiness)
9	Negative attitude
8	Cynicism
8	Increased usage of paid time off
7	Mental health manifestation or illness (e.g., anxiety, sadness, and depression)
7	Exhaustion
4	Stress
4	Passive aggressiveness
3	Separation from the organization
2	Isolation
2	Aggression
2	Insubordination

was younger employees experience more burnout. No participant mentioned multiple group memberships (e.g., minority status and millennial) as part of their observation. A full list of observed burnout incidence increases based on demographics or group membership of employees can be found in table 3.

Burnout Attitudes and Management Practices

Participants were asked to share their beliefs about causes of work-related burnout with both a standard set of criteria and the opportunity to provide additional criteria. The following beliefs about burnout causing criteria were reported: 73.02% reported low pay, 70.64% reported loss of positions within the library, 67.46% reported bureaucracy or “red tape” at the institution, 58.73% reported budget cuts, 57.94% reported lack of advancement opportunities,

Table 3. Observed burnout incidence increases based on demographics or group membership of employees.

Count	Group Difference Observations
14	Older employees
4	Younger employees
2	People of color
2	Parents with young families
2	Employees who feel marginalized
1	Technical services workers
1	Workers with repetitive work duties
1	Underemployed individuals
1	Individuals with health challenges
1	Individuals lacking advancement opportunities
1	Millennials
1	Professionals (in comparison to support staff)
1	Individuals who primarily speak a language other than English

55.56% reported shifting priorities and departmental goals, 6.35% reported difficult patrons, 32.54% reported other criteria, and four participants reported not believing any of these criteria cause work-related burnout. Other criteria believed to cause work-related burnout includes library administration issues (16), increased workload (9), lack of acknowledgement for technical services contributions (4), ILS changes or migrations (3), institutional administration issues (2), communication issues (2), difficult coworkers (2), pay inequity (2), technology changes (1), reorganization (1), RTP stress (1), increased patron expectations (1), unclear expectations for technical services (1), lack of autonomy (1), job role changes (1), lack of raises (1), high turnover in technical services (1), fast paced changes within the profession (1), treatment as a minority (1), and the nature of technical services work (1).

Participants’ attitudes towards work-related burnout were evaluated by responses to seven statements using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The responses to these statements can be found in table 4.

Participants were asked to identify the negative outcomes of burnout they are concerned will impact their employees with both a standard set of outcomes and through providing additional outcomes. The following concerns about negative outcomes caused by burnout were reported: 78.57% report job performance declines, 53.18% reported job seeking / looking for another position, 50.79% reported absenteeism, 49.21% reported turnover, 16.67% reported other negative effects, and three participants reported not being concerned about any of these negative

Table 4. Participants’ attitudes about work-related burnout.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Burnout is an issue academic library managers should be concerned about.	0%	0%	3.17%	47.62%	49.21%
Employees experience burnout due to their own characteristics and/or personal problems.	2.38%	29.37%	34.92%	26.98%	6.35%
Employees experience burnout due to organizational characteristics and/or problems.	0.80%	1.59%	4.76%	60.32%	32.54%
Burnout is an issue for the personal well-being and health of employees.	0%	0.80%	2.38%	38.89%	57.94%
Burnout is an issue for an employee in terms of their work quality and productivity.	0%	1.59%	1.59%	38.89%	57.94%
Co-workers are impacted by individuals experiencing burnout in terms of work quality and productivity.	0%	0%	5.56%	51.59%	42.86%
Burnout is an issue for library users in terms of quality of services they are provided.	0%	5.56%	15.87%	55.56%	23.02%

effects. Other concerns about the negative outcomes of burnout included adverse health (including mental) impacts (6), retirement (5), poor attitudes (4), negative impact on coworkers (4), productivity declines (4), low morale (2), lateness (1), and forgetfulness (1).

Participants were asked if they take any steps to try and reduce the negative outcomes of burnout in their employees. The majority of participants (70.63%) reported taking such steps and shared their practices. The manager actions taken to reduce the negative effects of burnout can be found in table 5.

Participants were asked if they could fill vacated positions to better understand the potential impact of job seeking behaviors and actual turnover. In total, 64.3% of participants indicated some level of concern about filling vacant positions. An inability to fill vacant positions was reported by 38.1%. Further, an additional 26.2% reported they were unsure if they would be able to fill vacant positions.

Participants were asked if they take any steps to protect hardworking and highly productive employees from burnout. Two-thirds of participants (66.67%) indicated taking steps to protect these employees. The most common practice was increasing support in general (27), followed by monitoring workload and preventing overload (24), encouraging the use paid time off (15), advocating for them (13), increasing scheduling autonomy (8), intervening to remove stressors (8), performing kind gestures (e.g., taking them to lunch) (6), offering project/task variation (5), having one-on-one meetings (4), assisting with workload prioritization (4), encouraging healthy time habits at work (e.g., take breaks, don't skip lunch, only work 8 hour days) (4), increased work autonomy (3), performing wellness checks (2), encouraging and supporting professional development opportunities (2), and encouraging use of benefits such as free counseling (1).

Table 5. Manager actions taken to reduce the negative effects of burnout.

Count	Manager actions to reduce negative effects of burnout
21	Increased communication
14	Personal support
14	Reduce other responsibilities/workload help
12	Schedule flexibility
11	Highlight resources available through the institution
8	Encourage employees to utilize their paid time off
8	Training
7	Prioritize projects/duties based on employee interests
6	Advocacy to library admin for overloaded employees
5	Flexible expectations/deadlines
5	Validation of employee’s burnout feelings
4	Assist with the employee’s workload/duties
4	Promotion/raise advocacy
3	Task prioritization help
3	Help employee with job seeking
2	Keep a positive attitude with my department
2	Intervene to help with difficult patrons (external and internal)
2	Increased autonomy
2	Increased feedback
1	Coaching
1	Keep goals achievable
1	Encourage teamwork among coworkers
1	Hire help
1	Clearly define expectations
1	Rotate duties within department
1	Plan easy days of work
1	Allow employees control over work environment
1	Personally absorb duties so employees do not get overloaded
1	Advocate for help/new hires

Communication

To gauge the level of direct communication about burnout and related constructs (e.g., work stress) between managers and employees, participants were asked if their direct reports talk with them about these topics. Conversations between managers and employees about issues such as burnout were reported by 87.3% of participants.

Participants were asked to identify communication-related management practices they engage in with both a standard set of practices and through providing additional practices. The following communication-related practices were reported: 93.65% involve employees in decision making, 91.27% place an emphasis on transparency with their staff and are transparent whenever feasible, 84.13% provide feedback once or twice per year during formal evaluations, 69.84% provide feedback more frequently than formal evaluations on regular and consistent intervals, 69.84% hold meaningful staff meetings, 55.56% provide social support to employees, 10.32% engage in other practices, and no participants reported not engaging in any of these practices. Other practices reported include community building/informal social events (4), emphasis on workload fairness and expectations (3), increased transparency with direct reports (2), active listening (1), non-traditional meeting formats (1), encouraging job skills training (1), use of one-on-one meetings (1), and communicating support for employees seeking better employment opportunities (1).

Participants were asked if their communication-related management practices change based on employee grouping (e.g., staff, librarians, etc.) with 18.25% answering affirmatively. Table 6 contains a list of the communication differences based on employee grouping.

Providing Resources

Participants were asked to identify management practices related to providing resources for employees with both a standard set of practices and through providing additional practices. The following practices related to providing resources were reported: 84.13% provide trainings for employees to acquire new library skills, 77.78% model good behaviors and attitudes towards work and the workplace, 68.25% utilize workflow services to help with managing workload (e.g., shelf-ready services, cataloging services, etc.), 61.11% provide counseling and/or trainings for employees experiencing burnout or dealing with high work stress, 59.52% provide trainings for employees in stress management, 57.94% provide trainings for employees in time management, 53.18% mentor employees, 2.38% engage in other practices, and one participant reported not engaging in any of these practices. Other practices reported included actively referring employees to library/HR training

Table 6. Changes to communication-related practices based on employee grouping.

Count	Communication-related change in practices based on employee grouping
5	Careful communications to librarians about tasks and projects to avoid limiting their autonomy
4	Careful information sharing with unionized workers
4	Increased information sharing with librarians
2	Avoid any discussion of personnel with non-supervisors
1	Provides tailored communication to each employee based on needs and with consideration to their job class
1	Uses formal and process-based communication with non-supervisors
1	Communication about performance and evaluations is more structured and procedural when working with staff
1	Holds separate meetings for separate job classifications
1	Staff are given more direct instructions
1	Closer guidance and directions given to untenured faculty librarians
1	Librarians may receive communication and instruction from library administration in addition to their direct supervisor
1	Professional staff are included in more meetings so that information is heard first-hand and doesn't need to be relayed by a supervisor
1	Librarians are given verbal directions and information as compared to staff who are given more written directions and information

and HR services such as an Employee Assistance Program (2) and active listening with employees to provide them with someone to talk with about their issues (1).

Participants were asked if their management practices related to providing resources change based on employee grouping (e.g., staff, librarians, etc.) with 38.1% answering affirmatively. Table 7 contains a list of these employee grouping differences.

A strong majority of participants (87.3%) reported their institution provides professional development funds to pay for training or courses for both general and job-specific skill acquisition.

Job Roles and Characteristics of the Job

Participants were asked to identify management practices related to job roles and characteristics of the job with both a standard set of practices and through providing additional practices. The following practices related to job roles and characteristics of the job were reported: 87.3% give employees autonomy, 79.37% allow flexible scheduling, 74.6% clearly define roles and responsibilities to new hires or existing employees absorbing new duties, 61.11% actively

Table 7. Changes to providing resources practices based on employee grouping.

Count	Providing resources change in practices based on employee grouping
28	Librarians provided more professional development funds
10	Professional development funds for staff may be unavailable or requests may be denied
8	Librarians have guaranteed professional development funds
8	Librarians are allowed to travel farther (including out-of-state)
2	Librarians provided with official mentors
2	Exempt employees have expanded professional development opportunities
1	Staff are allowed release time for professional development but not funding
1	Librarians provided with professional development, but staff are not
1	Librarians receive a stipend for professional development travel
1	Training for staff is conducted within the library or broader institution
1	Staff required to receive union and library approval for professional development travel
1	Librarians have more scheduling autonomy to work around professional development
1	Librarians' memberships to professional associations are paid by library
1	Union staff have their professional development formally tracked via contract rules
1	Paraprofessionals can apply for small grants and one-time funds for professional development

find and intervene in job role related issues such as employees facing workload issues, 57.14% adopt practices which provide healthy work-life balance, 36.51% allow work-from-home arrangements, 1.59% reported they engage in other practices, and one participant reported not engaging in any of these practices. Other practices reported included reducing library hours to prevent employee overload (1) and making reorganization plans a collaborative effort (1).

Participants were asked if their management practices related to job roles and characteristics of the job change based on employee grouping (e.g., staff, librarians, etc.) with 13.49% answering affirmatively. Table 8 contains a list of these employee grouping differences.

Participants were asked additional questions about job roles within technical services. About half (48.41%) of participants reported supervising employees working in technical services roles who were not originally hired for technical services work. Further, 81.75% of participants reported supervising employees who have taken on new or

Table 8. Changes to job roles and characteristics of the job practices based on employee grouping.

Count	Job roles and job characteristics change in practices based on employee grouping
5	Staff cannot be asked to work outside of their job description
4	Librarians given more autonomy within job role
2	Librarians given freedom to craft their job role
2	Librarians expected to expand workload as needed
2	Institutional policy allows librarians to work-from-home, but staff must be on site
1	Exempt staff provided more scheduling autonomy
1	Staff scheduling flexibility limited by timeclock procedures
1	Staff provided scheduling autonomy to try to match librarian autonomy
1	Librarians cannot be asked to do work outside their job description
1	Unionized staff are managed more closely
1	Non-exempt employees are actively discouraged from working more than 40 hours a week, working on weekends, and doing things like checking email while on vacation time

Table 9. Reported management practices to support employees with job role changes.

Count	Management efforts to support employees with changing or expanded job roles
73	Provide training and professional development opportunities
26	Increase support (general)
18	Increased communication
9	Help manage a realistic workload and reduce responsibilities as needed
3	Provide schedule flexibility
3	Provide pay increases or stipends
2	Manager assists with workload and covering responsibilities
1	Advocacy for promotion and/or raises for the employee
1	Protection of employees from forced role changes

different technical services duties for which they were not originally hired. Supervising technical services employees who have taken on non-technical services library roles due to workforce reductions (e.g., public services duties) was reported by 29.37% of participants. Most participants (76.98%) indicated they have taken steps to assist employees whose role has changed. Table 9 contains a list of manager efforts to support employees with job role changes.

Table 10. Participants' attitudes towards work stressors.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
As the manager, it is my responsibility to help reduce burnout by intervening to solve problems and implement changes in the workplace.	0.80%	2.38%	3.17%	52.38%	41.27%
The need for technical services employees to stay on the cutting edge by constantly adapting to new technologies, software, evolving systems, etc., is a significant work stressor.	0%	11.11%	13.49%	46.03%	29.37%
Technical services employees often face increased job expectations.	0%	7.94%	5.56%	39.68%	46.82%

Work Stressors

Participants were asked to identify management practices related to work stressors with both a standard set of practices and through providing additional practices. The following practices related to work stressors were reported: 91.27% remain flexible with employees so work stressors (e.g., deadlines) can be modified to accommodate employee's personal life needs, 88.1% provide trainings to help employees with adopting new technology, software, etc., 79.37% make accommodations to address overloaded employees (e.g., reducing responsibilities or providing additional time to meet job demands), 76.98% intervene to resolve stressors related to the work environment (e.g., climate, new furniture, etc.), 3.17% reported they engage in other practices, and one participant reported not engaging in any of these practices. Other practices reported included cross training employees for backup coverage (1), conducting post-project debriefs to determine ways to improve future projects (1), eliminating a policy that required 24-hour turnaround of new materials to the shelves (1), and directly assisting employees with time management and prioritization of workload (1).

Participants were asked if their management practices related to work stressors change based on employee grouping (e.g., staff, librarians, etc.) with 3.97% answering affirmatively. All of these participants responded with answers indicating solutions to work stressors varied based on differences in university or employment rules between exempt and non-exempt employees, especially when dealing with working hours and scheduling issues.

Participants' attitudes towards work stressors were evaluated by responses to three statements using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The responses to these statements can be found in table 10.

Discussion

One of the primary goals of this study is to better understand the incidence of work-related burnout in academic

library technical services workers from the perspective of managers. Burnout appears to be a widespread problem within technical services with a staggering 73.02% of managers reporting they have observed burnout in direct reports. The high incidence of burnout observations in this study is certainly concerning for technical services but matches recent findings of high burnout within academic librarians in general.²⁸ The high incidence of burnout observed by managers in this study is strengthened by their considerable experience as academic librarians (\bar{x} = 18.34 years) and in their current role as a technical services manager (\bar{x} = 8.17 years).

Technical services managers' beliefs about causes of burnout generally match findings in the burnout literature. Over two-thirds of participants pointed to low pay, loss of positions within the library, and institutional bureaucracy as causes of burnout.²⁹ Further, over half of participants believe burnout is caused by budget cuts, lack of advancement opportunities, and shifting departmental priorities.³⁰ Additional causes of burnout provided by participants included issues with library administration, increased workload, and lack of acknowledgement for technical services' contribution to the library. Workload issues are a common theme across the entire study and are likely symptomatic of both the changing nature of technical services work and the loss of positions that many institutions are experiencing.

Another important goal of this study is to understand the negative outcomes burnout has on technical services workers. Managers observed several negative outcomes that can be found in table 2. Disengagement, performance declines, and frustration are the three most common observations. These outcomes are both intuitive and match findings in the work stress and burnout literature.³¹ Burnout also appears to have an impact on the health of workers as the fourth highest observation was physical health manifestations or illness. These negative outcomes also have the potential to interact with each other and exacerbate the situation (e.g., illness leading to performance decline leading to increased stress and so on).

The impact of burnout on several employment-related issues is observed or mentioned as an area of concern by

managers. These outcomes included absenteeism, job seeking behaviors, and actual turnover. At the same time, technical services managers in this study reported significant issues with workforce attrition. The majority of managers expressed some doubt about filling vacant positions with 38.1% stating they definitely cannot fill vacant positions. High burnout incidence and workforce attrition is a dangerous combination for technical services departments where the job duties of vacant or eliminated positions often need absorbed rather than abandoned. This reality creates more undesirable outcomes such as high workload or overload for remaining employees. This overload can lead to burnout and eventually the turnover of more employees who cannot be replaced. Technical services managers should be aware of harmful cycles like these and intervene when possible.

Understanding the typical practices of academic library technical services managers provides important insights about the role managers have in impacting work-related burnout in their employees. While some variables may fall outside of a manager's ability to influence, managers can impact burnout in several broad areas including communication, providing resources, addressing job role and related issues with the job, and assisting employees with managing work stressors. Documenting these management practices also provides pragmatic data for managers curious about the practices of their contemporaries around the country.

Nearly all managers who reported observing burnout in their direct reports also indicated actively working to mitigate the negative impacts of burnout. The most often mentioned management practice for mitigating burnout was increasing communication. Other common responses included increasing personal support, reducing workload, providing scheduling flexibility, reminding employees to take advantage of institutional resources (e.g., employee assistance programs), and encouraging the use of paid time off. Similar practices are reported with respect to protecting hardworking and highly productive employees. Managers should be mindful that these employees may be particularly susceptible to workload issues due to their hardworking nature. It should be noted that all of these practices are directly within the control of managers and do not require any new resources from outside of the department. Overall, technical services managers appear to be leveraging the variables within their control to try and create positive change for the burned-out employee.

Lack of communication and feedback appears in the literature as a cause of work stress and burnout as well as a symptom of burnout when the employee becomes uncommunicative.³² Participants in this study reported high levels of communication strategies with their employees. Every manager indicated they deploy at least one communication practice. Almost all participants (93.65%) reported involving employees in decision making. This practice

should help mitigate burnout as a lack of employee input in decision making is a causal factor in burnout.³³ Another widely adopted communication practice used by technical services managers is placing an emphasis on transparency with employees. Nearly 70% of participants indicated they provide frequent and consistent feedback to employees outside of formal evaluation processes. While not the focus of this study, the benefits of manager feedback, and increased feedback frequency, are well documented in management research.³⁴ Most participants (87.3%) also indicated that they talk with their employees about work stressors. This is a positive highlight in data that indicates many employees are struggling.

Job demands and work stressors are the primary constructs that come to mind when thinking about work-related burnout. The availability of job resources plays an important role in managing these demands and stressors. Managers reported providing several resources that can help with workload and time-related stress including providing training for new library skill acquisition (84.13%), utilizing workflow services such as shelf-ready books (68.25%), and providing trainings on time management (57.94%). These practices result in acquisition of skills employees need to complete expanding duties, actual task reduction support, and skills to manage overload-related time pressures. Providing resources that assist with high workload and time-related stress is a practice that should be continued as both constructs have been linked to causing job stress and burnout.³⁵ It is noteworthy that 87.3% of managers reported providing professional development funds to their employees since skill acquisition and other trainings are a large aspect of the job resources provided by technical services managers. Library managers should consider protecting these funds, even in the face of budget cuts, as they may have additional benefits to employees outside of simple skill acquisition. Social support, especially from supervisors, is another key job resource for preventing burnout.³⁶ Two major social support practices were reported by managers including modeling good behavior and attitudes towards work (77.78%) and mentoring employees (53.18%).

Changing job roles, often expanding and resulting in an increased workload, are a common reality for academic library technical services workers. This is evidenced by a majority of managers (81.75%) indicating they supervise employees whose job role within technical services has expanded in comparison to their role when hired. Some managers (29.37%) reported the expanded job role for technical services workers also includes covering duties in other library departments. Nearly half of managers (48.41%) reported supervising technical services employees who weren't originally hired to work in technical services at all. Overall, managers in this study seem to be aware of the expanding job role issue for technical services workers.

Some practices used to help in this area included clearly defining roles to new hires and employees with expanding roles (74.6%) and actively intervening in job role issues such as excessive workload (61.11%). Managers also reported several variations of “increasing support” and increasing communication levels with employees experiencing role expansion. These practices should be continued as they can actively impact issues linked to burnout including role clarity and overload.³⁷

Autonomy is an important characteristic of day-to-day work life that is directly influenced by management practices. Most managers (87.3%) reported allowing employees to have autonomy. Technical services managers should continue to take advantage of their ability to influence this area as low levels of autonomy have been linked to burnout.³⁸ Autonomy may play an even larger role for workers in technical services as individuals are required to engage in creative problem solving, adapt to unique special projects, and prioritize a high volume of tasks. Managers reported engaging in practices that provide some scheduling autonomy for employees including permitting flexible scheduling (79.37%) and adopting practices that allow for a healthy work-life balance (57.14%). These practices directly help to reduce work stress for employees and contribute to a healthy relationship with the organization. Practices around scheduling autonomy and work-life balance should help prevent burnout but also seem well positioned to aid employees suffering from negative burnout outcomes including disengagement and absenteeism. While only 36.51% of managers reported allowing work-from-home arrangements, that number seems poised to increase after the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Work-from-home arrangements are an emerging trend that may help reduce burnout within the profession as they are often very popular among employees seeking better work-life balance.

High workloads surfaced as an issue throughout this study and must be considered one of the main work stressors for technical services workers. High workload or overload features heavily in the research as a stressor that leads to burnout.³⁹ Among other practices previously discussed, most managers (79.37%) reported making general accommodations to try and reduce the work stress of overloaded employees. Other efforts to address work stressors included flexibility to accommodate the employee’s personal life needs (91.27%) and intervening to resolve stressors related to the work environment (76.98%). Simple gestures like allowing an employee to have flexible time to accommodate childcare needs or making sure a cataloger has a nice ergonomic desk chair, can make a real difference for the individual employee’s stress level.

The nature of technical services may lead to unique work stressors as well. Most managers (75.4%) agreed that a significant work stressor is the need for technical services

employees to stay on the cutting edge by constantly adapting to new technologies, software, evolving systems, etc. This stance is mirrored in management practice as 88.1% of managers reported providing trainings to help employees adopt new software and technology. Like many other previously discussed issues, managers seem to be turning to training as a solution. The use of training to address the constantly changing technological needs in technical services is certainly meant to be supportive but may be compounding stress by adding more work to an already overloaded employee. The acquisition of new skills is obviously important, but the overloaded employee still faces significant work stress to complete their duties within a reasonable work week.

Another goal of this study was to capture any differences in burnout incidence and management practices based on employee groupings. Academic libraries contain many different employee types, unions, statuses, and classifications that managers must balance. In terms of burnout incidence, the most common observation in this study is that older employees experience burnout more than younger employees. This observation is contrary to recent academic librarian studies, and the overall work-related burnout literature, which suggests younger workers experience more burnout than older workers.⁴⁰ One explanation for the incongruence between research findings and observations in this study is that the nature of technical services work places unique stressors on older workers such as constant new technology adoptions, fast-paced changes, work overload, and the repetitive nature of tasks over long careers. Future studies could investigate the resilience and adaptability of technical services workers, with attention to generational differences, to better understand this issue. Contrary to what would be a reasonable assumption based on the overall demographics of library workers, this sample of managers reported no burnout differences based on gender and only two managers reported a higher burnout incidence for people of color. Further investigation of these issues is necessary.

Communication practices seem to be relatively uniform with only 18.25% of managers indicating changes based on employee grouping. The most commonly reported communication change was being careful while communicating with librarians to avoid limiting their autonomy. A conscious effort to protect the autonomy of professional librarians is a smart practice due to the previously discussed relationship between autonomy and burnout. Another reported difference in communication practices is changes in information sharing based on union status. However, these reports were very low. This low response level could be because not all managers work in a faculty or unionized environment.

When it comes to providing resources to employees, 38.1% of managers reported differences based on employee grouping. These differences primarily centered around

professional development funds. The most common difference reported is that librarians are provided with more professional development funds than other employee groups. Another common response is librarians have their professional development funds guaranteed and are able to do more with their funds such as travel out-of-state. These practices for librarians stand in contrast to the second most reported difference which is professional development funds for staff may be made unavailable or denied. This seems to be problematic for non-librarians as managers in this study often cited training and skill acquisition as a large part of their management practices. Managers should consider how certain departments and employee groups may be impacted by the denial or lack of professional development funds. This problem could be especially relevant in technical services if staff are not provided with the means to acquire skills needed to adjust to changing standards and technological advances. These employees may face increased work stressors (e.g., technostress) that could lead to burnout.

Management practices related to job roles and characteristics of the job were relatively stable across employee groupings with only 13.49% of managers reporting differences. The two most common responses included staff having strictly defined job descriptions and librarians have more autonomy. Changes related to practices dealing with work stressors were noted by even fewer managers (3.97%). All of these responses point to limitations put on the manager based on university or employment rules.

It is easy to view burnout as an issue that belongs to the person experiencing it. However, this is a shortsighted conclusion. Technical services managers in this study appear to understand this. A strong majority of managers (92.86%) agreed that employees experience burnout due to organizational characteristics and problems. Managers have also indicated several negative outcomes for the organization when employees experience burnout. This study illuminates several work stress and burnout inducing variables that managers can influence to effect positive change for employees and the overall health of the organization. Prioritizing and adopting these practices is a win-win situation for all involved. In terms of organizational benefits, Nardine points out that “given the negative effects that burnout has on job performance, attendance, personal and professional relationships, and healthcare costs, it would be to organizations’ advantage to implement burnout mitigation plans.”⁴¹ Simply put, managers owning the problem and working to improve conditions for employees is good library management.

Limitations and Future Directions

Participants were instructed to answer questions about their typical management practices. Although this instruction was clearly given, it cannot be ignored that data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. These circumstances could have affected participant answers and/or increased the reported burnout incidence and observations. This study made no distinction between faculty status of librarians. There may be implications for burnout based on librarian faculty status that went unobserved in the present study.

The future research directions on academic library worker burnout are vast. Managers in the present study often reported increased communication and providing training to prevent or reduce burnout. Future studies should look to evaluate whether these practices actually impact burnout in technical services workers. Similarly, a review of the existing literature, coupled with the present findings, shows a need for an updated quantitative study on work-related burnout of academic library technical services workers. Feedback from participants often pointed to their personal level of burnout as an issue. Understanding the burnout of library managers, and how it impacts their ability to support direct reports who may also be suffering from burnout, is an interesting prospect for understanding the overall toll of burnout in academic libraries.

Conclusion

Academic library technical services managers reported a high incidence of work-related burnout in the employees they supervise. These managers observed several detrimental effects of burnout for the organization (e.g., disengagement and performance declines) and for the employee (e.g., frustration and health consequences). Other worrying trends for technical services departments were reported by managers including overload, expanding job roles, and workforce attrition. These factors contribute to current levels of burnout and shape a worsening future for technical services workers. Overall, managers are deploying thoughtful and research supported practices (e.g., increased autonomy, strong communication, and workload management) to mitigate burnout and other work stressors. These practices may need to expand and become even more intentional should the current trends of budget cuts and decreasing workforces persist.

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