Faculty Burnout: Problem and Perspective

L.H. Newcomb
and Richard W. Clark

Introduction

"Faculty members are a college's or university's primary resource for stimulating learning and the central force in maintaining and enhancing its character, vitality and outreach" (Bevan, 1980, p. 3). Unfortunately, according to Edgerton (1980), large numbers of faculty are approaching their teaching and research responsibilities with low energy levels, a lack of enthusiasm, and no senses of purpose. A continuance along this path will obviously lead to a decline in the quality of education at colleges and universities.

Most faculty in agriculture have a strong commitment to the work ethic. They believe in goal setting and the unselfish giving of themselves. These faculty also are committed to being readily available to students, responding quickly to their clients and commodity groups and freely serving the university community. These expectations often lead faculty to exceed their resources and to set goals that are unrealistic.

Hence, faculty find themselves giving more of themselves than is best for them. Additionally, many faculty feel they receive less in salary and general recognition than they deserve. Concomitantly, the personal rewards for teaching have diminished with students lacking appropriate skills and the increasing attention of universities to the alleged importance of research. Edgerton (1980) indicated that a recent study showed that 96 percent of faculty believe that students are seriously deficient in basic skills. This problem requires increased faculty time spent on remediation. In addition, many faculty in agriculture are frustrated since an increasing number of students lack an agricultural background, thereby making group instruction more difficult.

Increasingly, more universities are devoting major attention to improving research productivity. Faculty generally feel that while no one says the importance of excellence in teaching is diminishing considerable evidence indicates that it is. Hence, they see little reason to continue striving to become better teachers; at the same time they may receive less satisfaction from their teaching duties.

Newcomb is a professor and Clark a graduate research associate in the Department of Agricultural Education at the Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210-1099.

Role ambiguity also characterizes the faculty situation, especially agriculture faculty with split appointments in research in extension. With role ambiguity comes frustration, which leads to strain.

Future career prospects also have an influence on the vitality of faculty members. The academic career of the university faculty of today is different from that of the 1950s or 1960s. "During the 1950's and 1960's, the size of college and university faculties increased dramatically to accommodate the boom in enrollment. Faculty enjoyed a high degree of mobility and, with it, the leverage for increasing salaries and prequisites" (Novotny, 1981, p. 2). Faculty members can tolerate their present positions as long as they think they can move on to better ones. Unfortunately, faculty are becoming more immobilized. According to Edgerton (1980), the demand for services is lessening, and a large percentage (48%) of the faculty are in the middle-aged category between 35 and 50, and most (56%) of the full-time faculty are tenured. These conditions lead to limited turnover and, therefore, less job mobility. Many current faculty will spend the next 25 years in their present positions. In a sense, they are trapped.

The combination of tight economic times, decreased job mobility, role ambiguity, job overload, lower job satisfaction, frustration, and a need for personal growth makes faculty members prime candidates for "burnout."

Eckert and Williams (1972) indicate that the sheer size of the middle-aged group of professors shows how dependent the institutions are on their experience, competence, vitality, and commitment. Burnout may severly limit the development of these essential qualities, thus reducing the overall effectiveness of the faculty and the institution.

Burnout Defined

There are many definitions of burnout. The following definitions by leading researchers of burnout are widely accepted:

"Burnout: To deplete oneself. To exhaust one's physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or by the values of society." (Freudenberger, 1980, p. 16)

"Burnout is a process that begins with excessive and prolonged levels of job stress. The stress produces strain in the worker (feelings of tension, irritability and fatigue). The process is completed when the worker defensively copes with the job and becomes apathetic, cynical or rigid." (Cherniss, 1980, p. 21)

"Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind." (Maslach, 1982, p.3)

Burnout is a process or syndrome (Maslach, 1982; Freudenberger, 1980; Cherniss, 1980). According to Maslach (1982), it is "a response to chronic everyday stress, a tolerance that gradually wears away under the never ending onslaught of emotional tensions" (p. 11).

Edelwich (1980) concludes that the burnout process has four distinct stages.
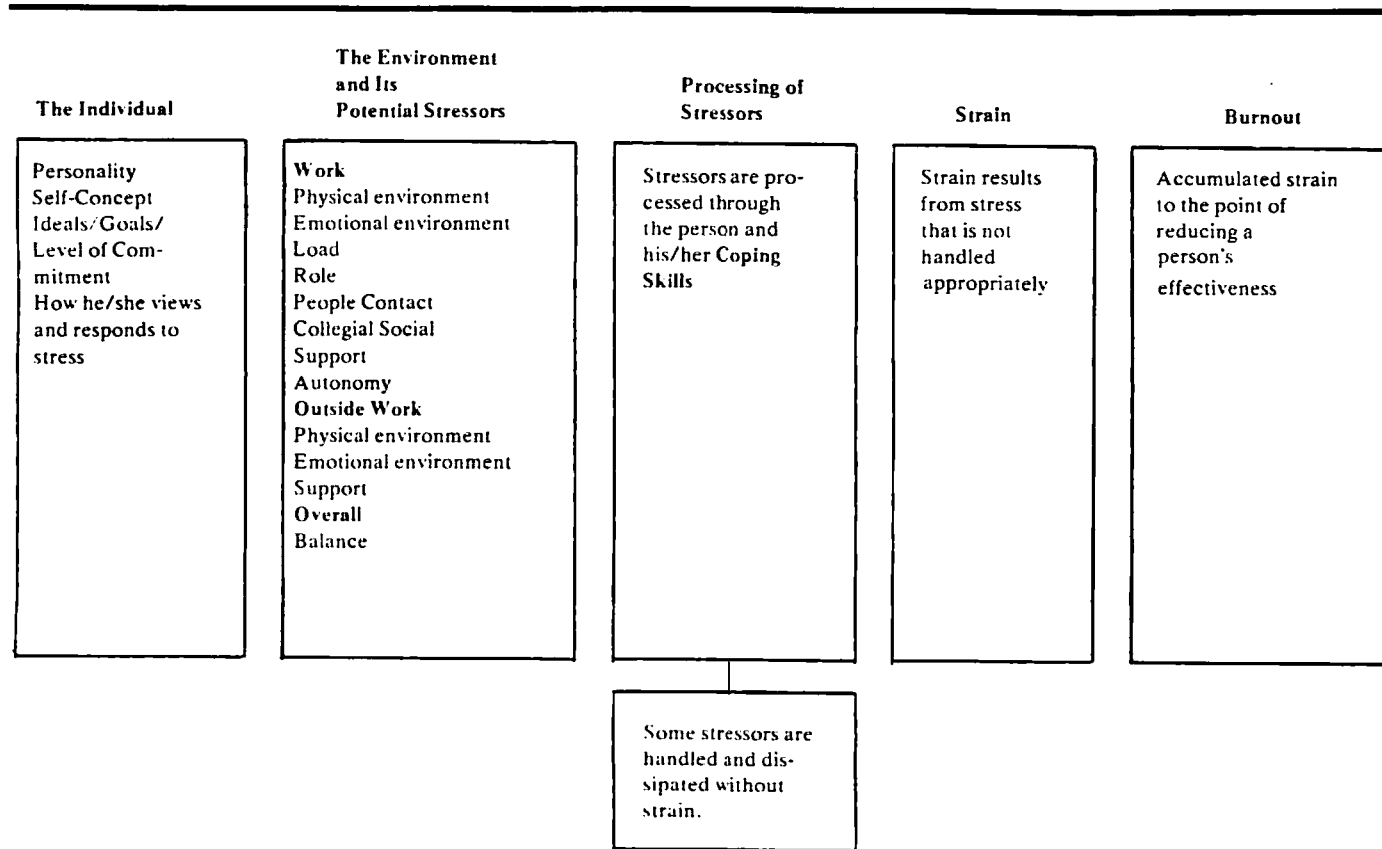
Stages of Burnout

Enthusiasm. This is the initial period of high hopes, high energy and unrealistic expectations, when one does not yet know what the job is all about. It is when one does not need anything in life but the job because the job promises to be everything. Excessive identification with clients and excessive and inefficient expenditure of one's own energy (including voluntary overwork) are major hazards of this stage.

Stagnation. One is still doing the job, but it is no longer so thrilling as to substitute for everything else in life. Enough of the reality has come through to make one feel that it might be nice to have leisure time, a little money to spend, a car, some friends, a family, and a home. The emphasis now is on meeting one's own personal needs, and the issues of money, working hours, and career development now become important.

Frustration. At this point, one calls into question one's effectiveness in doing the job itself. What is the point of trying to help people when they do not respond? What is the point of trying to help people when "the bureaucracy" frustrates one's best efforts? The limitations of the job situation are now viewed not simply as detracting from one's personal satisfaction and status, but as threatening to defeat the purpose of what one is doing. Emotional, physical, and behavioral problems may occur at this stage.

Apathy. This is the typical and very natural defense mechanism against frustration. It occurs when a person is chronically frustrated on the job, yet needs the job to survive. Apathy is the attitude that "a job is a job is a job." It means putting in the minimum required time (as against the overtime that is gladly undertaken during the stage of enthusiasm), avoiding challenges (even avoiding clients whenever possible), and seeking mainly to keep from endangering the secure position that compensates, however inadequately, for the loss of job satisfaction.

Table 1. Model for Burnout

The Individual	The Environment and Its Potential Stressors	Processing of Stressors	Strain	Burnout
Personality Self-Concept Ideals/Goals/ Level of Commitment How he/she views and responds to stress	Work Physical environment Emotional environment Load Role People Contact Collegial Social Support Autonomy Outside Work Physical environment Emotional environment Support Overall Balance	Stressors are processed through the person and his/her Coping Skills	Strain results from stress that is not handled appropriately	Accumulated strain to the point of reducing a person's effectiveness

Some stressors are handled and dissipated without strain.

It is important to note that intervention may be viewed as a fifth stage but may interrupt the cycle at any stage (Edelwich, 1980). This intervention may remove an individual from the cycle permanently or temporarily. After a temporary intervention, an individual may not progress through the full cycle but may go in and out of the various stages.

Maslach (1982) views the process or syndrome as beginning with emotional exhaustion. As a result of being emotionally drained, workers develop negative or cynical feelings toward clients or co-workers. Efforts may be made to depersonalize situations. In the last stage, the individual begins to look negatively at personal accomplishments.

Based on research on the burnout syndrome, the following model summarizes the burnout process (see Table 1). The individual brings his/her own personality, self-concept, goals, ideals, and level of commitment to the job. The individual also comes to work with some idea of how to respond to stress. The environment applies stress to the individual at work and outside of work. It then becomes the job of the individual to handle this stress through some type of coping mechanism. The individual will be able to dissipate some or all of the stress at this point by means of personal or organizational strategies.

Table 2. Potential Stressors

Work-Related Stressors
  Administrative red tape
  Attitudes of department colleagues
  Attitudes of university colleagues
  Adequacy of facilities (laboratory, office support services)
  Current salary level
  Seeking tenure
  Keeping current in one's field
  Lack of departmental status or prestige
  Students' lack of progress
  Unnecessary assigned tasks
  Too much to do in too little time
  Lack of clarity of what is expected
  Department is not close-knit
  Conflicting requests from two or more people
  Lack of autonomy
  Responsibility for others
  Lack of departmental communication
  Lack of university communication
  Pressure to publish
  Committee work
  Career progress not meeting expectations
  Depressed enrollment
  Grading papers
  Administrative duties
  Other areas of stress
Non-Work-Related Stressors
  Family responsibilities or tensions
  Financial worries
  Overall health
  Religious issues
  Political issues
  Personal struggles
  Other issues of stress

(Crosby, 1982, p. 54)

Table 3. List of Individual Burnout Symptoms

Physical	Psychological	Behavioral
Physical exhaustion/fatigue	Rigidity to change/loss of flexibility	Low-job performance/low-job satisfaction
Depression	Loss of concern and feelings/apathy	Decreased communication/withdrawal
	Cynicism/negativism	
Insomnia or sleeping more than usual	Emotional exhaustion/loss of emotional control	
Headaches	Low morale/sense of futility	High job turnover/leave position
Gastrointestinal problems/ulcers		Increased absenteeism
	Loss of patience/irritability	Loss of enthusiasm for job
Lingering colds/frequent colds/flu	Inability to cope with unwarranted stress	
	Feeling of anger/bitterness/resentment/disgust	Increased drug use
Weight loss or gain	Boredom	Increased marital and family conflict
Shortness of breath	Reduced self-concept	High alcohol use
Hypertension	Dehumanizing clientele/labeling	Lack of focus on job/lack of purpose and priorities
High cholesterol	Loss of idealism/disillusion	Accident proneness
Coronary disease	Frustration	Increased complaints about job
Impaired speech	Inability to make decisions	Forgetfulness/poor concentration
Sexual dysfunction	Feeling of powerlessness	Workaholism
	Suspicion/paranoia	
	Guilt feelings/feelings of failure	
	Depression	
	Alienation	
	Increased worry	
	Overconfidence/taking unusually high risks	
	Stagnation	
	Feelings of being everything to everyone/omniscient	
	Loss of charisma	

Note. Adapted from a compilation of research by Don Unger (1980, pp. 73-74).

Dr. Samuel Osipow (1983) indicates that "stress becomes negative, resulting in strain, if the individual is not able to deal [cope] with stress well and restore stability. Prolonged instability, or intense and extreme instability, is likely to produce negative results" (p. 2). One of these negative results is burnout.

Sources of Faculty Stress

Stress in the workplace is considered to be a major factor in the development of work-related problems (Selye, 1974; Cooper & Marshall, 1980; Levi, 1972). In a college or university setting, there are many sources of stress with which the faculty member must try to cope. These sources of stress can be broken down into work and non-work related. Table 2 contains a list of some possible sources of stress (Crosby, 1982, p. 54).

In a national study of stress among faculty members, it was found that of the three major areas (teaching, research, and service), teaching was the most stressful. The study also indicates that the ten most stressful situations are:

1. Excessively high self-expectations
2. Obtaining financial support for research
3. Insufficient time to stay abreast of information in the field
4. Low salary
5. Striving for publication
6. Feeling continually overloaded
7. Job demands interfering with personal activities
8. Lack of progress in career
9. Interruptions
10. Meetings (Gemlich, Loverich & Wilke, 1984a, p. 367).

Failure to deal appropriately with these stress factors can result in the strain that leads to burnout.

Individual Burnout Symptoms

Individuals involved in the burnout syndrome may exhibit certain characteristics or symptoms. It is important to realize that not every individual will exhibit the same symptoms or a specific number of symptoms. Table 3 indicates these individual symptoms that have been identified in individuals classified as "burned out." These symptoms or characteristics are classified as: physical, psychological and behavioral. Physical symptoms are accompanied by changes in physiological functions. Psychological symptoms involve the attitudes and feelings of the individual. Behavioral symptoms reflect those actions or behaviors manifested as a result of burnout (Unger, 1980).

Symptoms of burnout found in the research literature are: (a) low job performance/low job satisfaction; (b) physical exhaustion/fatigue; (c) rigidity to change/loss of flexibility; (d) decreased communication/withdrawal; (e) physical symptoms; (f) apathy/loss of concern; (g) cynicism; and (h) emotional exhaustion (Unger, 1980, p. 75).

Coping Strategies

As indicated in the earlier model of burnout, one way to prevent or reduce burnout is to reduce or eliminate stress before it becomes strain. This involves some type of coping strategy in the individual, social, or organizational realm.

Individual or Social Strategies

It is important that faculty be able to recognize stressful situations in the work setting. This is the first step toward developing strategies for alleviating the stress before it becomes harmful. After reviewing the results of their national study on stress of faculty members, Gmelch, Lovrich and Wilke (1984b, p. 488) indicated that "individual faculty members can, by awareness of the situations which are stressful to them, develop coping techniques known to reduce job-based stress."

Coping strategies may be considered either functional or dysfunctional. Functional strategies actually lead to a solution of the problem (e.g., improving time management skills). Dysfunctional strategies are used to avoid the problem or put distance between the individual and the source of stress (e.g., use of alcohol or drugs). Dysfunctional strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but ultimately the stress factor returns and is often more stressful than at its first occurrence. Therefore, it is important that the individual learn functional strategies for coping with stress and burnout.

An extensive review of the literature by Nusbaum (1982, pp. 28-29) indicated the following individual or social strategies as the most common functional methods:

1. Develop a realistic picture of yourself — know what you are feeling and why.
2. Set realistic goals for yourself.
3. Recognize the symptoms of stress and burnout.
4. Ask for help when it is needed.
5. Develop a structural and personal support system.
6. Retain hope.
7. Develop a detached concern for recipients of your efforts.
8. Maintain an active personal social life outside of work.
9. Take timeouts when needed.
10. Maintain a regimen of proper nutrition and physical exercise.
11. Develop a sense of organizational involvement.
12. Be willing to accept counseling when needed.
13. Develop self-therapies such as meditation, biofeedback, or relaxation response.
14. Accentuate the positive.

Of these, probably the most important is that of knowing yourself. Individuals must be aware of their

own feelings and physical condition. This knowledge is essential if one is to realize a problem exists and then seek the proper coping strategy. Maslach (1982) suggests that one way to get to know yourself is to express:

> "your feelings verbally — by writing them down in a diary, talking into a tape recorder or talking to a supportive colleague or friend. Such techniques force you to articulate and give shape to what may be vague or confusing feelings at first." (p. 99)

Organizational Coping Strategies

Certain characteristics, which may be related to physical conditions, interpersonal relationships, and support or administrative policies, may have detrimental effects on members of the organization. The organization can take actions that will help alleviate some of these possible problem areas. The literature, as summarized by Nusbaum (1982, pp. 28-30), indicates the following possible organizational strategies.

1. Set realistic organizational goals.
2. Assign workers to reasonable workloads and meaningful tasks, taking into consideration the number of contact hours with the people whom they serve and allowing for timeouts.
3. Utilize a team approach and job rotation.
4. Provide workers with administrative support and feedback.
5. Allow workers to take part in the organizational decision-making and policy-making that affects them.
6. Provide structured programs.
7. Allow for an atmosphere of enthusiasm, trust, and consideration among staff in staff meetings.
8. Improve pre-service training programs.
9. Provide adequate reward systems and equitable salaries and benefits.
10. Provide pleasant physical surroundings at work.

Thomas Horton (1983, p. 12) suggests that managers or administrators should make an effort to: (a) define responsibilities clearly; (b) set realistic performance standards; (c) encourage communications; (d) introduce major changes gradually; (e) reward accomplishment; and (f) monitor effectiveness. He feels these strategies will help reduce the frustration level of the faculty and result in less burnout.

Workshops to help increase awareness of burnout and how to cope with it have been used in universities and colleges. The major philosophy behind this approach may be summarized as follows:

> "Increasing control over one's work environment and job content is a major part of the psychological stamina and behavioral effectiveness. This control can be increased by teaching specific skills:

managing time, communicating, planning leisure time, reducing physiological stress and gaining control of personal feelings. The incorporation of workshops in these areas of staff development programs will have positive effects preventing burnout in some and assisting others recovering from it." (Wiggers, Fortner, & Wallace-Schutzman, p. 20)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Christine Maslach (1982) provides an excellent overview of burnout when she states:

> "If all of the knowledge and advice about how to beat burnout could be summed up in one word, that word would be balance. Balance between giving and getting, balance between stress and calm, balance between work and home — these stand in clear contrast to the overload, understaffing, overcommitment and other imbalances of burnout."(p. 147)

Faculty and administrators should spend time appraising the institutional and individual capabilities and limitations. The current economic and political climate has forced a limitation of resources both human and material. In spite of this, institutions and faculty are striving to reach the same goals as they did during times of prosperity. Together the administration and faculty must put these expectations in perspective (Gmelch, Lovrich, & Wilke, 1984b).

Bibliography

Bevan, J.M. (1980, October). Faculty evaluation and instructional rewards. **American Association of Higher Education Bulletin** 33(2): 1, 3, 4, 14-16.

Brookins, D. (1982). **Organizational characteristics that administrators perceive to be related to individual burnout.** Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.

Cherniss, C. (1980). **Staff burnout: Job stress in the human services.** Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Cooper, C.L., and J. Marshal. (1980). **White collar and professional stress.** New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Crosby, G. (1982). **The stress-burnout relationship: A study of university faculty.** Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, Tucson.

Eckert, R.E., and H.V. Williams. (1972). **College faculty view of themselves and their jobs.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Edelwich, J., and A. Brodsky. (1980). **Burnout: Stages of disillusionment in the helping professions.** New York: Human Sciences Press.

Edgerton, R. (1980, October). Academic careers, unlimited — off and running. **American Association of Higher Education Bulletin** 33(2): 2, 13.

Freudenberger, J. J., and G. Richelson. (1980). **Burnout: The high cost of high achievement.** Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co.

Gmelch, W.H., N.P. Lovrich, and P.K. Wilke. (1984a). A national study of stress among university faculty members. **Phi Delta Kappan** 65(5): 367.

Gmelch, W.H., N.P. Lovrich, and P.K. Wilke. (1984b). Sources of stress in academe: A national perspective. **Research in Higher Education** 20(4): 477-490.

Horton, T. (1983). Burned out? You're not alone. **American School and University** 55(12): 12.

Levi, L. (Ed.) (1972). **Stress and distress in response to psychological stimuli.** Oxford: Pergamon.

Maslach, C. (1982). **Burnout — the cost of caring.** Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Novotny, J. (1981, February). Mandatory retirement of higher education faculty. **American Association of Higher Education** (6): 7-11.

Nusbaum, L.C. (1982). **Perceived stress and self-concept as related to burnout in school counselors.** Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.

Osipow, S.H., and A.R. Spokane. (1983). **A manual for measures of occupational stress, strain and coping (form E-2).** Columbus, Ohio: Marathon Consulting and Press.

Selye, H. (1974). **Stress without distress.** New York: Signet.

Unger, D.E. (1980). **Superintendent burnout: Myth or reality.** Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.

Watkins, B.T. (1982, March 24). A new academic disease: Faculty "burnout." **Chronicle of Higher Education** 24(1): 1, 8.

Wiggers, T.T., D.S. Fortner, and F. Wallace-Schutzman. (1982). Burnout is not necessary: Prevention and recovery. **National Association of Student Personnel Administrators** 20(2):13-21.

Teaching Farm Management and Decision-Making Skills Using a Student-Managed Farm

Mark S. Honeyman

Abstract

Ag 450 at Iowa State University is an undergraduate course entitled Farm Operation and Management, in which the students learn management skills and decision-making by managing the Ag 450 Farm. The farm has been operated as a self-supporting commercial teaching farm for the past 40 years. The farm produces typical midwestern crops and livestock according to students' decisions in a diversified operation. Two full-time operators are employed. Course objectives include teaching the students to (1) manage a farm using farm management techniques, (2) develop an understanding of the opinions of others, (3) learn to function efficiently as a group, (4) participate personally in the challenge of applying current technology to real farm problems, and (5) develop patterns for decision-making. The purpose of this study was to examine the development of this unique educational program at Iowa State University, to characterize the Ag 450 Farm course, and to compile a brief history of the Ag 450 Farm.

The widespread application of science in production agriculture has placed additional value on higher education for farmers and agribusinessmen. Students enrolled in Agricultural Studies 450 (Ag 450) at Iowa State University learn applied farm management by making the decisions needed to operate the Ag 450 Farm, a teaching farm at the university. The farm and the class are both called Ag 450.

The class consists of junior and senior undergraduates majoring in curricula related to production agriculture: Agricultural business, agricultural education, agricultural mechanization, agronomy, animal science, and farm operation. Most of the students have farm backgrounds and are interested in careers in or closely associated with farming. The Ag 450 class has one prerequisite: Agricultural Economics 330 - Farm Planning, Production, and Organization. Most of the students have also taken extensive agricultural coursework.

This class of students makes all the decisions required to manage the Ag 450 Farm. They develop the plans and budgets and make the decisions in operating

Honeyman is an instructor in Agricultural Studies Department, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.