Information Institutions and Professions
Assignment # 2 - Memo
Kelsey Rogers


TO: Assistant Director

FROM: Kelsey Rogers

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SUBJECT: Preventing Burnout In Our Staff

Burnout can be defined by a combination of cynicism towards one's career, reduced efficacy, and mental and emotional exhaustion. This phenomenon has been shown to affect library staff across institutions and countries, including public libraries like ours in Sweden (Lindén, Salo & Jansson, 2018) and in our neighboring state of Indiana (Saylers et al., 2018). Two factors standout as contributors to burnout in library staff: perceptions of fairness in performance recognition (Adebayo et al., 2018; Bauwens et al., 2019) and role ambiguity (Adebayo et al., 2018; Saylers et al., 2018;  Shupe, Wambaugh & Bramble, 2015). Role ambiguity in particular is becoming increasingly important as the role of libraries and librarians changes in response to our patrons' needs.

We have recently made updating our programming to reflect changing patron needs a top priority. I believe that while this is very important for the success of our library system, this move will increase role ambiguity in our staff which, as these studies show, can increase burnout. Additionally, with our new emphasis on programming updates, performance recognition will be at the forefront as new and updated programs will be under review. Fairness in performance recognition can lead to both reduced burnout and increased organizational

citizenship behaviors (Bauwens et al., 2019). These behaviors are those that go beyond the officially defined role of the employee and focus on assisting others in their work which can be essential in a system-wide initiative. As the initiative will layer on top of the tasks and projects our staff are already doing, cooperation between staff will be very helpful in reducing the risk of burnout due to high work- and role-overload (Lindén, Salo & Jansson, 2018; Adebayo et al., 2018; Shupe et al. 2015).  In order to decrease and prevent burnout in our own employees during this time and in the future there are a few options that we can implement. Below are two goals and possible pathways to achieving them that target issues of burnout in response to our new initiative.

**Goal #1:** Reduce Role Ambiguity

Reducing role ambiguity can be achieved through clearly identifying and defining the responsibilities of staff roles and updating these responsibilities in a consistent and timely manner. In this way, employees will know what is expected of them rather than having to rely on guesswork or asking a supervisor which is something many employees may avoid due to being afraid they will come off as incompetent. Schupe et al. (2015) suggest providing a specific, safe and effective process for employees to express their concerns over ambiguous or overloaded responsibilities to account for this issue ass it will most likely come up even with the most comprehensive definition of responsibilities. Complimenting this effort, providing training and skill development to staff can assist them in keeping up the changing responsibilities of libraries and librarians. Schupe et al. (2015), Saylers et al. (2015), and Adebayo et al. (2018), all support these approaches in reducing role ambiguity.

**Objective 1 - A:** Define Responsibilities

Key responsibilities for each department are identified, and clearly defined and communicated to the department heads. Each department supervisor then identifies and clearly defines key responsibilities for each staff position, making sure to be as clear and comprehensive as possible. These responsibilities are then reviewed and approved by the directors. The newly defined staff responsibilities are clearly communicated across the system. Reviews and updates of these official responsibilities are completed on a yearly basis and whenever staff responsibilities are changed.

*Outcome 1 - A*: *Supervisors and staff have a clear and cohesive understanding of the responsibilities of their positions.*

**Objective 1 - B:** Create Process for Clarification

Procedures should be developed for staff to safely and effectively communicate concerns and confusion over their role responsibilities. Both the possibility of role overload and role ambiguity should be addressed without judgement. The process should include steps to update and communicate changes to the definition of responsibilities. These procedures should be clearly communicated with the staff.

*Outcome 1 - B*: *Staff utilize process for clarification without apprehension and responsibilities are updated in a timely manner to reflect needed clarifications.*

**Objective 1 - C:** Reinforce Training and Skill Development Programs

As our library already has a system in place for staff training, I suggest that we reemphasize the programs we offer in terms of the new initiative, highlighting especially relevant

programs. Additionally, we should take the time to seek out and provide newly relevant training programs to further support the changing landscape of our staff's responsibilities.

*Outcome 1 - C*: *Staff learn new skills that support their role responsibilities in light of recent changes.*

**Overall Outcome #1**: *Symptoms of burnout in staff due to role ambiguity are reduced and future burnout is prevented as staff clearly understand their responsibilities and have the resources to fulfill them.*

**Goal #2:** Ensure Performance Recognition Fairness

There are three types of performance recognition fairness that can influence burnout as shown by Bauwens et al. (2019). Distributive fairness occurs when employees feel that the effort they put in their work is reflected in the rewards and recognition they receive with an emphasis on recognizing diverse types of effort. Procedural fairness occurs when the process for recognition is transparent and equitable. Finally, interactional fairness occurs when the social aspect of giving and receiving recognition is positive and open. Ensuring that each of these types of performance recognition fairness are in place is essential in reducing and preventing burnout in our staff as an uptick in work effort and projects will be evident in response to the new initiative.

**Objective 2 - A**: Revise and Clearly Communicate Process for Performance Recognition

Keeping all three types of performance recognition fairness in mind, current procedures for recognizing staff effort should be revised. In particular, distributive fairness should be the

main focus, ensuring that multiple types of effort are recognized. Once revised procedures are created, they should be clearly communicated to staff and updated in a timely manner.

*Outcome 2 - A*: *Staff have a clear understanding of the expectations of their performance and the process through which they are recognized for their efforts.*

***Overall Outcome #2****: Efforts towards fulfilling the new initiative are fairly recognized, thus reducing and preventing burnout in staff. As performance recognition fairness is maintained, staff feel more motivated to assist each other with projects and other responsibilities outside of those defined for their roles.*

References

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