

# **Burnout in Leadership – The Latest Research – and its implications**

**David Megginson &  
Tim Casserley**

# Key ways in which this research is different

- Burnout primarily affects young high flyers (20% of top talent pool)
- Caused by nature of relationship between high flyer & work
- Individual characteristics that make some high flyers more prone:
  - fragile sense of identity & purpose
  - lack of quality self interaction (reflexivity)
- Brings about change in sense of self
- Use of burnout as valid developmental material
- Developmental potency: generates systemic learning
- Learning determined by accepting responsibility & being held

## Nature of burnout

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Negative psychological condition closely linked to negative physiological effects |
| 2 | Primarily work related; develops gradually & is long term process                 |
| 3 | Function of relationship between high flyer and their work environment            |
| 4 | Pervasive phenomenon not strongly dependent upon national culture                 |

## Those most at risk

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | High flyers in their 20s and early 30s; within the first ten years of a career |
| 2 | 'Normal' individuals who do not suffer from psychopathology                    |

## Symptomatology

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Overwhelming exhaustion – emotional, cognitive and physical                 |
| 2 | Distress – affective, cognitive and physiological                           |
| 3 | A reduction in performance and productivity                                 |
| 4 | A sense of disillusion leading to decreased motivation and job satisfaction |
| 5 | Dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work                              |
| 6 | Addictive behaviour   |

# Types & consequences of burnout

Leads to career derailment for most & transformational learning for a very few (6% of our research sample)

**Crashing & Burning**

**Chronic self  
destructive pattern**

**Joyless depletion**

*Typology of burnout experience*

# How it is stigmatised

For individuals:

- Admission of failure – tantamount to career suicide
- Sub culture of fear & lack of openness in organisations
- On the cusp of last great workplace taboo – poor mental health ('Stand for Reason' campaign in the UK)

For organisations:

- Risk to employer brand & EVP
- Attraction & engagement – particularly generation Y
- Being seen as 21<sup>st</sup> century sweat shop

# Why this is important

## Risk management/ prevention

- Organisational level
  - Avoid reputational damage to employer brand
  - Retain and develop high value employees
- Individual level
  - Finding meaning & purpose through work makes one vulnerable to abuse

## Developmental/enablement

- Organisation level
  - Burnout contributes to development of universal practices of good leadership
  - Brings untold value, cannot be bought
- Individual level
  - Transformation of identity & purpose
  - Evolution towards full adult maturity

‘Ironically, the very situations that most often lead to derailment can as readily lead to development. Put another way, experience can do one in or it can teach important lessons. The trick is to know how to influence which way it goes’

Professor Morgan McCall

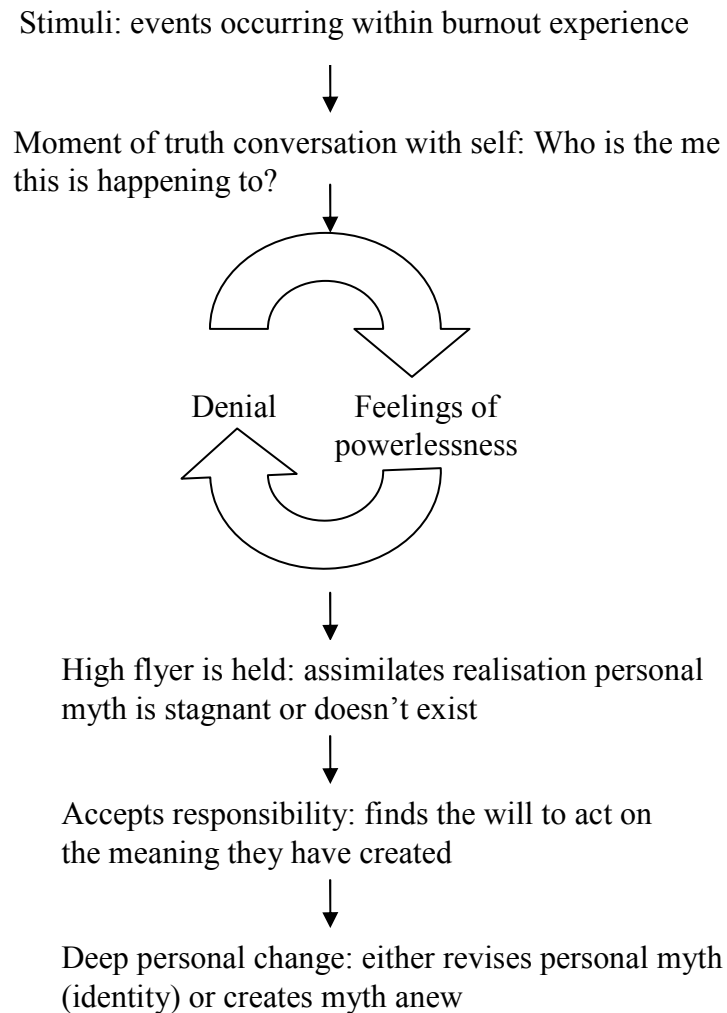
# Research scope & methodology

- In depth interviews + psychometric survey of 100 high flyers
- 29 different nationalities, domiciled in 21 countries
- Average 3 hour interviews audio recorded, transcribed, analysed
- Survey tool: Maslach Burnout Inventory + work stress coping dimensions

# Consequences of burnout

- Psychosomatic issues
- Reduced engagement & commitment
- Career derailment (development?)
- Change in sense of self

# What determines whether high flyers learn from burnout?



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Figure 5.6 Learning pattern of those who learnt from burnout

# The (component) lessons of burnout

<b>Key development themes</b>	<b>Examples of how this was manifest</b>
<b>Recognition of own limitations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More realistic sense of own capabilities</li> <li>• Willing to reach out and ask for help</li> <li>• Knowing when one's body needs a rest and taking it</li> <li>• Greater openness to learning the new</li> </ul>
<b>Greater sense of perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realistic assessment of the consequences of work issues</li> <li>• More balanced approach to work and its place in their lives</li> <li>• More mature, more balanced business decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Self management/self responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining own boundaries</li> <li>• Taking share of responsibility for situations</li> <li>• Greater sense of self authorship</li> <li>• Greater sense of self control</li> <li>• Understanding the need to check-in with oneself in order to keep in balance</li> </ul>
<b>Compassion for self and others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sensitivity to others</li> <li>• Greater sense of fairness and justice in the work place and managing people accordingly</li> <li>• Greater focus on the development of others</li> </ul>

# How burnout develops leadership

<b>Universal leadership practices</b>	<b>Systemic learning from burnout</b>	<b>Constituent lessons</b>
Form/sustains enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding limitations &amp; patterns which can derail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of limitations</li> <li>• Self management/</li> </ul>
Bring value to their followers & wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent thinkers</li> <li>• Emotionally robust individuals with distinct identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sense of perspective</li> <li>• Self management and self responsibility</li> </ul>
Provide followers with inspiration to continue on the journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspire followership</li> <li>• Emotionally robust identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion for self/others</li> <li>• Self management</li> </ul>
Create climate of balance	Sustainable, balanced approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self management</li> <li>• Recognition of limitations</li> </ul>
Sustains followers through challenging times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspire followership</li> <li>• Emotionally robust individuals with distinct identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion for self and others</li> <li>• Self management and self responsibility</li> </ul>
Source of wisdom, sound judgement, balanced decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wisdom: more balanced decision making, greater sense of perspective, awareness of consequential nature of actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sense of perspective</li> <li>• Recognition of limitations</li> <li>• Self management</li> </ul>

Back up slides

# Action learning focused on the lessons in each kind of experience

## Sixteen Developmental Experiences

Assignments	
1. <b>Early Work Experiences</b>	Early non-managerial jobs
2. <b>First Supervision</b>	First time managing people
3. <b>Starting from Scratch</b>	Building something from scratch
4. <b>Fix-it / Turn it Around</b>	Fixing / stabilizing a failing operation
5. <b>Project / Task Force</b>	Discrete projects and temporary assignments done alone or as a team
6. <b>Scope</b>	Increase in numbers of people, dollars, and functions to manage
7. <b>Line to Staff Switch</b>	Moving from line operations to corporate staff roles

Hardships	
8. <b>Business Failures and Mistakes</b>	Ideas that failed, deals that fell apart
9. <b>Demotions/Missed Promotions/Lousy Jobs</b>	Not getting a coveted job or being exiled
10. <b>Subordinate Performance Problem</b>	Confronting a subordinate with serious performance problems
11. <b>Breaking a Rut</b>	Taking on a new career in response to discontent with the current job
12. <b>Personal Traumas</b>	Crises and traumas such as divorce, illness and death

Other People	
13. <b>Role Models</b>	Superiors with exceptional (good or bad) qualities
14. <b>Values Playing Out</b>	“Snapshots” of chain of command behaviours that demonstrated individual or corporate values

Other Events	
15. <b>Coursework</b>	Formal courses
16. <b>Purely Personal</b>	Experiences outside of work

# Experiences which hold the most developmental potential

