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Burnout in the Dance Industry

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Reflection of preliminary research

For this project, we were instructed to design a survey for the Association for Electronic Music to get an insight into the topic of burnout among artists and industry professionals in the electronic music industry. The project was conducted in the seven academic weeks dedicated to the course Music Careers, Industries and Lives plus extra three weeks building up to the final exam/deadline and requested survey. To be able to compose a survey, we decided to first conduct literary research on the topic. We examined literature on burnout as an overall health issue from a medical/psychological perspective and at the same time we looked at research on mental health in the (electronic) music industry. The research from psychological perspective showed us that the development of burnout is dependent on societal, personal, and work-related factors. Since this survey is for an industry related organization, we decided to mostly focus on the work-related factors, although we also included some questions touching upon support from social circles. We also used this literature to be able to develop questions asking for symptoms or causes of burnout. We interpreted these so that they were applicable to the electronic music industry specifically. Moreover, we also examined existing work-related and burnout questionnaires that are used in psychology to see how we could phrase the different questions, and which scales we could implement.

Research on mental health and burnout in the (electronic) music industry specifically showed us that especially artists experience stress and pressure due to the unpredictability and irregularity of their jobs. Artists and crew members that are touring are especially at higher risk of clinical depression, anxiety, and burnout. This is why we also decided to add questions on the stress factors of the work in the industry with options such as traveling and irregularity. Literature also suggested that among artists and crew members practices like mindfulness, seeking social support and actively engaging in well-being are helpful for their mental health. This led us to include a question on what respondents do prevent the development of burnout symptoms, showing some of these options.

For gaining more specific and deeper knowledge on burnout and stress in the electronic music industry, we also decided to conduct interviews with people who work in the electronic music industry themselves. Through our personal contacts, we managed to interview one upcoming DJ and producer, one nightlife community builder and DJ and one night program booker for a music venue who is also a curator for other organizations as well as a DJ. These last two have also previously worked as a nightlife music journalist, electronic event marketer, copywriter for electronic music festival and nightlife panel coordinator. In this way, we managed to obtain a wide picture on possible causes of burnout and awareness around the topic in the industry. Besides, being able to do the interviews gave us the possibility to practice question formulation. This was helpful for making sure the respondents of the survey can interpret the different questions correctly. The interviewees mentioned that the unpredictability and irregularity of jobs in the industry is what makes it quite stressful. Since it is such a passion-driven industry, workers more easily overstep their boundaries. Moreover, they mentioned that regular alcohol and drug use can also play a role in the exhaustion that people in the industry experience. This was also found in existing literature, which is why we included it in the survey as well. Finally, the interviewees stressed the need for more open discussion and awareness on the topic of burnout from within the electronic music industry. Therefore, we also made sure to dedicate some questions on this issue to the survey.

Eventually, we combined what we found in the literature with the context from the interviews and inspiration from existing questionnaires to create survey questions for AFEM. After having sent out these questions to AFEM, we had an online meeting with them to discuss them. This allowed us to get some feedback and implement the discussed changes.

Bibliography

The following academic readings have been used as a guideline to collect information in regards of both burnout as a general condition and burnout in the (electronic) music industry.

Houtman, I. L. D. et al (2020). Oorzaken, gevolgen en risicogroepen van burn-out: Eindrapport. TNO. Retrieved from: <https://www.monitorarbeid.tno.nl/nl-nl/publicaties/burn-out/>.

This report on the causes and consequences of burnout firstly stresses the problematic disagreement on a definition of burnout. It even differs per country. However, the researchers adopt a definition that is also close to the one of the World Health Organization, (WHO): ‘Burnout is a work-induced syndrome of (1) emotional fatigue, [...], combined with (2) distancing from work (distancing) and/or with (3) having little confidence (anymore) in one's own ability (reduced competence)’ (p. 20). Moreover, the report discusses how the development of burnout is dependent on a combination of work-related, societal and personal factors. Work-related factors are especially relevant to this research. Specifically, factors such as high workload or demands, little flexibility in the regulation of work, lack of support from the work environment and little appreciation for work (also financially) can contribute to the development of burnout. The causes of burnout depend on the one hand on the situation at work, while the employee’s way of coping with stress at work also plays a role.

Kegelaers, Jolan Jelle, Lewie Jessen, Eline Van Audenaerde, and Raoul R. D. Oudejans. “Performers of the Night: Examining the Mental Health of Electronic Music Artists.” *Psychology of Music* 50, no. 1 (January 5, 2021): 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735620976985>.

The aim of the study was to examine the mental health of electronic music artists, as well as several determinants.

Using a quantitative research, a total of 163 electronic music artists participated in this study. It has been demonstrated through the data collection that both symptoms of depression/ anxiety *and* well-being were adopted as indicators for mental health. Furthermore, standardized measures were used to assess potential determinants of mental health, including sleep disturbance, music performance anxiety, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, occupational stress, resilience, and social support.

Results highlighted that around 30% of participants experienced symptoms of depression/ anxiety. Nevertheless, the majority of these participants still demonstrated at least moderate levels of functioning and well-being. Sleep disturbance formed a significant predictor for both symptoms of depression/anxiety and well-being. Furthermore, resilience and social support were significant predictors for well-being.

Golembiewski, Robert T. “Burnout As a Problem at Work: Mapping Its Degree, Duration, and Consequences.” *Journal of Managerial Issues* 1, no. 1 (1989): 86–97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40603688>.

This reading helped us to understand where to focus the attention while creating the survey and gave us also information on possible prevention approaches. Besides our work not focusing on the prevention, it was important for us to have a glimpse also on this to have a full picture of what we are working with and how to narrow down the topic.

We aimed on giving a more descriptive summary of this article for potential further steps in the project.

Golembiewski describes the ‘phase model of burnout’ that not only permits valid and reliable measurement, but that also suggests useful approaches to dealing with burnout. Three key

theoretical and practical issues are suggested by these scenarios. They concern differentiating phases or stages in the build-up of strain, identifying points at which interventions are appropriate, specifying the types of intervention appropriate at those points.

A person's degree of burnout can be expressed along 3 dimensions, and they include: firstly, depersonalization, or the tendency to view others as things or objects rather than as feeling, valuing persons. Secondly, personal accomplishment, or the degree to which a person sees self-doing well on task worth doing. Thirdly, emotional exhaustion, or the degree of experienced strains relative to one's normal coping skills and attitudes.

The "phase model of burnout" can be generated into a scheme in which the three dimensions can generate eight possible combinations (each combined between High/Low), in which the dimension of personal accomplishment must be considered a reversed way, so the lower the better.

About the implications for remediation and most especially prevention, the attention is mostly towards the *environment*. First it is important to keep the individuals at less advanced phases by manipulating environmental variables; openness and interpersonal sensitivity, for example, will reduce the probability of level 1 becoming 2 or worse. There are very good learning designs for avoiding or reducing the personalization - like team building, conflict resolution, participative management etc. Relatedly, a psychologically meaningful job and participation in work decisions seemed capable of raising one's sense of personal accomplishment, low levels of which are the gateway to phases 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. In general, these suggestions have in common a direct trust. Since the immediate work environment seems crucial in inducing burnout what needs changing is the work site rather than individuals. These interventions are not aimed at creating stressor free environments, this is an unlikely and impossible goal, but the aim is managing the effects of stressors rather than trying to make life stressor free.

Overall, most of the conventional wisdom does not seem to help in dealing with people in advanced phases. The usual prescriptions for advanced burnout involve high energy interventions like stress management workshops or interpersonal confrontations but in general, 8 are usually already over stimulated and lacking in energy.

Periodic job rotation - between tasks high versus low in stress - can help in burnout and this advice seems sound, where applicable. Moreover, various low stimulus designs seem appropriate for those in advanced phases (such designs include flexible work hours and mild role negotiation).

Chronic burnout seems to be a group rooted phenomenon, to begin. Indeed, as of now, the most powerful prediction is that members of the same immediate groups will have similar phases of burnout. It is more likely that the same group work fits in the same phase of burnout (more specifically if you know the phase assignment of any single group member, let's say L3 or L4-5, several studies indicate you have a 75%-90% chances of predicting the burnout level of a majority of all other work group members).

Stress management workshops are understandably voluntary, but the least needful people might seek them. Here, we desperately require research to test for such awkward possibilities. Paradoxically success in such workshops means for the participants to learn on how to do even better in dealing with stress, so it might be counterproductive.

Gross, S. A. and Musgrave, G. 2020. *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition*. Pp. 41–62. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book43.c>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

This chapter explores how musicians understand and face their role in the music industry, the challenging and uncomfortable side of it, and looks at the destabilising effect that all these

characteristics can bring to the individual on the level of self-worth and self-esteem. The chapter leads on focusing on the struggle of defining their work practises in the music industry as labour and consequently how these impact their work's success and lives. Overall, these uncomfortable tensions between what musicians are and what they should be is identified as very dangerous and even more because embellished by the common mantras in music industry of 'believing in yourself', 'keeping it positive', 'being original', which create constant anxiety in musicians and are detrimental for their careers and lives.

Gross, S. A. and Musgrave, G. 2020. *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition*. Pp. 63–86. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book43.d>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

This chapter in the first part focuses on the relationship between musicians and online sharing/consumption of their art, that makes them feel constantly emotionally vulnerable and anxious for being judged and about overall feedback that can easily lead them to a downfall in their career and self-esteem. In connection to this aspect, the chapter proceeds examining how musicians engage with the concept of *value* when offline and within the music industry itself. To do so are brought up the concepts of 'luck', 'randomness', 'perfect timing' that are very common in this environment, creating even higher levels of emotional distress and anxiety since everything is in the hands of faith and the unknown, instead of the quality of work and controllable variables. Overall, in this chapter is brought up the fact the major factor of distress and anxiety for professional musicians are the precarious and unpredictable workplace and the general notions of control.

Gross, S. A. and Musgrave, G. 2020. *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the Price of Musical Ambition*. Pp. 87–114. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book43.e>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

In this chapter the attention is raised on the tensions that ambition creates between the musicians and those closest to them, as in their family friends and partners, expanding even in the music community since it becomes a major aspect of competition. Raising this aspect also points to the elements of inequality, privilege, and disadvantage in the music industry.

The relationship between the musician and the people around him/her is a fundamental factor for the validation, meaning, and self-esteem of the person, hence why both sentimental and economic relations are very important and impactful for the private life and working life of the musicians.

Newman, Chayim, Ryan P George, Tim Beitz, Zachary Bergson, and Vance Zemon. 2022. "Mental Health Issues among International Touring Professionals in the Music Industry." *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 145 (January): 243–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2021.12.031>.

These researchers are part of the Tour Health Research Initiative (Philadelphia) and Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology (NY). The Tour Health Research Initiative as started by a group of psychologists who feel like there are mental health issues in the live music sector, but real data is still lacking.

In 2020 they created a survey for touring artists and crew members, focusing specifically on risk for depression and suicidality; the ones who completed it showed elevated levels and higher risk of suicidality, clinical depression, stress, anxiety and burnout. The survey also gives reason to believe that engaging in mindfulness and emotional and social wellbeing could be a valuable treatment /

protector for this risk group. However, it is also shown that the group used alcohol and marijuana weekly, which could also influence mental health negatively (apart from the touring schedule). Overall, the survey used psychological scales and statistical tests to identify the risk for depression and other mental health issues.

Van Den Eynde, Julie, Adrian T. Fisher, and Christopher Sonn. "Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report." *Entertainment Assist*, October 7, 2016. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2016-10/apo-nid121961.pdf>.

This article attracted us by the findings of their research that they conducted with 3 groups of participants: performing artists and music composers, performing arts support workers, and broadcasting, film and recorded media equipment operators from the Entertainment Industry from all the territories in Australia. Each of the groups answered questions related to culture within the industry that has a strong connection to their work/life balance, income, sleep patterns, mental health, and support they are getting in case of emergencies from their colleagues, and family members or friends. The results which were shown in %, were quite interesting and helped us in shaping some of the questions of our survey related to the working hours and the reliability of the working environment in terms of support and attention to the mental well - being of their employees. According to the research, more than half of the workers felt like they were not able to rely on their family members or colleagues, which is very important to be aware of, as this can be one of the factors of bad well-being at work which might cause other health issues. Anxiety was found as one of the most common mental health issues diagnoses which is in half of the cases leading to depression. Overall, the article showed that the issues with mental health in Entertainment Industry are very common and are influenced by many internal and external factors, which might even lead to a suicide of the artist. For the employers it is very important to be aware of them in order to prevent such situations happening by starting to appreciate their artistic crews more, give them more support and flexibility in their working hours so they have enough time to spend with their families and rest.