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# A cross-cultural examination of the effect of employer support on employee productivity

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A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Effect of Employer Support on Employee Productivity

Haley Lipton and Shawn Tuman

Honors College

James Madison University

This work complies with the JMU Honor Code.

*Haley Lipton & Shawn Tuman*

### Abstract

The purpose of this creative, collaborative, capstone project is to conduct a cross-cultural examination of the effect of employer support on employee productivity by compiling, examining, and synthesizing conclusions from existing research. In a world of growing globalization and technological innovation, the speed of productivity is often the cornerstone that differentiates successful businesses from unsuccessful businesses, providing a competitive advantage to the quick while the others fall behind. Often this increased level of efficiency comes at a cost beyond the price of the product and the salary of employees, a deeper, psychological cost. By reviewing research focused in the United States and Europe, we aim to minimize the gap between the health of employees and the profit of the business. We argue that prioritizing the well-being of employees is an advantageous business decision because it increases worker productivity and satisfaction which then enhances a business' productivity and profitability.

*Keywords:* burnout, employer support, productivity

### **Literature Review: Social Work Perspective**

This section of literature review is focused on research driven by social work concepts and theory. Social work is a profession dedicated to helping individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations achieve well-being. The studies that are summarized and analyzed below are driven by a desire to help inspire well-being in the workplace by exploring the role of employer support. From a social work perspective, this research is worthy of investment because it has the potential to radically improve quality of life both professionally and personally for millions of working people.

Released in 2011 as part of the *Work, Employment and Society* journal, the article “Support for the Work-Life Balance in Europe: the Impact of State, Workplace and Family Support on Work-Life Balance Satisfaction” was written by Laura den Dulk, and Anja-Kristin Abendroth. The purpose of this study was to explore the impacts of different forms and sources of support on work-life balance satisfaction in eight European countries. Forms of support include state, instrumental, and emotional support. Sources of support include the workplace and the familial or private sphere. National levels of support were not part of the official research in this article, but were still referenced in the research to help provide context for each country. Instrumental support in the workplace can be described through job factors such as control and flexibility. At the private level, instrumental support is an assistance that eases the stress of home life like paid domestic help. Emotional support in the workplace is found in relationships between colleagues and supervisors. Emotional support in private life comes from relational social supports. At the national level, emotional support is less of a focus, but instrumental support is found in national policy that supports work-life balance. The authors claim that the importance of this study lies in the fact that research shows “...employees who have trouble balancing work and personal life perform less effectively” (Abendroth & Dulk, 2011, p.234235). To research this phenomenon, the authors of the study gathered a sample of 7,867 professional

and low-level workers in the service-sector. The sample participants are from Sweden, the United Kingdom, Finland, Hungary, Germany, Portugal, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands. The sample participants represent workers from bank/insurance companies, retail companies, IT/telecom companies, and public hospitals. To measure work-life balance satisfaction, the researchers worked collaboratively with the European Union to create an extensive and translatable survey. Although the researchers acknowledge their limitations and request further exploration, they conclude that in the workplace both instrumental and emotional support are necessary for considerable work-life balance satisfaction, while in the home emotional support is more useful than instrumental support.

This study reinforces our hypothesis as it explains the importance of support in the workplace on a positive employee perception of work-life balance satisfaction. This study also demonstrates an alignment with our hypothesis because the study was inspired by research that suggested less satisfied employees are less efficient in the workplace.

In 2016, authors Lheureux, Truchot, and Borteyrou released an article in the 30<sup>th</sup> volume of *Work & Stress: An International Journal of Work, Health & Organisations*. This article, titled “Suicidal Tendency, Physical Health Problems and Addictive Behaviours Among General Practitioners: Their Relationship with Burnout” details the authors’ research. Interest in this subject arose when the authors recognized a lack of research on the outcomes of General Practitioner burnout. Prior research displays that General Practitioners, also known as primary healthcare providers, are especially prone to burnout, and there is also considerable research outlining what factors are likely to lead to burnout. In most cases, however, the conversation stops there. Lheureux, Truchot, and Borteyrou hope to fill in the gaps by pursuing four effectsbased hypotheses in their study. This group of authors hypothesizes that burnout will be positively associated with poor health, suicide, and addictive behaviors and also that the developing health issues will be what leads to the suicide and addictive behaviors.

In order to pursue this study, the authors chose to release a survey to 1,890 General Practitioners in France. The survey sample was sourced from a “nationally representative database” and each General Practitioner was compensated for their participation (Lheureux, Truchot, & Borteyrou, 2016, p. 177). Many of the survey questions were selected based on prior research. Specifically, the researchers use the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey, Body Mass Index reading, somatic symptomatology index, lasting physical health problems, and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Tests. Questions regarding drug use and suicidal tendency were created without the use of a preconstructed model. Data analysis considered descriptive statistics, correlation, and linear regression.

The findings of this research partially supported and partially opposed the researchers’ hypotheses. Of the two main types of burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, experiences of emotional exhaustion were much more strongly correlated with the predicted outcomes than those of depersonalization. Emotional exhaustion was correlated with increased health problems, use of psychotropic drugs, and suicidal tendencies, but was not significantly correlated with alcohol use. Depersonalization was not significantly correlated with any of the listed outcomes. Limitations of this study are the correlative nature of the evidence and the amount of possibly confounding factors in the lives of the General Practitioners who participated in the study. When discussing practical implications, the authors of this article share that “...apart from the fact that helping them to preserve their health is intrinsically a desirable purpose, preventing burnout of GPs has benefits for both the patients and the entire society” (Lheureux et al., 2016, p.188).

This study helps to support the hypothesis of our own research project as it illuminates potentially dangerous outcomes of burnout. The study concludes that “...burnout is now considered a serious and pervasive work problem not only for professionals, but also for their clients/patients as well as for organizations” (Lheureux et al., 2016, p. 174). Burnout is an issue

that needs to be taken seriously as it significantly impacts the quality of life and behaviors of many individuals. Our own hypothesis is further supported by this study as the researchers suggest "...leisure-time activities, self demarcation, limitation of working hours, continuous professional development, acceptance of professional and personal boundaries, personal reflexivity and focusing on the positive aspects of work" to cope with burnout (Lheureux et al., 2016, p. 188).

In 2011, Jessica Bagger and Andrew Li completed a study called "How Does Supervisory Family Support Influence Employees' Attitudes and Behaviors? A Social Exchange Perspective". This was intended to explore the role of support from the employing organization to the employee and the employee's family. This study was motivated by pre-existing research showing that in current times, employees are often left "juggling work and family responsibilities, causing negative outcomes, including lower task performance, less discretionary behavior benefitting the organization and the supervisor, and job dissatisfaction" (Bagger & Li, 2011, p. 1134). Bagger and Li discovered two gaps and attempt to address them in their own study. First, they see a lack of information surrounding the method of support that best minimizes conflict. Second, the authors hope to explain how organizations can benefit from such support. Both relational and benefit-based support is considered. To examine these concepts, the researchers conducted two studies.

In the first study, the researchers hypothesize that "supervisory family support is positively related to job satisfaction" and that "supervisory family support is negatively related to turnover intentions" (Bagger & Li, 2011, p. 1126). The study sample was comprised of 225 professionals working a minimum of 30 hours per week in the western region of the United States and their accompanying supervisors. A survey was released on two occasions to measure job satisfaction and turnover intentions by asking for information regarding communication

patterns and quality of relationships in the workplace. Both hypotheses were supported in the findings.

In study two, the authors attempt to address potential limitations from the first study. This study examines the same general topic by measuring the level of supervisory family support, by considering supervisor ratings of employee behavior, and by sourcing participants from more than one workplace. The results of this study demonstrate that when supervisors are able to access benefits for families the supervisors and employees tend to have a better relationship with better communication which leads to lower turnover rates.

Both of these studies support our hypothesis. The first study augments our thoughts by claiming the significance of the relationship between the employer and employee toward job satisfaction/lack of turnover ideation. The second study further supports our hypothesis by identifying the impact of family-friendly benefits. The overall conclusion focuses on the importance of a positive relationship between employer and employee as well as the importance of actual benefits being provided by the company or organization.

In 2015, authors Shoji, Lesmierowska, Smoktunowicz, Bock, Luszczynska, Benight, Cieslak collaborated for a study called “What Comes First, Job Burnout or Secondary Traumatic Stress? Findings from Two Longitudinal Studies from the U.S. and Poland”. In order to tackle this topic, two separate longitudinal studies were conducted, one in the United States and the other in Poland. In human services professions, experiences of burnout are quite pervasive. Specifically in settings where workers are interacting with trauma, a phenomenon called Secondary Traumatic Stress is becoming more widely studied. Although many scholars conclude that the two phenomena often exist simultaneously, this set of studies hopes to explore the direction of the relationship by finding whether one leads to the other or vice versa.

Study number one was completed in the United States. The sample was comprised of 294 mental health professionals who had been working with members of the military for at least one

year. At the time of the first test, participants were surveyed on their experiences of secondary traumatic stress and job burnout. Demographic factors were also recorded. A second copy of the survey was released six months after the first survey was completed. The results of this study showed that a high level of burnout recorded in the first survey was associated with a higher amount of secondary traumatic stress at measurement number two. However, an elevated amount of secondary traumatic stress at measurement number one was not associated with a higher amount of job burnout in survey two.

In study two, the sample was different. The largest difference, of course, was that the study took place in Poland. In addition to this geographical difference, the sample also consisted of human service workers serving traumatized civilians rather than military personnel. This study followed the same essential structure as the first, but the surveys were translated into the proper language. Through many rounds of analysis, the results of this study were found to match the results of the first study.

This analysis supports our hypothesis by demonstrating the relationship between job burnout and secondary traumatic stress. In human services professions, indirect exposure to trauma can still have a significant impact. Job burnout has been proven to be associated with lower efficiency in the workplace, and so following this study, it can be argued that it is an organization's best interest to provide support for employees that prevents burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

In 2013, Tafvelin, Hasson, and Schwarz conducted a study called "Comparing Employees and Managers' Perceptions of Organizational Learning, Health, and Work Performance" in Sweden. The researchers explain that this exploration is important because organizational learning, or the use of work hours to purposefully further employees' knowledge of their respective disciplines, has been proven to impact employee motivation, job satisfaction, health, and performance. With the power of those effects solidified in prior research, these

scholars attempt to expand the research by focusing on the perception of organizational learning opportunities. The authors argue that mismatching perceptions between employers and employees can be negative not only for the employee, but for the organization overall.

In order to research this topic, the researchers created a cross-sectional study to analyze these perceptions. The sample is comprised of individuals within an industrial company in Sweden. There are 101 managers in the sample and 290 subordinate employees. A questionnaire probed for factors of organizational learning, efficiency, stress, and health. The researchers analyzed perception-matching of organizational learning first and then of health and efficiency.

Results of this study demonstrate that there was often a difference in the employers' and employees' perceptions of organizational learning. The research also shows that the bigger the difference in perception, the lower the employees rated their health and efficiency. The researchers conclude that these results call for further study, though they are confident in saying the results imply that improvement of organizational learning will positively impact the health and efficiency of employees and thus the health of the organization overall.

This research article supports our hypothesis by highlighting yet another way to understand employer support and employee satisfaction. This study connects quite clearly to the concept of organizational input.

In 2016, scholar James Gerard Caillier released a scholarly article called "Do Work Benefits Enhance the Work Attitudes of Employees? Findings from a Panel Study". Mr. Caillier hypothesized the relationship between many different forms of benefits and the amount of job satisfaction or turnover ideation. Factors include telecommuting, alternate work schedules, child care, elder care, employee assistance programs, and health and wellness programs.

In order to study this topic, Caillier began by explaining concepts such as Role Theory, norm of reciprocation, and Social Exchange Theory. Afterwards, Caillier chose to analyze data

previously collected by the United States Office of Personnel Management. The survey analyzed is called the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and is released yearly.

The results here displayed that only health and wellness programs positively impacted job satisfaction. The other factors did not correlate or were noted to cause negative movement of job turnover intentions.

This research supports our hypothesis very weakly, showing a very small amount of support for the impact of employer support. The findings in this article seemed very surprising in contrast to the many articles previously analyzed that appeared to fully support our hypothesis. The measured success of health and wellness programs is supportive of our hypothesis, and it is possible that the limitations of the study's design led to the unsupportive evidence. As the researchers discuss the findings and limitations, they note that the study tracked the agency longitudinally, but not the individuals within the company. It is possible that individual characteristics, changes in leadership, or changes in employees could have affected the measurement of the success of different forms of employee support. In addition, the researchers suggest that while health and wellness programs send the message that the employer *cares* for the employee's health, employee assistance programs can send the message that the employer is *concerned* for the employee, which may affect the employee negatively by increasing stress. This astronomical difference in perception can affect the way the different forms of support are received. Although this study does not completely support our hypothesis, the results were able to identify what limitations to avoid in future research, and how to critically analyze surprising results.

Recently, in 2016, a team of authors associated with the *British Journal of Social Work*, decided to explore the role of burnout among child welfare social workers in the United States. Travis, Lizano, and Barak released a journal article titled "'I'm So Stressed!' A Longitudinal Model of Stress, Burnout and Engagement among Social Workers in Child Welfare Settings".

The researchers deem this topic worthwhile because of increasing information regarding the inherent stress of such a position. The topic of burnout is quite common in the field of social work, and this particular group of authors decided to explore what relationship exists between worker stress, burnout, and worker engagement.

In order to study this, the researchers created a longitudinal study with surveys released once every six months for 18 months. The sample consisted of 362 social workers all from within the field of child welfare in an urban area. Supervisors were included in the sample. Specific survey questions targeted work-family balance, issues within role theory, emotional exhaustion, personal detachment, work disengagement, and exit-seeking behaviors.

The researchers concluded that many of their hypotheses were strong. Work-family conflict, role ambiguity, and role conflict affected work withdrawal and exit-seeking behaviors the most because of the level of burnout experienced. The presence of depersonalization and work withdrawal were also positively correlated with exit-seeking behaviors.

This study supports our overall hypothesis by examining the negative impacts of burnout. This study highlights the fact that work in settings with a high level of job stressors can lead to burnout which can subsequently lead to employee disengagement. Neither employers nor employees will benefit from the burden of employee disengagement.

In 2016, researchers Stavrou and Ierodiakonou explore the topic of employer support by delving into the realm of Human Resources and potential discrepancies between manager and employee perceptions of entitlement to certain work-life balance programs. The researchers hypothesize that close alignment of manager and employee perception of entitlement is more beneficial overall for both employers and employees than a misalignment in expectations.

In order to study this, the researchers collected a sample from 20 European countries. Data was recorded from the Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance. This preexisting study was released across Europe through a pair of questionnaires: one to the

human resource officers and one to employee representatives. Surveys were first written in English and then translated. Overall, 21,301 surveys were released to HR managers, and 5,232 surveys were completed by employee representatives.

The results of this study identified that manager and employee perceptions of entitlement to benefits were very different. This study also showed that cases of closer matching of perceptions led to more positive outcomes for the work organizations overall.

This study relates quite well to our hypothesis by showing the importance of a clear understanding of what employers offer and simply being on the same page as employees.

### **Summary: Social Work Perspective**

After distilling the information from the research articles reviewed above, it is abundantly clear that employee support is worth investing in. This literature review provides evidence that work-life balance needs to be prioritized, that there are a variety of effective forms of employer support, and that the consequences of burnout are severe. When there is a struggle to manage the role pressures and stressors of both work life and personal life, this research shows that workers are less efficient, less motivated, have a higher rate of turnover, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. Next, it is important to emphasize that there have been many different forms of employee support that can reap positive benefits. This is crucial information because it signifies that all professional organizations can adopt a unique employer support plan that fits their company's needs. Finally, this research re-emphasized that the negative consequences of burnout can be quite severe, ranging from increased job turnover to deterioration of health and increased suicidal ideation. From a social work perspective, rooted in foundational social work concepts such as Maslow's Hierarchy, Role Theory, and Person-in-Environment Theory, our hypothesis has been supported. Employees who are offered support from their employers function better in the workplace and are able to avoid the harsh outcomes associated with burnout.

## **Literature Review: Business Perspective**

### **Premise of Productivity**

For nearly 50 years, there has been an increased desire to increase productivity from employee managers across the globe at nearly any expense. Similarly, there has been a convergence of post WWII European Nations and the United States in increased productivity and standard of living. However, the formal definition of productivity is often ignored and the contributing factors of such productivity are often only discussed at the inter firm or intraindustry level. “A common mistake is, for instance, to use productivity synonymous to measures of production, which refers to the amount of a product or service produced. As a result of this confusion, people tend to believe that increased production, means increased productivity. This is not necessarily true” says the Royal Institute of Technology of Sweden study, *Understanding the Concept of Productivity* (Tange 2002,p.2).

Only once we more specifically define productivity for the United States and Europe can we begin to measure the metric and more importantly asses the contributing firm level factors yielding productivity. From that microscopic view we can also examine the external impact of the pressure to produce and the alleviated pressure therein. (Sprague 2014).

The established contributing factors for analysis in this discussion are; paid time off, working hours, paid leave, happiness, goods vs. service industries and burnout. The discussion will include research from Europe and the United States in reflection of each of the contributing factors and over analysis of productivity. Lastly, there will be conclusions drawn throughout the discussion with corresponding visual supporting data in relation to the hypothesis in question.

## **Defining Productivity**

Often, we focus primarily on external results or chosen metrics of productivity. For example, we equate hours of production versus, employee count and overall return per employee to equal productivity. Far too often we ignore that to truly measure productivity one must look internally to discover what forces are yielding production and the impact of said forces. Similarly, it is of utmost importance to not mistake efficiency for productivity. Analyzing efficiency as a substitute for productivity will lead to skewed results in the greater economic context of productivity. For example, efficiency is how quickly a car can be created from start to finish on the factory line. Meanwhile, productivity can be viewed as how many intermediary component goods become finished goods in one day and how many line workers were utilized and paid to do so.

The IZA Institute of Labor Economics study, *Cross-country Differences in Productivity: The Role of Allocation and Selection*, mathematically and systematically analyzes the factor of productivity at the firm level, with derived cross-country data (Bartelsman, 2009). This study sheds light on the idea that productivity is far too often analyzed only in the national economic sense and often ignores productivity within the industry or idiosyncratic to the firm. Only through careful analysis of policy distortions which impact productivity can real contributing impacts begin to be weighted as they should be.

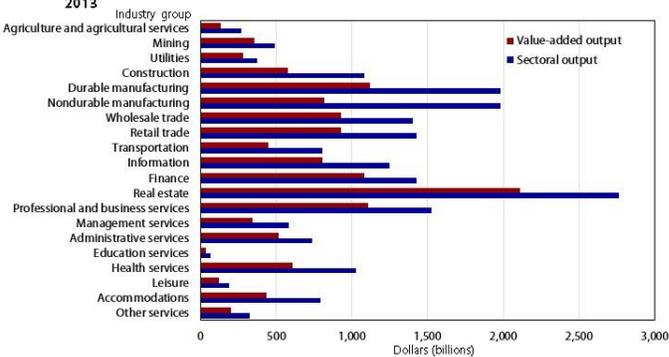
An interesting conclusion drawn by the study is the idea that external productivity is often directly proportional to the size of the company and its fixed capital. Thus, there are two important elements of this study that aid in the understanding of this discussion. Looking only externally at productivity is too insular, and thus the true value lies in understanding the idiosyncratic policies which impact productivity. It is the aggregate of industry reported data

which is often used to extrapolate correlative data and thus we must go one step further to determine the route of the initial input data to accurately examine firm level productivity.

**Paid Time Off**

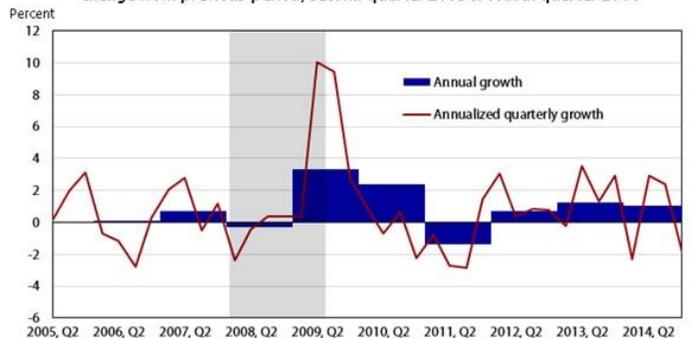
One of the most discussed idiosyncratic policies related directly to productivity is paid time off. There is an abundance of evidence for the large gap between the amount of paid time off (PTO) in Europe in comparison to the United States, however this is not surprising as to the nature of American perception of the value of “hard work” as expressed by Merriam Webster as industrious (Hardworking, 2018). Therefore, it is understood that the concept of hard work has deep seated roots in industrialization. However, what needs to be addressed is not the necessity of a paradigm shift in the perception of hard work, but in the understanding of the relationship between hard work, productivity, and time, and the lack of direct correlation thereof (Zenger, & Folkman, 2016).

Figure 1. Private business sector gross domestic product: value-added output and sectoral output, 2013



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

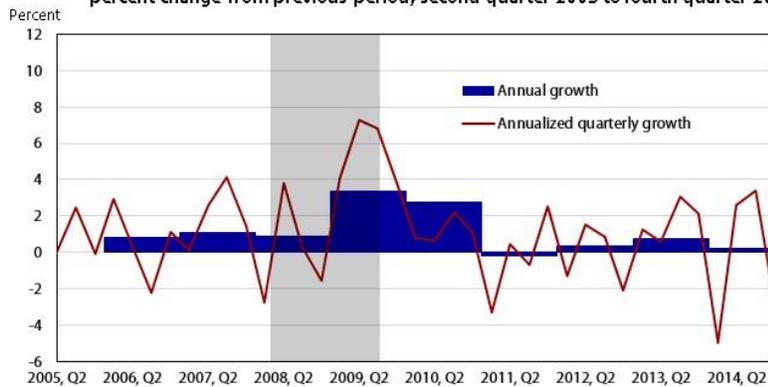
Figure 2. Labor productivity growth in the private business sector, sectoral output, percent change from previous period, second quarter 2005 to fourth quarter 2014



Note: Shaded area represents the 2007-2009 recessionary period. Source: Authors' calculations based on data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as the US Bureau of Labor and Economics data shows an overwhelming sense of severe lack of paid time off in the United States (OCED, 2018). However, this is just the tip off the iceberg of the productivity issues that lie within the lack of PTO. Firstly, it is statistically proven that those who have less PTO will take few to any days off when they are sick and instead use their PTO days for events viewed as necessities, I.e.; getting a car repaired, going to the dentist, etc... This concept however, only perpetuates overall productivity reduction in the work place. When employees attend work when they are sick and should have stayed home their production levels decrease to the point in which the company can be losing more money than it would have cost to have provided the paid time off.

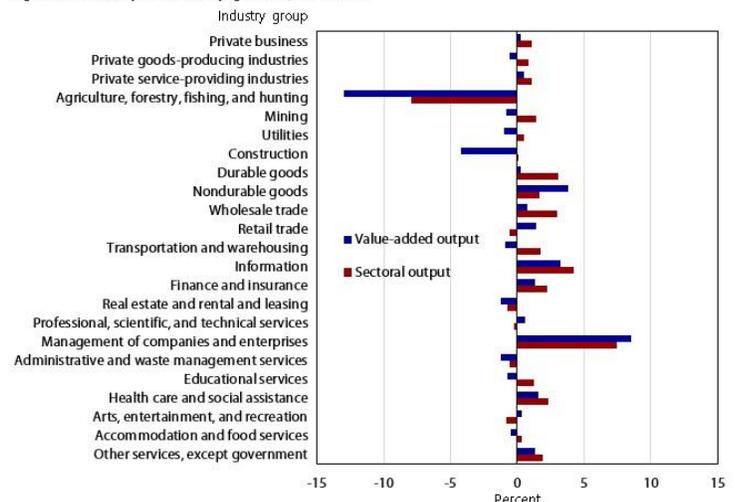
**Figure 3. Labor productivity growth in the private business sector, value-added output, percent change from previous period, second quarter 2005 to fourth quarter 2014**



Note: Shaded area represents the 2007–2009 recessionary period.  
 Source: Authors' calculations based on data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

(Eldridge and Price 2016)

**Figure 4. Labor productivity growth, 2013–14**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

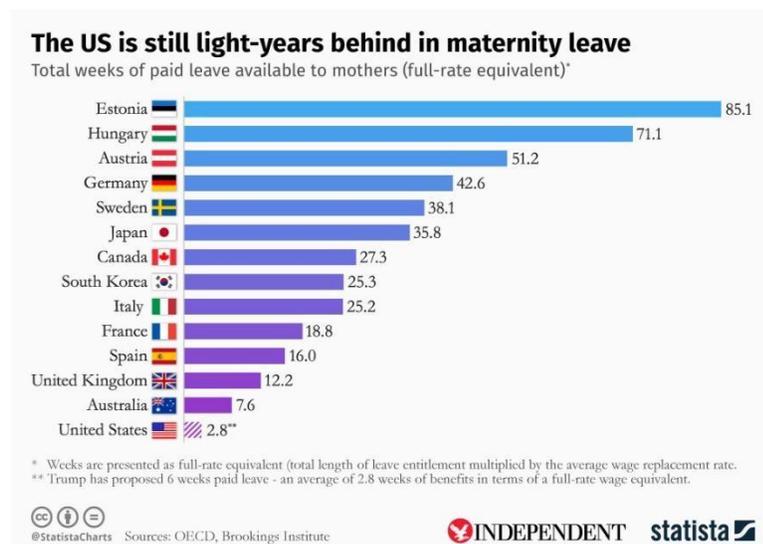
## Maternal and Paternal Leave

Paid maternal leave has been a long-contested issue in the global work

place. Often the argument circled around traditional job security for mothers and costs for the company.

However, in the study, *Maternity Leaves in Academia: Why Are Some UK Universities More Generous Than Others?* it was determined that paid maternal leave yields overall higher consistent employment rates, thus yielding a more productive economy (Epifanio, & Troeger 2018). Similarly, there remains the growing request and need for paternal leave as well maternal leave. A Research Gate study examined Chinese and Canadian first-time parents in respect to PTO maternal and paternal leave. While the perceptions of parenthood and mother/father responsibilities varied slightly amongst the participants, one constant proved abundantly evident throughout the study—the idea of spending time to create a bond with the child was viewed as both desired and crucial. However, for most parents, time off was not attainable due to financial constraint and necessity to remain in the work place coupled by the inability to take time off from work. Similarly, the study suggested that while there are initiatives in place for paternal leave as well as maternal, they are seldom sought for the sake of insuring job security (Kushner, Sopcak, Breikreuz, Pitre, Williamson, Rempel, Stewart, & Letourneau, 2015).

The following Statista chart depicts the stark difference between the length and average benefits of maternity leave between the United States and its global constituents:



## Leave Expanded

Leave in some areas can be expanded to family care beyond that of simply a parent, but instead in the form of a care giver. The National Institute of Health found in the study, *The Effects of California's Paid Family Leave Program on Mothers' Leave-Taking and Subsequent Labor Market Outcomes*, found that in the California paid leave scheme which includes time to take care of sick or elderly family members, there were similar results of increased employment levels. This study also touches upon the often-understated need for PTO, caring for a sick loved one. Care for a loved one can already put increased mental, emotional, and financial stress on care givers and their families. These stresses often find themselves under the façade of substandard performance in the work place. Continued substandard performance often leads to discontinued employment in the long run. Thus, the inclusion of paid leave can be derived to yield greater employment rates wherever it is implemented, not to mention the strain it relieves on lower income employees (Rossin-Slater, Ruhm, & Waldfogel 2013).

With the aforementioned phenomena in mind we can begin to see how cyclical the issue remains of equating time to productivity and thus productivity to job security. This cyclical relationship often leads to dissatisfaction in the workplace. It is this dissatisfaction that leads to the previously mentioned lower level of continuous employment and thus back to the often macro-economically analyzed decreased levels of productivity (DeRigne, Stoddard Dare, & Quinn 2016).

Essentially, the relationship can simply be defined as follows: greater sense of job security yields greater satisfaction in the workplace, greater satisfaction yields greater productivity, greater productivity yields greater economic growth and stability.

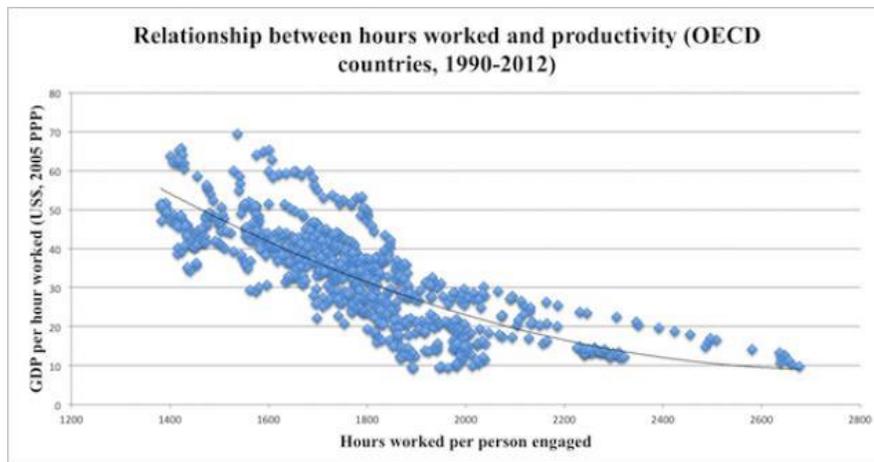
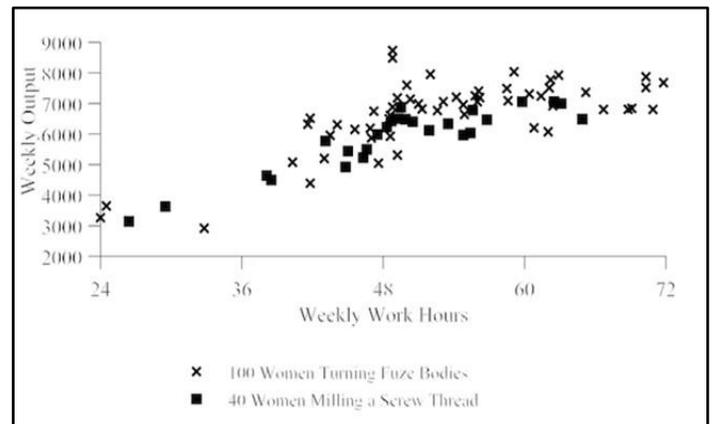
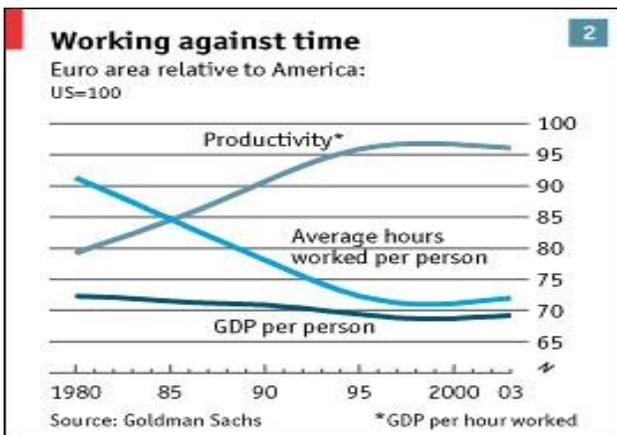
J= job security	S=Satisfaction
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P= productivity	G= growth
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$J+S = P = G$
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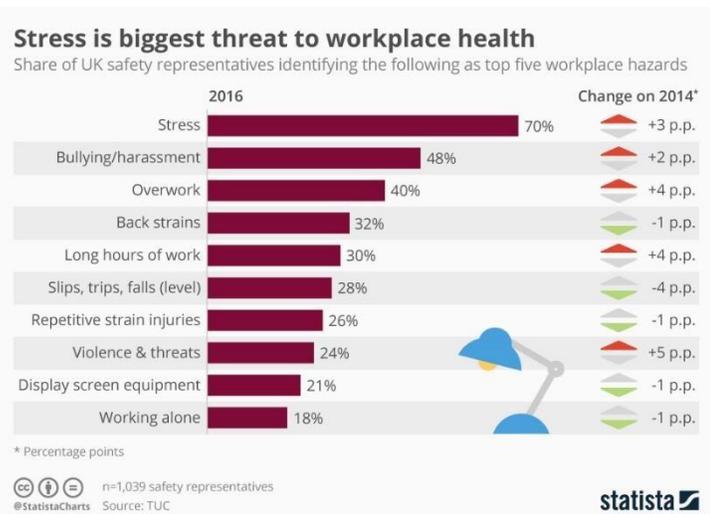
### Working Hours

This concept is often perpetuated in the mistakenly correlated link between working hours and measured productivity. In fact, in the Research Gate study, *The Productivity of Working Hours* lead by John Pencavel discovered that the relationship is “inappropriate summary indicator of a highly nonlinear effect”. In fact, below an hour’s threshold, output is proportional to hours; above a threshold, output rises at a decreasing rate as hours increase (2014, p.26). This concept may be met by disbelief with those in staunch support of the Henry Ford eight-hour work day, forty-hour work week model. However, the models below depict the continuous trend of moving away from the Fordian model as well as the inverse relation of working hours vs. productivity (OECD, 2018).



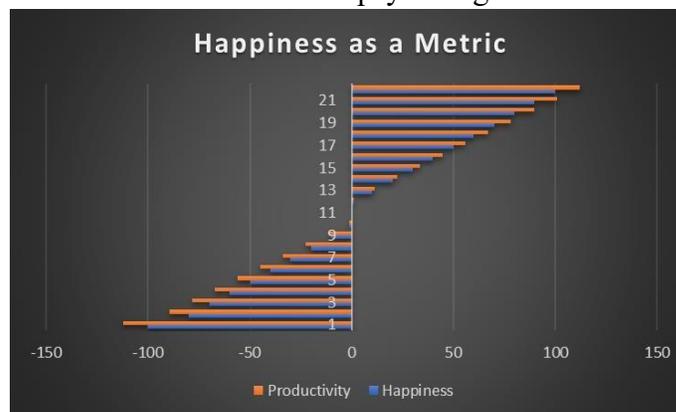
### Goods vs Service Industry

Now it is important to recognize that all the data thus far points in the direction that increased working hours and less time off does not yield more productivity and thus change is needed. (Gielan, Gallo, Achor, Gielan, & Valcour, 2016). However, does this apply when examining the service industry instead of standard production based business of which there is a much more standardized relation between hours of work and factory production based upon running hours of machinery? According to the following study, *Changes in Burnout and Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance in Physicians and the General US Working Population Between 2011 and 2014*, yes, in fact, there is (Shanafelt, Hasan, Dyrbye, Sinsky, Satele, Sloane, & West, 2015). This is where the concept of burnout enters the conversation. Having studied physicians and analyzed the general American public in general the blank survey found that, burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance in US physicians worsened from 2011 to 2014. More than half of US physicians are now experiencing professional burnout (Shanafelt et al.,2015). This concept of burnout can be applied across the service industry, where hours are often found to be dependent on the client and the situation and thus can stretch well beyond the typical 9-5 in order to meet deadlines and deliver on contracts.



## Happiness as a Metric

The Econstar organization conducted another productivity study, *Happiness and Productivity*, examining happiness as a metric (Oswald, 2009). They discovered the link between happiness levels and productivity to be directly correlated at a 12% productivity level increase as happiness increased. The metric of happiness and the lack thereof was taken directly from the idea of status quo shocks which are statistically proven to alter someone's mood i.e.; bereavement or, as previously addressed, a family member falling ill. For example, if one's spouse falls ill and the employee is unable to take time to care for them, their happiness decreases as well as their productivity, thus the opposite was proven to be true as well. The study used the following mathematical break down to quantify the psychological value of happiness: "Think of individuals as having a finite amount of energy. Within any period of time, they must choose how to distribute that across different activities. Let 'e' be the energy the worker devotes to solving tasks at work. Let w be the energy the worker devotes to other things -- to 'distractions' from work. Let R be the worker's psychological resources. Hence  $(e + w)$  must be



less than or equal to R." (Oswald, 2009, p.6). The relationship can be visually noted below: The model concludes by determining that, "Work-life strain could be conceived of as the (rational) need to devote energy and attention away from the job. Happier workers need to do so less, and thus they have higher productivity" (Oswald, 2009, p.8).

### **Summary: Business Perspective.**

The data has spoken for itself; verbally, symbolically, mathematically, and graphically. After careful analysis of paid time off, leave, working hours, goods vs service industry, happiness, and productivity the conclusion appears rather simple—the correlation between increasing working hours and raised productivity levels is a myth of the past. Paid time off is under issued and the limiting of such is an economic burden. Leave is far too often unattainable and extremely needed. Both the goods and service industry while different in delivery are impacted similarly in terms of burnout and this does not show a trend of stopping anytime soon. And happiness does in fact play a tangible role in productivity and needs to be increased across the board.

Armed with these findings along with the understanding that increased levels of productivity increase overall international economic growth and stability, it is our job to take a lesson from our European counterparts and develop a healthier work life balance to increase economic prosperity. However, it is not economic prosperity alone that needs to be the driving force in continuing this research and engaging in the discussion of employer support on employee productivity. The focus on the human factor must not be ignored. For in fact the central constant amongst every study examined, and every graph analyzed, was how individuals felt, or how much individuals could produce, etc. Thus, we must task our businesses, large and small, to focus not only on the margin but on the marginalized, not merely on the profits but on the people.

### **Joint Synthesis**

In comparing our findings, we were pleased to find that our hypothesis was well supported, and that we have been able to create a clear plan for acting on our conclusions. Before discussing the details of that plan, we will discuss two of the most pressing takeaways of our

project: burnout is an insidious phenomenon with dire consequences and support to decrease burnout has equally intense benefits.

Burnout is a buzzword in many parts of the modern world, but very few people understand the extent to which burnout can affect quality of life. Many complain casually, but the fact is that rampant experiences of burnout can negatively impact us as employers, employees, consumers, and in our personal lives as well. In the personal arena, burnout is noted to be associated with experiences of role conflict, and an inability to fulfill the many roles that one carries. In the professional scope, employees who are feeling burnt out are often unable to provide high quality work on a consistent basis.

The data was abundantly clear that support is not only needed for employee well-being, but that it is profitable for the employer as well. Not only does employer support benefit employee health and wellness, but it simultaneously increases professional success and overall economic stability. Similarly, not only does an increase in paid time off and leave add to overall satisfaction in the workplace and industry, but it boosts productivity levels as well. Lastly, not only does employer support yield both firm level and macroeconomic growth but it also raises employee happiness and wellness levels, which will then allow the aforementioned positive correlations to continue. Therefore, we can determine that not only is employer support the necessary mechanism in which to drive productivity, but it is much needed to foster workplace positivity and employee health as well.

Now what must we do with this knowledge? We must urge key business decision makers to examine their own policies and ensure that what's in "the best interest of the company" includes with the utmost importance what's best for the employees as well. How do we go about creating such a paradigm shift, you may ask? We unite data with determination and two seemingly disparate fields with one like-minded goal. This research project has allowed us to highlight that the social work goal of wellness coincides with the business goals of profitability,

productivity, and economic stability. Thus, our next step is to present a business implementation plan and an advocacy statement, in tandem, to the leaders of professional organizations. Once the vision is understood and companies begin to assess their support programs, the status quo can begin to change. It can change the way we value people while still maintaining a high level of productivity.

We hope that this information can touch the lives of many. We hope for the small businesses in rural towns, the famous corporations abroad, and the workplaces with direct worker mistreatment that plague certain parts of the world to be affected by the power of this collection of data. We believe through this process that we have been able to lend the businessspeak of profit, productivity, and success to the social work goal of encouraging the well-being of individuals, families, groups, communities, and agencies.

**Advocacy Argument**

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

As students and researchers, we recognize that you are the leader of an important professional organization and implore you to consider investing in programs of employee support.

Our research has demonstrated that programs of employee support can help meet the goals of employee well-being *and* of professional success. We argue that prioritizing the well-being of employees is an advantageous business decision because it increases worker productivity and motivation which then enhances a business' productivity and profitability as well as economic stability as a whole. A lack of employee support almost invariably leads to burnout, which can be crippling for a business or other professional organization.

There are many forms of support that have been shown to dramatically improve outcomes for both employees and employers, so it is possible for you to handcraft your set of solutions. We encourage you to take advantage of the process we have created for assessing the current standing of your workplace, then creating, implementing, and evaluating a unique plan for the development of employer support programs. As invested and engaged researchers and advocates, we commit to assisting you in this process from start to finish.

After extensive research and synthesis, it is our professional opinion that employer support is worth your time, energy and commitment. We look forward to collaborating with you and helping your place of business reach greater success.

Sincerely,

Haley Lipton & Shawn Tuman

## **Business Plan**

### **▲ Support Your System to Stem Success**

#### **I. Assessment**

1. Organizational and Operational Diagnostic Test
  - a. Employee Survey
2. Key Issue Assessment
  - a. Categorize common themes

#### **II. Strategy**

1. Identify initial impactors
  - a. Selection of 3 primary areas of addressment
2. Cost Analysis
  - a. Fund Allocation
3. Timeline of initiatives

#### **III. Implementation**

1. Roll out orientation
  - a. Tiered Timeline execution
2. Completion

#### **IV. Evaluation**

1. Repeat phase I
2. Report changes
  - a. Analyze success

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