

# Burnout Prevention Through Personal Growth

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*This study evaluated the effects of a burnout prevention program based on insights from transpersonal psychology, notably psychosynthesis. It examined the effects of the program on burnout, happiness, spirituality, emotional intelligence, and relative deprivation with respect to one's career. Thirty-eight individuals, mostly with a background in engineering, participated in a 10-day program over 3 months. A comparison group of similar age and work experience was recruited of colleagues from the same firms and departments. Both groups filled out questionnaires at 3 time points: before the start of the program, immediately after the program (3 months later), and 9 months later. Results showed that a psychosynthesis-based prevention program might be an effective instrument in reducing burnout and enhancing happiness, emotional intelligence, and feelings of spirituality.*

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**KEY WORDS:** burnout prevention; happiness; psychosynthesis; transpersonal psychology; spirituality

Individuals most vulnerable to burnout are often those who are strongly motivated and involved in their work. For these individuals, work is an important source from which to derive meaning in life. If these individuals no longer find meaning through achieving their goals and expectations, burnout is a likely end result. Burnout can be defined as "a persistent, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is primarily characterized by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effective-

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This research was financed by Zorg Onderzoek Nederland. We thank Thom Koot and Sandra Wesdorp for their contribution in developing and giving this training. The research was conducted while Dirk van Dierendonck was employed at the Helen Dowling Institute.

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ness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work” (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998, p. 36). In our view, the process of burning out is partly a reflection of the failure to find meaning and growth in life. Thus, burnout is conceptualized as the end result of a gradual process of disillusionment in the quest to derive existential significance from work (Pines, 1993).

## **BURNOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

This study evaluated a burnout prevention program specifically aimed at highly motivated individuals in the danger zone for burnout. Burnout prevention programs (e.g., Higgins, 1986; Malkinson, Kushnir, & Weisberg, 1997; Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 1998) have been mostly cognitive–behaviorally oriented, aiming at cognitive restructuring, didactic stress management, and relaxation (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). These programs have primarily focused on reducing arousal. It is therefore not surprising that the effects of such cognitive–behavioral programs are often limited to reducing exhaustion.

In line with the above-mentioned definition, burnout is generally operationalized as a three-dimensional syndrome, including exhaustion (i.e., the depletion or draining of emotional resources), cynicism (i.e., indifferent or distant attitude toward work), and reduced professional efficacy (i.e., lack of satisfaction with past and present expectations, efficacy expectations; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996). A prevention program should therefore aim at improving all three dimensions, taking into account the fullness of the burnout syndrome. This goal can be achieved by explicit attention to personal growth and human values.

We developed a program that specifically targets personal growth and ways to experience more meaning in life—factors that are important for positive-oriented and healthy persons (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Our approach to burnout prevention was taken from transpersonal psychology, notably psychosynthesis. This psychological approach to human nature is specifically designed to tackle issues concerning goals, expectations, existential significance, and personal growth (Gordon-Brown & Somers, 1988).

## **PSYCHOSYNTHESIS**

Psychosynthesis has been one of the most influential forces within transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology was labeled the “fourth force” in psychology by Maslow (1968), after the psychoanalytic, behavioral, and humanistic traditions in psychology. It takes into account the psycho-

logical principles of these earlier traditions and also includes transpersonal experiences. Two essential elements in the transpersonal counseling process are gaining self-acceptance and uncovering the beliefs (e.g., personal, familial, cultural) that create someone's reality (Strohl, 1998). The fundamental assumption underlying this perspective is that individuals have the innate wisdom and knowledge to find their own personal responses to the questions and distresses that life can confront them with.

The founder of psychosynthesis, Assagioli (1965), conceptualized healthy human adult development as consisting of two distinct stages: personal psychosynthesis and spiritual psychosynthesis. The present training focused first of all on personal psychosynthesis, which involves exploring the structure of one's own psyche and becoming familiar with the contents of one's personal unconscious. After discovering the elements that make up our personality, it is important to improve the ability to manage them. The guiding principle here is that "we are dominated by everything with which our self becomes identified. We can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify ourselves" (Assagioli, 1965, p. 22). The purpose of personal psychosynthesis is to help integrate—to synthesize—the individual around the personal self. The potential and awareness of spiritual psychosynthesis is a secondary goal. Spiritual psychosynthesis consists of the integration of the personality around a deeper center, the spiritual Self, of which the integrated personality becomes an instrument.

In comparing our program with other approaches, it is helpful to realize that psychosynthesis differs from psychoanalysis in that the emphasis is on synthesis and not on analysis. According to psychosynthesis, analysis—the separation of the whole into components—is not enough for achieving lasting change in our feelings, our attitudes, or our behavior. It is important to take our analytic understanding and integrate these components into a harmonious, integrated whole—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (Gerard, 1964). The acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension recognizes that there is a connectedness that goes beyond the personal level, and this spiritual dimension is essential for (re)discovering meaning and purpose in life. Our approach extends previously published burnout prevention and intervention programs, none of which took this dimension into account. To our knowledge, this is also one of the first studies to explore the effects of a psychosynthesis-guided program of intervention.

## RESEARCH FOCUS

The focus of the present study was first of all on the effects of the program on reducing feelings of burnout. We expected that our program would have a beneficial effect on all three burnout dimensions. Exhaustion is

strongly related to demands and unmet expectations (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), emphasizing the negative consequence of resource loss and, vice versa, the likely positive outcome of resource gain. In addition to exhaustion, we expected that our program would influence the other two dimensions of burnout. The latter two dimensions can be considered the “attitudinal dimension” of burnout (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 1993). Negative attitudes toward one’s work and toward one’s job performance are likely to be sensitive to a program that encourages positive self-appraisal in participants.

Because the main focus of this program was on prevention, it is likely that its effect would extend to the positive pole of workers’ well-being, that is, happiness. Happiness can be defined as workers’ moods and emotional reactions to circumstances at work and home (Diener, 2000). The attention given to happiness and its importance for people both in and outside organizations is increasing (Seligman, 2002). Therefore, in this study we focused not only on the negative side of well-being (burnout), but also on its positive side (happiness).

The importance of meaning and growth at the workplace is also emphasized in theories on the mid-career crisis (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). These theories suggest that especially between the age of 35 and 45, individuals experience a turning point in their careers as they begin to realize that their achievements may be far smaller than they had hoped for and expected (Gerrichhausen, 1989). Therefore, we targeted as participants for this program employees within this age range. These persons are at a higher risk of burning out because a mid-career crisis is often associated with feelings of emptiness, disillusionment, and despair (see Pines et al., 1981). We investigated the effect of the program on feelings related to a mid-career crisis by specifically measuring feelings of relative deprivation toward one’s career.

To measure the spiritual dimension within psychosynthesis, we used the Spiritual Assessment Scale (Howden, 1992). Howden defined spirituality as the integrating factor within one’s being that manifests itself through unifying interconnectedness, purpose, and meaning in life; inner resources; and transcendence. Unifying interconnectedness refers to a feeling of relatedness to others and all of life. Inner resources refer to feelings of strength, calmness, inner peace, and ability. Purpose and meaning refer to a sense of worth, hope, and reason for living. Transcendence refers to experiences of great emotional and personal value during which reality is seen differently from normal, such that the person feels more insight, coherence, and meaning.

Furthermore, adhering to an experiential approach, emotions are considered a vital element within psychosynthesis (Strohl, 1998). Feelings provide meaning to experiences. In line with recent thinking on emotional intelligence, the skills to identify feelings, regulate feelings, and use the information provided by feelings are considered important for adaptive social behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Clearly recognizing feelings will strengthen

the ability to choose behavior that is in line with one's goals and expectations and to find meaning and growth in life.

## METHOD

### Participants and Design

Employees of three major industrial companies in The Netherlands were invited to participate. Participants within the age range of 35–45 years were recruited in collaboration with these concerns. Participation was voluntary, with no costs involved for the participants. Introductory sessions were held to inform interested employees about the content of the program and the research. Next, the trainers had an intake interview with everyone who had expressed an interest in participation. Beforehand, potential participants filled in a short questionnaire with open-ended questions on their expectations, goals in life, important events in their life, and the limitations they experienced to reach their goals. The intake served two purposes: (a) to tune the expectations of the participants to the content of the training and (b) to refer persons with personal problems that exceeded the goals of the program to individual counseling. The training specifically aimed at personal growth, not at providing therapy. The trainers used as the main exclusion criterion whether a person would interfere with the group process. After the intake, two persons were advised to seek individual counseling.

Thirty-eight people, most of them with a background in engineering, followed the program. One person dropped out of the program because of personal reasons. The questionnaires were sent either to the organizational address or to the home address of the respondents, depending on their preference. A postage prepaid return envelope was provided for return of materials to the research team. Within the intervention group, 34 individuals completed the questionnaire three times. This group consisted of 27 male and 7 female participants, with a mean age of 40.3 years and an average employment record within the company of 14.2 years. For the comparison group, we asked colleagues to participate who were from the same companies and departments and who were of similar age and work experience. The comparison group included 40 men and 6 women, with a mean age of 39.4 years and 11.8 years of employment within the company. The two groups did not significantly differ on these three demographic characteristics ( $p = .34$ ,  $p = .38$ ,  $p = .08$ , respectively).

The study consisted of a quasi-experimental design (Cook & Campbell, 1979) with pre, post, and follow-up measurements among one intervention and one comparison group. Pre and post measurements were 3 months apart, directly before and after the program. The follow-up measurement took place 6 months after the post measurement.

### **Burnout Prevention Program: “The Challenge to Inner Mastership”**

The training consisted of 10 days spread over 3 months. The participants were divided into four groups, with the size of the groups ranging from 8 to 11 persons. The first two groups went through the training in the spring, and the other two groups went through training in the fall of the same year. Analysis showed no significant differences in the effects of the training between the spring groups and the fall groups; we therefore analyzed these as one group. Two psychosynthesis counselors, a man and a woman, guided all four groups.

The training started with a 2-day meeting, followed by a 1-day meeting every other week for 12 weeks. It was completed with another 2-day meeting. All meetings were held at a countryside resort. Three months later, a follow-up meeting of one morning finished the training. The participants were encouraged to keep a diary during the training and to write an emotional autobiography. Both were strictly for personal use. Each day focused on a specific theme. The days were semi-structured. A typical day would start with a short meditation, followed by a session in which participants reflected on the past 2 weeks since the last meeting. Next, guided imagery techniques were used to focus on the theme of the day. During the rest of the day, the theme was further explored in several ways, including drawing the images that came up in the guided imagery and discussions in small groups and in the whole group.

The themes of the first 2-day meeting were body consciousness, emotions, and the mind. The third day explored aspects of the personality, known within psychosynthesis as *subpersonalities*. Subpersonalities refer to the different elements in our personality—the different roles we play in our life. A subpersonality can be viewed as a synthesis of habits, characteristics, and other psychological elements. It acknowledges that we are one individual with different qualities for different situations. The view of psychosynthesis on subpersonalities is related to the cognitive-affective system of personality formulated by Mischel and Shoda (1995). According to these theorists, expectations, affects, and cognitions are combined in so-called mediating units that are activated depending on the specific situation. Different situations can therefore result in different behaviors. On Day 4 of the study, attention was given to supportive and critical influences and “heroes.” The subject of Day 5 was the outer and inner authorities. Both Days 4 and 5 focused on the people in our life that influenced us, now and in the past (e.g., our parents). Days 6 and 7 focused on love and will and on autonomy and interconnectedness, respectively. Day 8 was entitled “The Spiritual Autobiography.” Participants were invited to share the most touching moment in their lives. The concluding 2-day meeting finished the training by focusing on love for oneself, personal values, and the personal mission. The importance

of spiritual goals for individual well-being was also emphasized by Emons's (1999) work on how personal goals make life meaningful, valuable, and worth living. Examples of exercises that were used can be found in Assagioli (1965) and Ferrucci (1993). Throughout the training, themes were illustrated by inspirational quotes.

The guiding principle throughout the training was that everyone creates his or her own reality and must experience it, learn from it, change it if not satisfactory, and act on it constructively. Within the training, as in transpersonal counseling in general, distress is not perceived as needless suffering, but as growing pains that are necessary components of the human growth process (Strohl, 1998). Transpersonal psychology maintains an unconditional faith in a person's potential for self-healing. An essential part of the process is the uncovering of beliefs that create a client's reality. As such, vital elements in the training were teaching the participants self-acceptance, responsibility for one's life, and trust in one's inner wisdom.

## Measures

### *Burnout*

Burnout was measured using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey, which consists of three subscales: Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional Efficacy (Schaufeli et al., 1996; Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). The internal consistency for all three scales was good: Exhaustion (5 items)  $\alpha = .88$ , Cynicism (5 items)  $\alpha = .83$ , Professional Efficacy (6 items)  $\alpha = .80$ .

### *Happiness*

Happiness was measured with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants rated how often they experienced each of 10 positive and 10 negative emotions during the last few weeks. A 5-point scale was used, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). A global happiness score was calculated by combining the positive and negative scores. The internal consistency of the scale was .86.

### *Spirituality*

Spirituality was measured with the Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS; Howden, 1992). The SAS was designed using various definitions of spiritu-

ality found in the philosophical, psychological, sociological, theological, and nursing literature. The construct validity study of Howden (1992) showed satisfactory results. The SAS does not rely upon any religious theory or terminology and can therefore be used as a research tool for investigation into spirituality in various settings. This instrument consists of four subscales: Purpose and Meaning in Life (4 items,  $\alpha = .79$ ; e.g., "There is fulfillment in my life," "I have goals and aims for my life"), Innerness or Inner Resources (8 items,  $\alpha = .82$ ; e.g., "I have an inner strength," "I have a sense of balance in my life"), Unifying Interconnectedness (7 items,  $\alpha = .70$ ; e.g., "I feel a kinship to other people," "I have a general sense of belonging"), and Transcendence (6 items,  $\alpha = .76$ ; e.g., "I have experienced moments of peace in a devastating event," "Even when I feel discouraged, I trust that life is good"). A 6-point scale was used, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*).

### *Emotional Intelligence*

The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) was applied to measure the ability to reflect upon and manage emotions (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). The TMMS consists of three subscales that index the degree of attention that individuals devote to their feelings and the clarity of these feelings as well as the individuals' beliefs about terminating negative mood states or prolonging positive ones. Salovey et al. (1995) showed in their reliability and validity study that the TMMS is a reasonable operationalization of emotional intelligence. The original 48-item version was shortened to 16 items because of the necessity of keeping the total length of the questionnaire within reasonable limits. The items with the highest scores on the various factors (Salovey et al., 1995) were used. The internal consistency of the scales was satisfactory: Attention (6 items,  $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., "I don't pay much attention to my feelings," "I don't usually care much about what I'm feeling"), Clarity (5 items,  $\alpha = .78$ ; e.g., "I am usually very clear about my feelings," "I almost always know exactly how I am feeling"), and Repair (5 items,  $\alpha = .64$ ; e.g., "Although I am sometimes sad, I have a mostly optimistic outlook," "No matter how badly I feel, I try to think about pleasant things"). A 5-point scale was used, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### *Relative Deprivation*

Feelings of relative deprivation toward one's career were measured with an 8-item scale (Buunk & Janssen, 1992). The internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

## RESULTS

### Intercorrelations

The intercorrelations of the variables at Time 1 are shown in Table 1. The relations among the burnout dimensions are consistent with past research, as are the relations among the spirituality subscales. The strong correlations of three spirituality subscales with professional efficacy—and to a lesser extent with cynicism and exhaustion—lend support to our assumption that burnout and personal growth are interrelated.

### Intervention Effects

As a preliminary step, we tested whether the intervention group and the comparison group differed significantly on the outcome measures. The non-random assignment to both groups opens the possibility that the comparison group may initially have been functioning and feeling better than the treatment group. However, a multivariate test with all the measures at Time 1 as dependent variables and group as the independent variable failed to show a significant group difference,  $F(12, 63) = 1.61, p = .11$ .

We proceeded to test the overall effect of the training on the dependent variables with a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The Group  $\times$  Time effect was significant,  $F(24, 47) = 2.12, p = .01$ , signifying a positive overall effect of the training. We therefore proceeded with the univariate analyses.

In all of the following univariate analyses, we included a simple contrast to test short-term as well as long-term effects. A short-term effect was indicated by a significant contrast effect from Time 1 to Time 2. A long-term effect was indicated by a significant contrast effect from Time 1 to Time 3.

As is shown in Table 2, of the three burnout dimensions both exhaustion and professional efficacy had significantly changed as a result of the training (significant Group  $\times$  Time effects). For both dimensions, this effect was significant in both the short term and the long term. Happiness also showed a positive effect in the short term as well as in the long term. No significant overall effects were found for the burnout dimension cynicism or for relative deprivation.

Three out of four spirituality scales showed significant changes, both short term and long term (see Table 3). The significant changes were shown for purpose and meaning in life, inner resources, and transcendence. The only dimension that did not show a significant change was unifying interconnectedness.

The emotional intelligence of the participants increased with regard to

**Table 1.** Intercorrelations of Variables at Time 1 (n = 80)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Exhaustion	—											
2. Cynicism	.50***	—										
3. Professional efficacy	-.42***	-.50***	—									
4. Happiness	-.55***	-.57***	.72***	—								
5. Relative deprivation	.10	.25*	-.36***	.38***	—							
6. Purpose and meaning in life	-.31**	-.48***	.51***	.38***	-.17*	—						
7. Inner resources	.23*	-.36***	.47***	.54***	-.05	.59***	—					
8. Unifying interconnectedness	-.20*	-.29*	.41***	.36***	-.10	.47***	.41***	—				
9. Transcendence	-.04	-.06	.25*	.18	-.10	.38***	.65***	.39**	—			
10. Attention to emotions	.22	.12	-.15	-.18	-.14	-.05	.01	.08	.04	—		
11. Clarity of emotions	-.19	-.19	.38***	.41***	-.26*	.44***	.36***	.26*	.24*	.13	—	
12. Repair of negative emotions	.03	.05	.17	.18	-.03	.33**	.48***	.14	.50***	.25*	.24*	—

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.** Means and Standard Deviations of Burnout, Well-Being, and Relative Deprivation in the Intervention Versus Comparison Group

Measure	Intervention group			Comparison group			ANOVA		Contrast for Time × Group	
	Pre	Post	Follow-up	Pre	Post	Follow-up	F	df	Pre-post F	Pre-follow-up F
Burnout										
Exhaustion										
M	2.06	1.63	1.56	1.34	1.32	1.22	4.43*	2, 150	6.02*	4.72*
SD	1.22	.99	1.14	0.84	0.80	0.82				
Cynicism										
M	1.74	1.62	1.64	1.36	1.42	1.48	0.75	2, 150	1.26	1.09
SD	1.27	1.06	1.21	0.97	1.01	1.04				
Professional efficacy										
M	4.00	4.39	4.32	4.22	4.13	4.25	5.94**	2, 152	12.34***	4.20*
SD	0.95	0.85	0.88	0.70	0.77	0.83				
Happiness										
M	1.23	2.00	1.83	1.70	1.74	1.82	5.32**	2, 152	9.97**	4.16*
SD	1.12	0.67	0.96	0.63	0.76	0.67				
Relative deprivation										
M	2.51	2.32	2.28	2.34	2.35	2.30	2.85	2, 152	3.50	4.60
SD	0.83	0.79	0.89	0.85	0.82	0.84				

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Means and Standard Deviations of Spirituality and Emotional Intelligence in the Intervention Versus Comparison Group

Measure	Intervention group			Comparison group			ANOVA		Contrast for Time × Group	
	Pre	Post	Follow-up	Pre	Post	Follow-up	F	df	Pre-post F	Pre-follow-up F
<b>Spirituality</b>										
Purpose and meaning in life										
M	4.18	4.75	4.66	4.47	4.55	4.66	6.53**	2, 148	9.34**	3.61*
SD	0.94	0.68	0.67	0.69	0.70	0.62				
Inner resources										
M	3.94	4.73	4.59	4.20	4.21	4.38	19.20***	2, 146	32.12***	8.92**
SD	0.79	0.48	0.65	0.74	0.66	0.66				
Unifying interconnectedness										
M	4.51	4.80	4.81	4.56	4.63	4.66	2.14	2, 146	3.28	1.84
SD	0.61	0.44	0.53	0.57	0.61	0.58				
Transcendence										
M	3.20	3.79	3.74	3.47	3.57	3.59	7.26***	2, 146	9.44**	8.64**
SD	0.85	0.76	0.66	0.96	0.87	0.77				
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>										
Attention to emotions										
M	3.88	4.15	4.10	3.61	3.65	3.63	1.83	2, 152	2.93	2.15
SD	0.67	0.64	0.66	0.75	0.81	0.69				
Clarity of emotions										
M	3.16	3.57	3.69	3.56	3.55	3.64	4.41*	2, 152	5.44*	7.19*
SD	1.01	0.88	0.96	0.70	0.65	0.58				
Repair of negative emotions										
M	3.26	3.88	3.93	3.25	3.34	3.44	3.67*	2, 152	5.35*	5.04*
SD	1.04	1.02	0.79	0.97	0.81	0.84				

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance.  
 \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

clarity of emotions and repair of negative emotions. Participants were better able to acknowledge and recognize their emotions after the training and were better able to repair negative emotions. These positive effects remained stable in the following 6 months. No significant effect was found for attention to emotions.

## DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated the effects of a transpersonal, psychosynthesis-based, burnout prevention program. It examined the effects on burnout, happiness, spirituality, emotional intelligence, and relative deprivation. The program differed from those commonly used in the burnout field because it explicitly paid attention to personal growth. The effect of the program was tested with the help of measurements at pretreatment, at posttreatment, and at follow-up 6 months later. A comparison group consisting of colleagues who matched the participants on demographic variables was included in the study.

In sum, the expected beneficial effect of the program was largely confirmed. Compared with the comparison group, the intervention group showed a decrease in exhaustion and an increase in professional efficacy, happiness, clarity of emotions, repair of negative emotions, purpose and meaning in life, inner resources, and transcendence. These effects were stable over a period of 6 months. No significant changes were found for cynicism, relative deprivation, unifying connectedness, or attention to emotions.

The findings of this study suggest that a transpersonal-oriented prevention program can be effective in reducing burnout and enhancing happiness, emotional intelligence, and feelings of spirituality. The practical significance of these findings becomes clear by comparing the burnout scores of the participants with the cut-off scores presented in the manual of the Dutch Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). The cut-off scores are based on people who were absent from work because of burnout. These scores can be used to discriminate between burned-out and not burned-out cases. Twenty-nine percent of the participants could be identified as burned-out and were in the high-risk zone for dropping out of work before the training. Only 13% were in this risk zone 6 months after the training (Time 3). In the comparison group, these percentages were 5% and 7%, respectively. In other words, in the training group there was a 55% drop in burned-out cases. Furthermore, two recent longitudinal studies (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 2001a, 2001b) presented support for a model that suggests that professional efficacy might very well be the starting point of the burnout process, followed by cynicism, which influences exhaustion. In this model, professional efficacy functions as the basic or core resource to better handle the strains of the job. The enhancement of profes-

sional efficacy seen from this perspective lends credence to the view that our program is a useful preventive tool for supporting employees to reverse the first signs of burnout.

As we expected, the experience of spirituality, as operationalized by Howden (1992), was enhanced. Three out of four dimensions showed a positive improvement. The participants experienced more purpose and meaning in life, more inner resources, and a stronger feeling of transcendence. These positive results lend credence to our use of a transpersonal approach. Purpose and meaning in life provide a sense of worth, hope, and reason for living. The importance of this concept is most dramatically emphasized by Frankl (1963), who found that those prisoners in his Nazi concentration camp who could find a purpose or a goal had a chance of surviving. Inner resources give a feeling of strength when dealing with the uncertainties of life in times of crisis. Howden (1992) based his concept of spirituality on the work of Vaughn (1986), among others, who viewed spirituality as "radiating from an inner resource" (p. 87). It should also be noted that inner resources, of all the variables included, showed the strongest improvement attributable to the program. Transcendence, the ability to rise above or overcome bodily or psychic conditions, is an important resource because it describes the capacity to take a step back from one's own situation and achieve new perspectives and experiences. This process facilitates finding new answers to old questions, and in the act of letting go those attachments are no longer needed.

The participants' emotional intelligence improved as far as concerns their own emotions. They experienced their emotions with more clarity, and they indicated that they could better handle negative emotions. This finding suggests that the emotional process was handled more efficiently and effectively. Regretfully, our instrument does not allow for conclusions regarding the ability to identify, understand, and handle emotions in others.

The program was less effective in influencing participants' feelings of relative deprivation toward their careers. The positive changes in this career-related variable failed to reach significance, although the long-term effect did reach significance. It is therefore unclear whether the program increased the capacity of the participants to cope with stressors in their work environment. A possible explanation for these findings is that our approach was an individually oriented preventive burnout program. An integral program should, of course, also incorporate measures at the organizational level (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997).

Among the limitations of this study was the use of non-randomized comparison groups. Although our pre-intervention analyses showed that the intervention group and the comparison group did not significantly differ on the outcome variables, a randomized controlled design would have been a better way to test intervention effects. In the present situation, people were recruited who found that they needed the intervention for themselves. An alternative for such situations would be a waiting-list control group design.

Regretfully, not enough people volunteered to enable us to implement this design. Because of these practical limitations, we chose what we considered the best option. Another limitation was the relatively small size of a predominantly male sample. These aspects enhance the possible influence of error variance and prevent generalization. Also, the study included only self-report data, giving room to the possible influence of method variance. Future intervention studies with objective measures, such as performance, sickness absence, physical health, and colleague perception data, would be of great value. Also, the external validity of the psychosynthesis approach would benefit from offering this program to people working in a wider range of occupations.

Among the strengths of this study, our research design allowed for a control of history effects, with the inclusion of two groups in the spring, followed by two groups in the fall of that same year, and the inclusion of a control group composed of colleagues working within the same departments as participants. In addition, within an organizational setting, our training program showed great promise as an effective instrument to facilitate personal growth, prevent burnout, and enhance happiness. Future studies should investigate similar programs to determine what effects can be replicated. Such studies will benefit if some efforts are made to take into account the limitations of the present investigation.

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