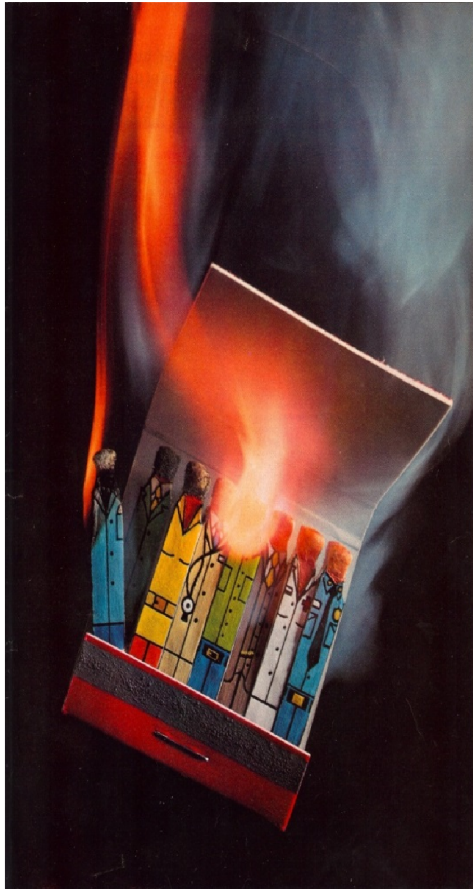# THE PROBLEM OF BURNOUT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Christina Maslach
University of California, Berkeley

Beginning of Work on Burnout

First articles about burnout over 35 years ago
   Practitioner (Freudenberger)
   Researcher (Maslach)

Major research measure (MBI) over 30 years ago

Key question from practitioners:
   "What can we actually _do_ about burnout?"

Three Decades of Burnout Research

- Currently over 1000 journal articles published each year, in over 100 journals around the world
- Assessments of burnout and engagement have been validated in many languages
- Social and organizational correlates identified in six areas of job-person fit:
  - ❖ **Workload**
  - ❖ **Control**
  - ❖ **Reward**
  - ❖ **Community**
  - ❖ **Fairness**
  - ❖ **Values**

Burnout Dimensions

Exhaustion

Individual Stress

Cynicism

Job Response

Inefficacy

Self-evaluation

Burnout Symptoms

- Predominance of fatigue

- Atypical physical distress

- Symptoms are work-related

- Symptoms appear in "normal" persons who did not suffer from prior psychopathology

- Decreased effectiveness and impaired work performance are due to negative attitudes and behavior

Outcomes of Burnout

- Poor quality of work
- Low morale
- Absenteeism
- Turnover
- Health problems
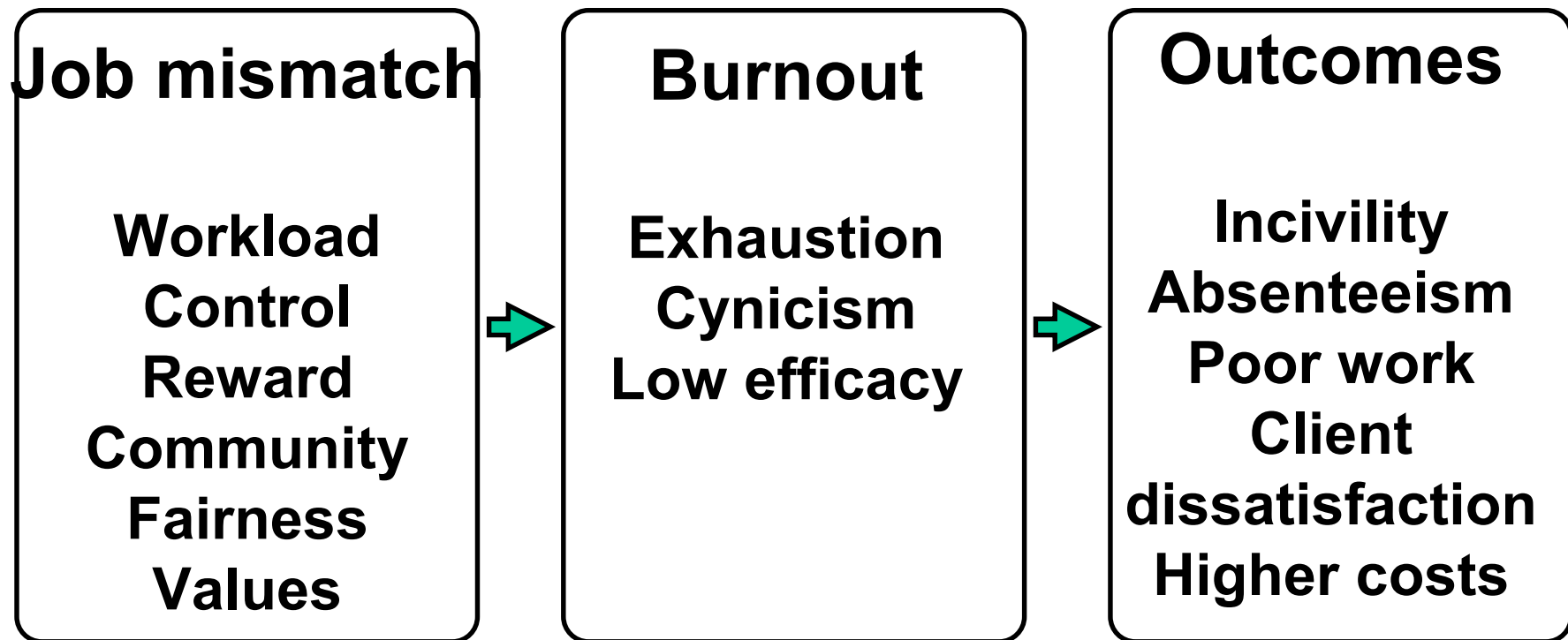- Depression
- Family problems
- Self-harm, suicide

Mismatch of Job and Person

- **Work overload**
- **Lack of control**
- **Insufficient rewards**
- **Breakdown of community**
- **Absence of fairness**
- **Value conflicts**

The Mediation Role of Burnout

Job mismatch

**Workload
Control
Reward
Community
Fairness
Values**

Burnout

**Exhaustion
Cynicism
Low efficacy**

Outcomes

**Incivility
Absenteeism
Poor work
Client
dissatisfaction
Higher costs**

Strategies for Preventing Burnout

- **Building engagement**

- **Regular organizational assessments**
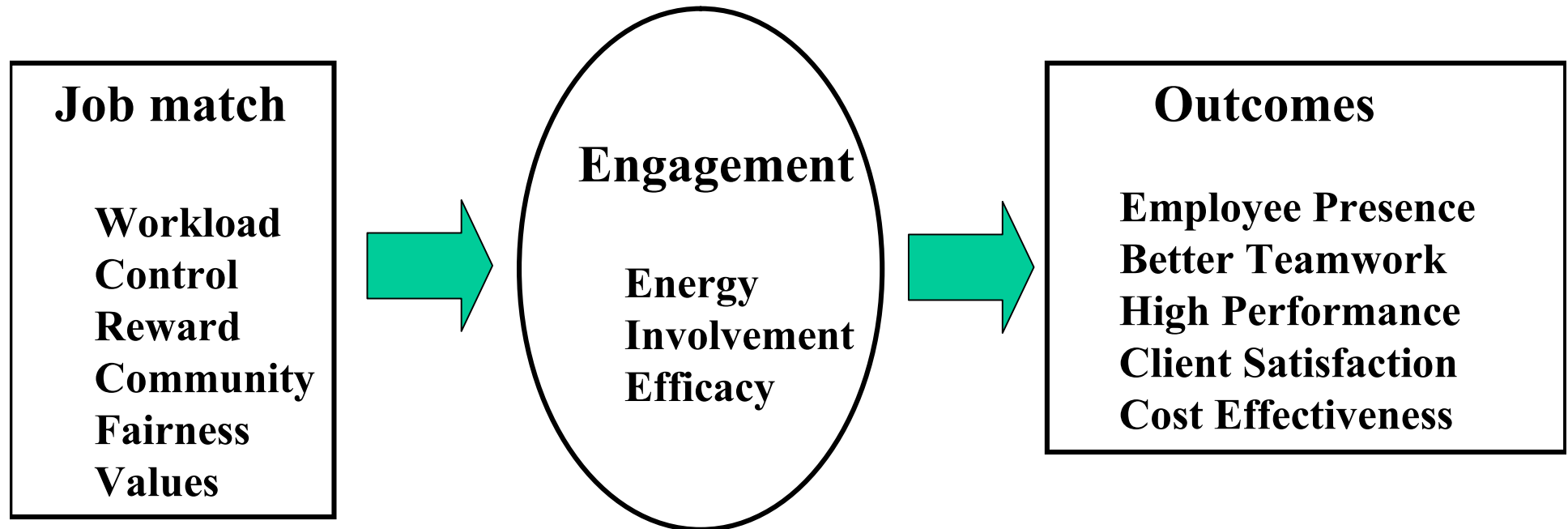
- **Early detection**
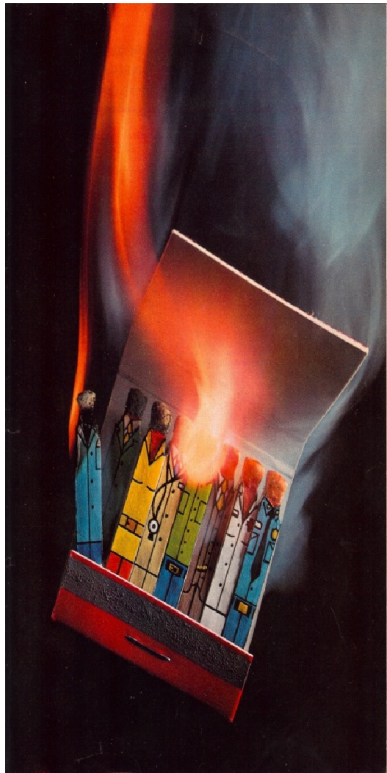
BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

- **Work engagement is the positive opposite of burnout**
  - Energy vs. exhaustion
  - Involvement vs. cynicism
  - Efficacy vs. inefficacy

- **Efforts to achieve a positive goal may be better than trying to reduce a negative problem**

Appropriate Job and Person Match

- **Sustainable workload**
- **Choice and control**
- **Recognition and reward**
- **Supportive work community**
- **Fairness, respect, and social justice**
- **Clear values and meaningful work**

THE MEDIATION ROLE OF ENGAGEMENT

Job match

Workload
Control
Reward
Community
Fairness
Values

Engagement

Energy
Involvement
Efficacy

Outcomes

Employee Presence
Better Teamwork
High Performance
Client Satisfaction
Cost Effectiveness

ONE TYPE OF STRATEGY TO BUILD ENGAGEMENT

- **Civility, Respect, and Engagement at Work (CREW)**
  - Developed and tested in hospital settings
  - Six-month team process to build a supportive work community
  - Results show improved engagement, reduced burnout, less absenteeism
  - www.workengagement.com/crew

Replication in Canadian Hospitals

- Design
  - **Wave 1: Eight CREW Groups (N=252)**
  - **Wave 2: Seven CREW Groups (N=226)**
  - **Control: 26 Units No CREW (N=874)**
- **Significant CREW Impact on:**
  - **Civility**
  - **Incivility**
  - **Job Satisfaction/Commitment**
 - **Burnout/Absences**
- **Improvement Evidence One Year Later**

Leiter, M. P., Laschinger, H. K. S., Day, A., & Gilin-Oore, D. (2011).
The impact of civility interventions on workplace social behavior, distress, and attitudes.
Journal of Applied Psychology.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

- **Regular "check-ups" provide evidence on how well the organization is doing**
- **Six strategic areas are critical for identifying areas for improvement**
  - **Workload**
  - **Control**
  - **Reward**
  - **Community**
  - **Fairness**
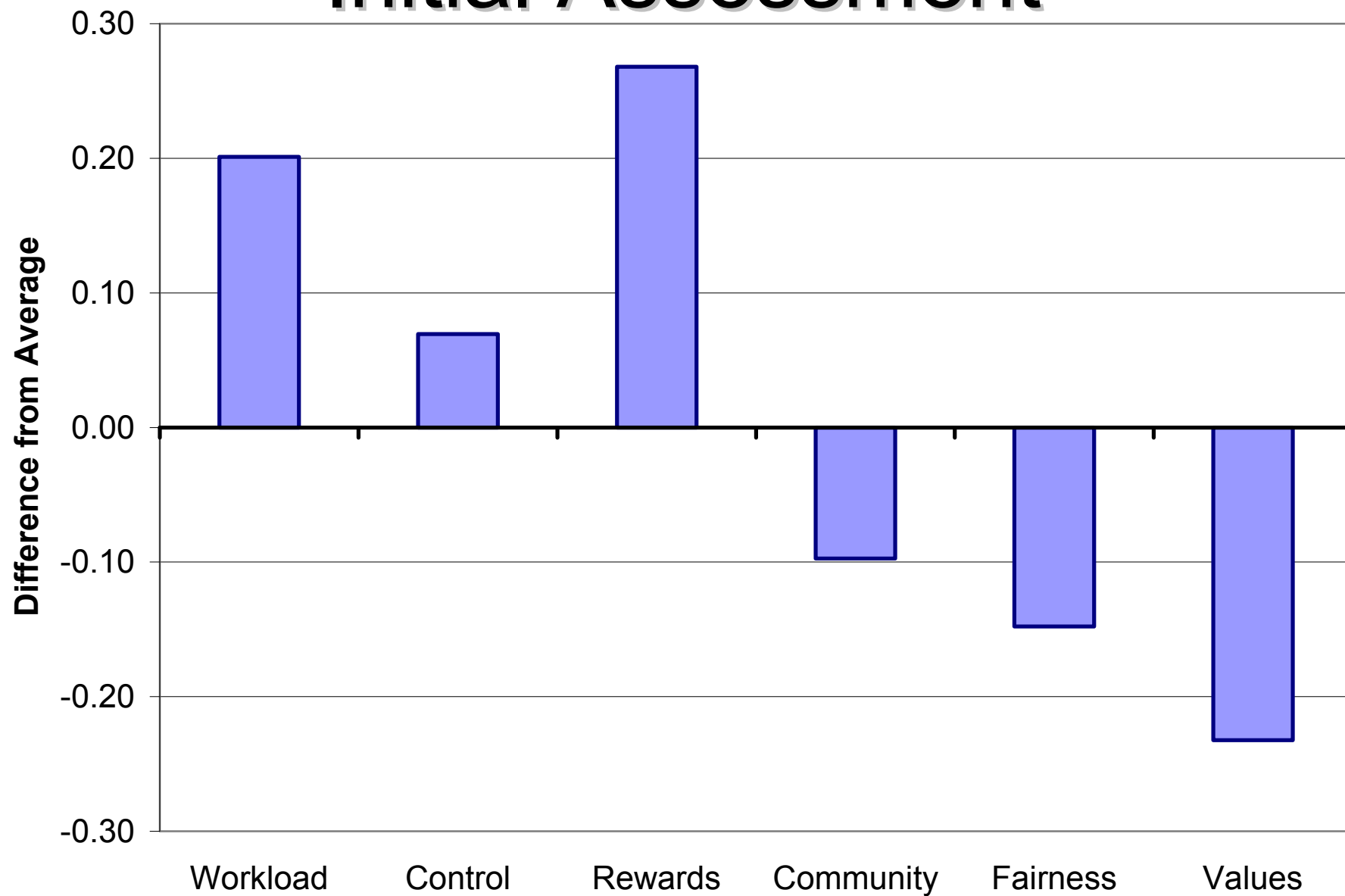 - **Values**

CASE STUDIES OF CHECKUPS
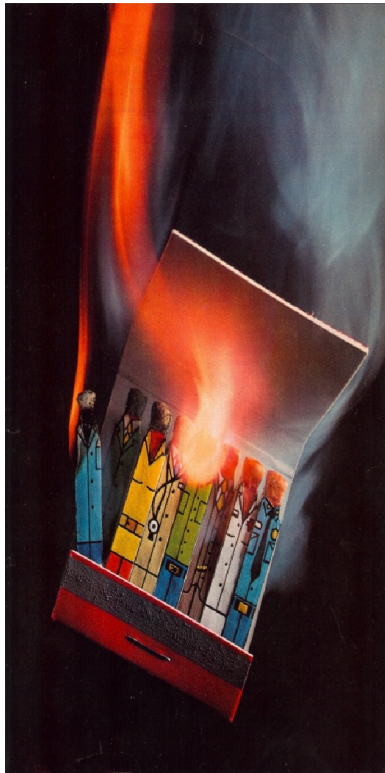
- **Large organizations with a variety of employees**
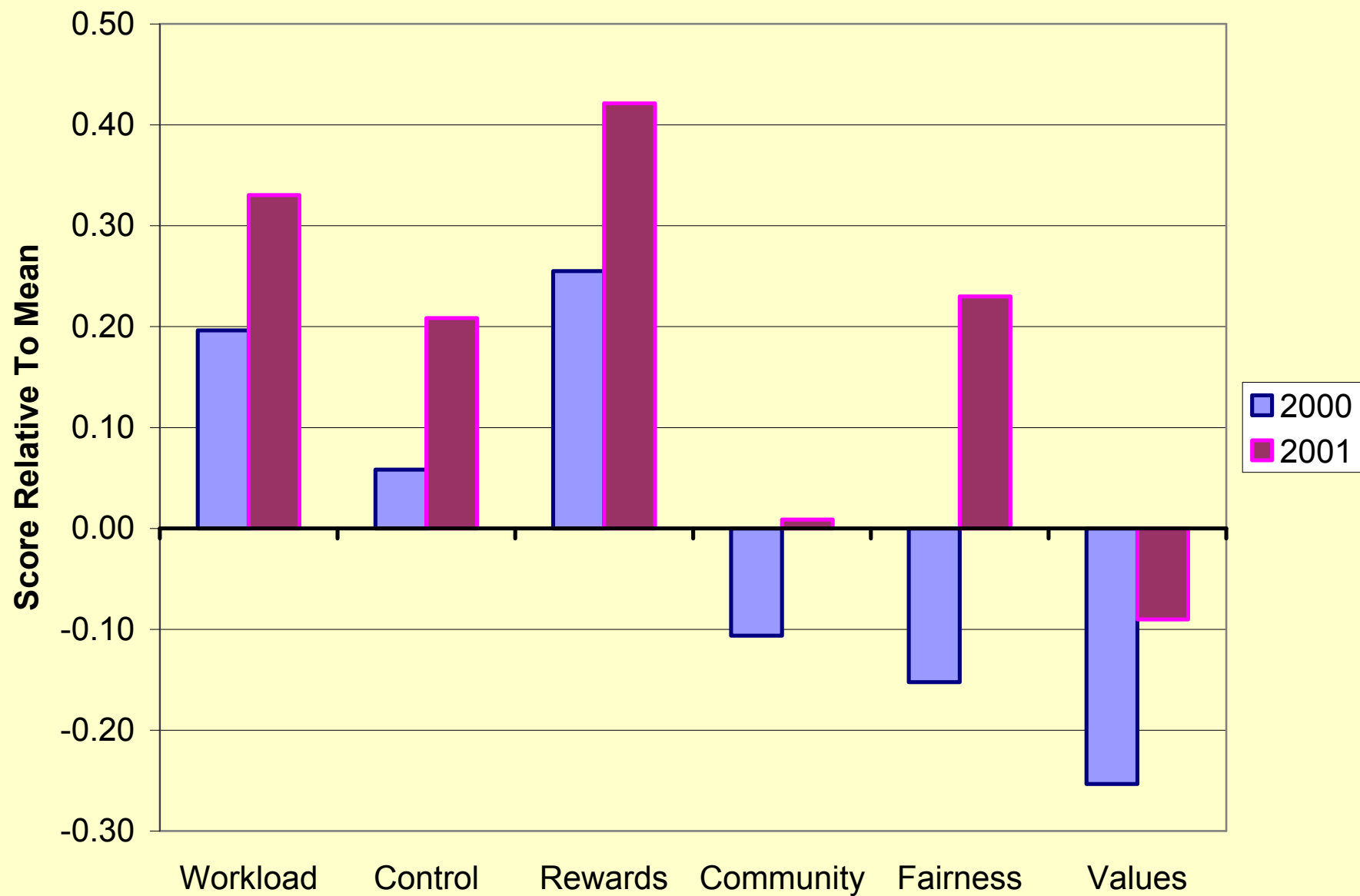- **Participation by 80-90% of employees**
- **Collaborative planning process for organizational change**
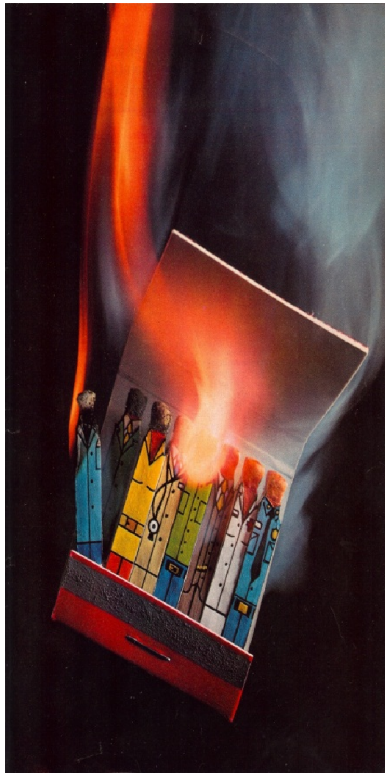- **Positive improvements in the workplace at the time of second Checkup**
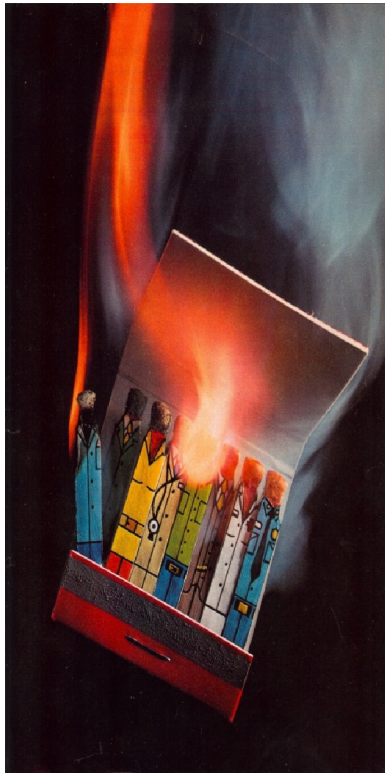
Initial Assessment

One-Year Follow Up

EARLY DETECTION STRATEGIES

- **Prevention efforts can be more effective before major burnout problems have developed**
- **Organizational assessments can identify early signs of burnout**
  - **"Early warning sign"**
    - **Only one dimension of burnout (Ex or Cyn)**
  - **"Tipping point"**
   - **Mismatch in at least one area of worklife**

EARLY PREVENTION

- **Targets of intervention**
  - **Organizational or group interventions should occur when the early detection signs are clustered**
  - **Individual interventions should be directed to people with unique warning signs**
- **Areas for intervention**
  - **Tipping points indicate the areas in which intervention should take place**

Readiness to Contribute to Actual Organizational Interventions
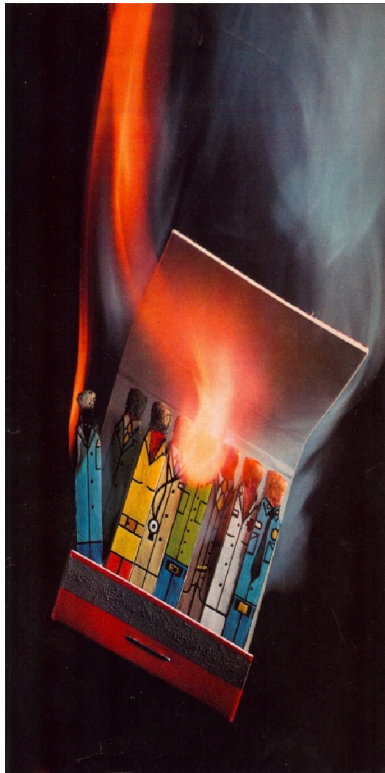
- We now have greater knowledge and better tools

- We must develop more effective collaborations between researchers and practitioners

FUTURE DIRECTIONS
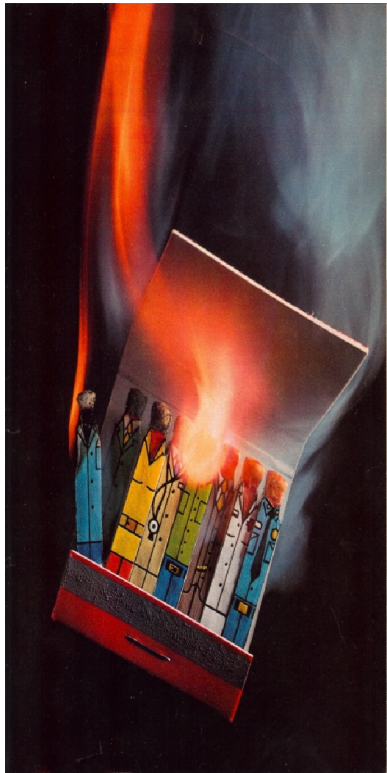
- **Greater focus on the social and organizational context of people's psychological relationships with work**

- **Identification and assessment of effective solutions**

- **Publishing venue dedicated to all types of global burnout work**

BURNOUT RESEARCH

Aims & Scope

Burnout Research is a peer-reviewed international journal aimed at presenting basic, translational and clinical high-quality research related to the phenomenon of burnout. As the first journal dedicated to understanding the causes of burnout and potential solutions to the problem, *Burnout Research* welcomes original research articles, review articles, case reports, and opinion pieces.

The goal of the journal is to publish the top research in three major areas:

1. Cutting-edge research that lays out new directions for the burnout field, including new research paradigms and measures, new theoretical models, and new collaborations between researchers and practitioners.
2. Critical reviews that provide comprehensive and integrative analyses of key themes (such as cultural or occupational differences in burnout), or meta-analyses of major datasets.
3. Translational research studies that assess promising interventions for preventing burnout and building engagement.

You are invited to submit your papers online to
http://ees.elsevier.com/burn/

open access

open access

Want to find out more?

Christina Maslach
Michael P. Leiter

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