



State Forgiveness and Its Influence on Burnout in Dutch Workers

Social, Health, and Organisational Psychology (Work & Organisation track)

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Abstract

As interpersonal relationships take on a greater importance in the contemporary workplace, it is important to acknowledge the inevitable conflict which will occur. Forgiveness is one of numerous potential constructive responses to conflict in the workplace but has thus far been largely neglected as a research topic. The purpose of the present study was to investigate how the level of forgiveness an individual experiences relating to a specific transgression (i.e. state forgiveness) relates to the level of burnout they may experience. As well as this, the mediating effect of state rumination and the moderating effect of perceived interactional justice were investigated. After completing a recall measure, 105 participants located in organisations around the Netherlands were asked to complete measures relating to the various variables of interest. Descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated and the PROCESS plug-in for SPSS were used for hypothesis testing. The results suggest that a negative relationship exists between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout, and that state rumination plays a negative mediating role on this relationship. No evidence was found for the moderating role of level of perceived interactional justice on the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of state rumination. The results of the present study suggest that forgiveness may be a promising strategy to deal with workplace offenses. Future research ought to continue to pursue this line of research and further expand our understanding of the consequences of forgiving in the workplace.

Keywords: state forgiveness; burnout; state rumination; interactional justice.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary workplace is often characterised by employee interdependency and requires individuals to work contiguously with one another, meaning interpersonal relationships amongst colleagues in the workplace have a greater importance than before. Research has found that employees who are happy in their work and who have positive relationships at their workplace have lower turnover intention, greater creativity, and higher engagement (Langley, 2012; Wesarat, Sharif, & Majid, 2015). While collaboration amongst employees is of benefit to both personal and professional development, it is inevitable that this form of working will lead to conflict between employees at some point. This may be due to a multitude of factors, such as limited resources or conflicts of interest. Workplace conflict has a detrimental effect on overall employee mood and emotions, which in turn negatively impacts organisational variables such as job performance, turnover, and decision-making (Langley, 2012). Furthermore, the negative affect of one employee has the potential to have a negative effect on the workplace as a whole (Langley, 2012). Thus, one of the challenges in employees' lives is how they continue to be happy, engaged, and satisfied with their work in the face of such conflicts.

Although a typical impulsive response to interpersonal offenses is to do harm in return (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998), it is likely that a retaliatory response increases rather than decreases the chance of being hurt again (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999). An alternative response is to inhibit retaliatory responses and instead react in a forgiving manner. Two distinctions of forgiveness exist: (1) dispositional forgiveness, which refers to an individual's innate tendency to forgive, and (2) state forgiveness, which refers to forgiveness "pertaining to specific offences" (Toussaint & Webb, 2005, p. 350). Bies, Barclay, Tripp, and Aquino (2015, p. 7) define forgiveness as "the internal act of relinquishing anger, resentment, and the desire to seek revenge against someone who has caused harm, as well as the enhancement of positive

emotions and thoughts towards the harm-doer”. In other words, to act in a forgiving manner means to act in a prosocial way rather than an antisocial one. Consequently, forgiveness represents a powerful potential resolution to conflict.

Supporting this, Meunier and Baker (2012, p. 83) describe forgiveness as “absolutely essential for the success of long-term relationships”. This highlights the importance of forgiveness in our relationships, and this is not just restricted to personal relationships. A survey carried out by the Fetzer Institute (2010) found that despite the fact that 90% of respondents felt they needed more forgiveness in their personal lives, they did not view forgiveness as appropriate for the workplace (12%) or were unable to identify what they view as an obstacle to forgiveness in the workplace (10%). As the need for effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace becomes more and more necessary, so too does research which investigates how we can resolve the inevitable conflicts.

Despite this, there is currently a paucity of research relating to forgiveness in the context of the workplace. Most of the extant research has focused on the antecedents of forgiveness, such as what individual and organisational factors may lead to less or more forgiveness (see e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001, 2006; Zdaniuk & Bobocell, 2015). Conversely, basic questions regarding the consequences of forgiveness in the workplace have received surprisingly little attention (see Cox, Bennett, Tripp, & Aquino, 2012, for a notable exception). Hence, the main purpose of the present study was to examine whether employees’ levels of state forgiveness are associated with their work outcomes, particularly level of burnout. Additionally, investigating the mediating effect of rumination and the moderating effect of interactional justice on this relationship was of interest to the present study.

1.1 Forgiveness in the Workplace

As previously mentioned, friendship at the workplace has been found to have numerous benefits, such as a positive impact on organisational productivity, facilitation of the exchange of resources and ideas among employees, and lower levels of turnover intention (Wesarat et al., 2015). Contrastingly, employees who feel that they have been treated unfairly may be less productive, less committed to the organisation, and more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours (Barclay & Saldanha, 2015). Thus, forgiveness represents a unique opportunity to repair the damage caused by workplace conflict and allow organisations to continue to reap the benefits of organisational friendships.

Previous research on forgiveness in the workplace tends to focus on more pessimistic outcomes, such as revenge and counterproductive work behaviours (Barclay & Saldanha, 2015), but the benefits of forgiveness in the workplace have also been noted (albeit indirectly). Guchait, Lanza-Abbott, Madera, and Dawson (2016) found that employees who worked in an organisation with a forgiving climate (characterised by acceptance and understanding of mistakes and errors) were more likely to be satisfied with their work and less likely to leave their job. Furthermore, Guchait et al. found that an employee's perception of a forgiving climate increased their willingness to engage in learning behaviours, which in turn led to increased organisational commitment and, again, decreased turnover intention. Karremans, Van Lange, and Holland (2005) concluded that forgiveness restores a person's generalised prosocial orientation, increasing thinking in terms of "we" and feelings of relatedness to others. This conclusion is important as it highlights how forgiveness has the potential to facilitate the co-operation and dependency which many workplaces are now characterised by. Madsen, Gygi, Hammond, and Plowman (2009) suggested that because there is an increased need for effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace, forgiveness has an impact on both job performance and productivity. Further, they noted that forgiveness has been associated with higher employee morale and greater organisational trust which are both key ingredients for

organisational success. Although these findings provide some indirect evidence that forgiveness and work outcomes may indeed be associated, this notion has not been tested directly as of yet. Therefore, the first goal of this paper was to examine whether state forgiveness is positively associated with one important work outcome: level of burnout.

1.2 Forgiveness and Burnout

Schaufeli (2017) defined burnout as:

A chronic state of work-related psychological stress that is characterised by exhaustion (i.e., feeling emotionally drained and used up), mental distancing (i.e., cynicism and lack of enthusiasm), and reduced personal efficacy (i.e., doubting about one's competence and contribution at work). (p. 120)

From this definition, the potential detrimental effects of burnout within an organisation are evident. Interpersonal conflicts at the workplace may take a severe emotional toll on individuals and may provoke or aggravate symptoms of burnout. At the individual level, employees experiencing burnout are dominated by negative emotions, feel detached from their work, and experience a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, thereby stunting personal and professional growth. At the organisational level, an employee who is exhausted, disengaged, and lacking confidence in their work will not be able to contribute towards organisational goals in an efficient way. Furthermore, individuals who are suffering from burnout pose a significant economic cost to the organisation when aspects such as performance, sickness absence, and disability pension are considered (Aronsson et al., 2017). As forgiveness has the potential to alleviate feelings of stress (e.g., Akhtar & Barlow, 2018), it is possible that the practice of forgiveness may ameliorate burnout symptoms, thus positively impacting organisational performance.

Some initial evidence suggests that forgiveness may indeed be negatively associated with burnout. Madsen et al. (2009) mention that unforgiving individuals within an organisation result in lower levels of performance due to feelings of anger, hostility, and rumination associated with unforgiveness. Conversely, they noted that forgiveness has been associated with higher morale and greater organisational trust. Studies have noted that forgiveness had the potential to minimise the negative consequences of interpersonal harm on individuals' health, well-being, and social relationships, softening the emotional blow which a transgression delivers (Chan, 2010; Cox et al., 2012). A meta-analysis conducted by Akhtar and Barlow (2018) suggested that forgiveness therapies reduce common mental health problems such as depression, stress, and distress, and promote positive emotions. Further, they found that forgiveness interventions appear to be effective in promoting mental health and subjective well-being. Two studies ($n = 267$) in the meta-analysis measured stress and distress, and there was a large, significant overall effect found which favoured the intervention group. Six studies ($n = 517$) measured anger and hostility, resulting in a medium significant effect favouring the intervention group. Taken together, it seems likely that a negative relationship exists between state forgiveness and burnout.

Hypothesis 1. Level of state forgiveness is negatively associated with level of burnout.

1.3 The Mediating Role of Rumination

The potentially beneficial consequences of forgiving tendencies in reducing burnout levels may be explained by reduced levels of ruminative thinking. Rumination is defined as “a maladaptive response strategy defined by repetitively and passively thinking about one’s negative emotions and the events that caused them” (LeMoult, Arditte, D’Avanzato, & Joormann, 2013, p. 472). Two distinctions of rumination exist: (1) trait rumination, which refers to an individual’s innate tendency to ruminate, and (2) state rumination, which refers to rumination following exposure to a stressor (Key, Campbell, Bacon, & Gerin, 2008). State

rumination has been found to predict subsequent negative affect, poor recovery from sad mood, and emotional reactivity to social stressors independent of trait rumination (Marchetti et al., 2018). Further, state rumination has been found to have negative effects on numerous variables which affect organisational outcomes, namely problem-solving, goal-oriented behaviour, and mood, making it of interest to the present study.

Previous research on the relationship between forgiveness and rumination has found clear links between the two, and it is often concluded that a lack of rumination is a prerequisite for forgiveness to occur successfully (Chan, 2010; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). The positive contribution of forgiveness on mental well-being is likely due to variables such as social support, interpersonal functioning, and health behaviours (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). When an individual is in a rumination state, all three of these variables are negatively affected (e.g., Chan, 2010; Marchetti et al., 2018; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Moreover, the direct negative effect of forgiveness on mental health and well-being is thought to operate through rumination and its comorbidity with various negative emotions. Specifically, unforgiveness has been found to have a significant detrimental impact on an individual's well-being due to feelings of anger, hostility, and rumination associated with it (Madsen et al., 2009). Chan (2010) postulated that rumination could be a major factor which sustains an individual's desire for revenge and halts forgiveness for specific transgressions. Therefore, the existence of a negative relationship between state forgiveness and state rumination seems likely.

Likewise, evidence for the relationship between rumination and burnout exists in the literature. As previously mentioned, burnout is characterised by three dimensions (exhaustion, mental distancing, and reduced personal efficacy). The impact of rumination on these three dimensions can be found in previous research, albeit independently. Key et al. (2008) found that rumination played a role in the association of psychological and physiological responses to stress and hypertension by prolonging the arousals that accompany stress. Nolen-Hoeksema

(2000) found that the ruminative process may keep an individual in either an anxious or depressed mood for the majority of their day, and that rumination enhances negative thinking. Further, it was found that rumination contributes to feelings of hopelessness about the future, negative evaluations of the present, and negative memories of the past. LeMoult et al. (2013) found that state rumination was associated with difficulty disengaging from negative emotions, while Marchetti et al. (2018) found that state rumination increased emotional reactivity to social stressors. Taken together, it is evident that a relationship exists between state rumination and symptoms of burnout.

Thus, the existence of a relationship between forgiveness and rumination, and between rumination and burnout is supported by the extant literature. As the outcome of practising forgiveness is replacing negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviours toward an offender with prosocial responses (Worthing et al., 2014), it is fair to expect practising forgiveness in response to a specific transgression (i.e. state forgiveness) will decrease the amount of rumination resulting from a specific transgression (i.e. state rumination). Further, as state rumination may provoke symptoms of burnout, it seems possible that the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout may operate through level of state rumination. Investigating these relationships is of interest to the present study.

Hypothesis 2. Level of state forgiveness is negatively related to level of burnout through level of state rumination.

1.4 The Moderating Role of Interactional Justice

While state rumination is a variable which is focused at the individual level, organisation-level variables may also influence the forgiveness-burnout association. An example of one of these variables is organisational justice. As a general concept, organisational justice refers to how fairly employees feel treated in the workplace (Eigen & Litwin, 2014). A common conclusion found in the literature is that the more fairly employees feel they are being

treated, the higher their organisational commitment will be and the more likely they will be to perform prosocial behaviours. Organisational justice is typically subcategorised into three types: (1) distributional, (2) procedural, and (3) interactional. Despite the fact that the contemporary workplace has made the concept of interactional justice more relevant (Le Roy et al., 2012), it has been noted in the current organisational justice literature that there is a lack of studies which investigate its effects (Eigen & Litwin, 2014); thus, the present study will focus on interactional justice.

Interactional justice refers to “the quality of interpersonal treatment received during the enactment of organisational procedures by persons in authority” (Goodstein & Aquino, 2010, p. 624). Interactional justice is often conceptualised as being comprised of two components, namely: (1) interpersonal justice, which refers to treating people with dignity and respect, and (2) informational justice, which refers to giving people sufficient information about various tasks relating to organisational outcomes. As previously mentioned, interpersonal relationships in the workplace have a new importance in the contemporary zeitgeist. According to Le Roy et al. (2012), the components of interactional justice have become more prevalent in the everyday work environment than the components of other forms of justice. Employees expect to have their responsibilities explained to them in a clear, respectful manner, and if they perceive that this has not occurred, it is likely that feelings of anger and indignation will be triggered (Greenberg, 2009).

Supporting this notion, the current literature suggests that the more fairly employees feel they are being treated, the more likely they are to exhibit prosocial behaviours in the workplace (Eigen & Litwin, 2014). As mentioned previously, an increase in prosocial orientation results in increased thinking in terms of “we” and feelings of relatedness to others (e.g., Karremans et al., 2005), which may strengthen the interpersonal relationships in an organisation and influence the likelihood of forgiveness occurring. Furthermore, Greenberg

(2009) found that a high level of interactional justice will mitigate employees' negative reactions to other forms of injustices (such as procedural or distributive), causing them to be more open towards and understanding of unfavourable decisions. Taken together, it seems likely that the level of interactional justice an employee perceives in the workplace will influence how forgiving they will act, thus influencing the relationship between forgiveness and burnout. More specifically, it seems likely that a high level of interactional justice will have a positive influence on this relationship, as a lack of interactional justice has been associated with the emergence of counterproductive work behaviours.

Hypothesis 3. A high level of perceived interactional justice will strengthen the negative relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout.

1.5 Present Study

Taken together, forgiveness in the context of an organisation is an area ripe with opportunity for research. The purpose of the present study was to contribute to the literature by investigating the following: a) the relationship between state forgiveness and burnout; b) the potential mediating effect of state rumination on this relationship; and, c) the potential moderating effect of perceived interactional justice on this relationship. Figure 1 depicts the present study's process model.

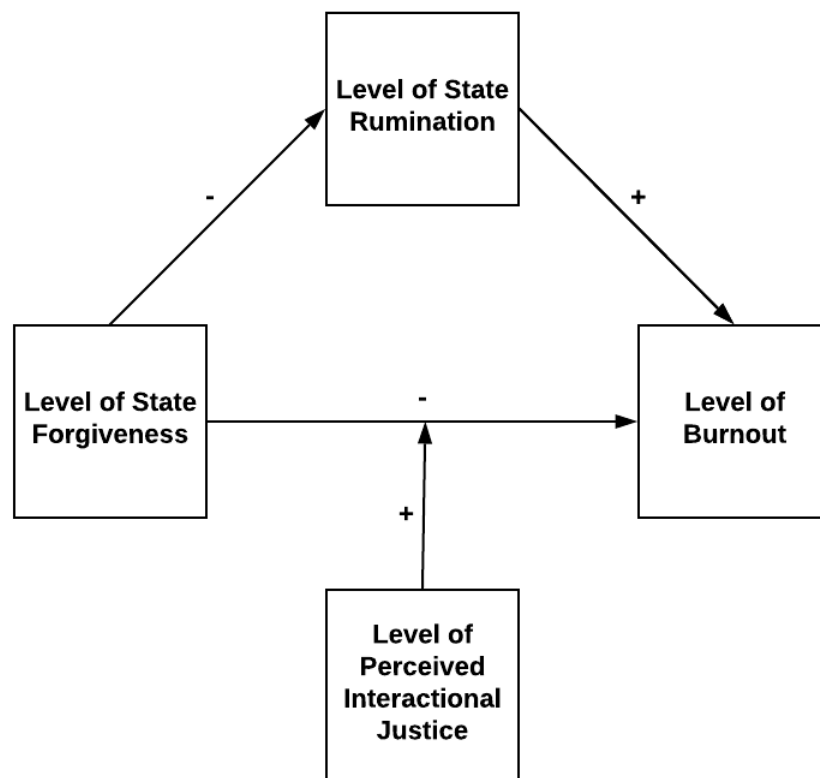


Figure 1. Process model

Firstly, it is expected that state forgiveness is negatively associated with burnout, meaning a higher level of state forgiveness is associated with lower levels of burnout. Secondly, it is expected that state forgiveness will be associated with burnout through state rumination. Lastly, the negative association between state forgiveness and burnout is expected to be strengthened by a high level of perceived interactional justice. The next section deals with the research methodology utilised in the present study in order to investigate the hypotheses, followed by data analysis and interpretation.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants and Design

The present study utilised a cross-sectional design featuring continuous variables. Based on a power analysis (G* Power, Version 3.1.9.2., Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, and Lang,

2009), the present study aimed to recruit at least 100 participants and concluded with a total of 105 usable responses. Participants were recruited using various social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and were reached using a snowball sampling. In order to facilitate data collection, all measures utilised in the present study were presented in Dutch (see Appendix). Of these responses, 63% were from females. The average age of respondents was 38.3 years old ($SD = 13.8$), with an average organisational tenure of 7.3 years ($SD = 9.9$). Most respondents held either junior (40%) or middle (50.5%) management positions and worked in the commercial sector (65%). The average amount of hours worked per week based on contract terms was 33.8 ($SD = 9.6$); however, the average actual hours worked per week (including travel and overtime) was 42.9 ($SD = 13.9$).

2.2 Procedure

Qualtrics, an online platform, was utilised to conduct data collection. Prior to commencement of the present study, ethical approval was obtained. Participation in the present study was completely voluntary. Informed consent was utilised, with the researcher disclosing the appropriate information regarding what is to be expected from participation before any data was collected. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the present study at any time. Participants were asked to complete several self-report questionnaires on how they deal with conflict in the workplace. Self-report measures were both most convenient and most appropriate for the present study due to the highly personal nature of the topic. All data collected was held to the highest standards of confidentiality possible and electronic copies of any data collected was stored in a password protected folder

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Recall. Participants were firstly informed of their anonymity and were asked to recall the most recent work-related transgression they could think of. If a participant did not complete the recall, they were excluded from the study. Examples of responses to the recall

were “I found out my contract would be drafter shorter than expected”, or “My colleague questioned the quality of my work”. Following this recall, a number of questions were asked about the incident, such as about the quality of the relationship with the transgressor prior to the incident, the amount of time since the incident occurred, and the severity of the incident, rated on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being wholly negative and 7 being wholly positive. Descriptive statistics for offense-specific variable can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Offense-Specific Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relationship Commitment	4.76	1.32
Interaction Frequency w/ Transgressor	4.79	1.48
Incident Severity	4.02	1.40

The average score for offense-specific variables was moderate, with relationship with the transgressor and interaction frequency with the transgressor scoring slightly higher than the other variables. The time since the transgression occurred had ranged from 0 (i.e. very recently) to 90 months ($M = 5.18$; $SD = 10.28$) and 45.7% of respondents stated that the transgressor was their supervisor.

2.3.2 Forgiveness. Level of state forgiveness was measured using an adapted version of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory by Karremans et al. (2005) ($\alpha = .90$). This measure, originally developed by McCullough et al. (1998), consists of three subscales: the Avoidance scale ($\alpha = .84$), composed of statements such as “I keep as much distance between us as possible; the Revenge scale ($\alpha = .79$), composed of statements such as “I’ll make him/her pay”; and, the Positive Forgiveness scale ($\alpha = .80$), composed of statements such as “I have completely forgiven the other person for this incident”. The participant was

asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). For the total scale and the positive forgiveness subscale, a higher score indicated a higher level of forgiveness. For the revenge and avoidance subscale, a higher score indicated a lower level of each variable.

2.3.3 Burnout. Level of burnout was measured using an adapted version of the 15-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), focusing on the burnout subscale ($\alpha = .89$). The measure was composed of statements such as “I feel mentally exhausted by my work”, and “At the end of the working day, I feel empty”. Responses ranged from never (1) to always/every day (7), with a higher score indicating a higher level of burnout.

2.3.4 Rumination. An adapted version of a measure utilised by Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, and Wigboldus (2010) was used to measure state rumination in the present study ($\alpha = .88$). The measure requires respondents to refer to the same recall of a past transgression, and consists of questions such as, “I often think back to [the transgressor]”, and “I sometimes worry about [the transgressor]”. Responses range from totally disagree (1) to completely agree (7), with a lower score indicating a lower level of rumination.

2.3.5 Interactional justice. To measure level of perceived interactional justice, the present study utilised an adapted version of the Colquitt’s Organizational Justice Scale (COJS) (Colquitt, 2001) by Colquitt and Rodell (2015) ($\alpha = .77$), which assesses the quality of interactions with a supervisor. The 4-item measure is composed of statements such as “Everyone is treated politely at work”, and “Everyone is valued at work”. Responses ranged from to disagree completely (1) to agree completely (7), with a higher score indicating a higher level of perceived interactional justice.

2.4 Statistical Analyses

2.4.1 Descriptive. Mean scores were calculated for various variables, such as level of state forgiveness, level of burnout, level of state rumination, and level of perceived interactional justice. Reliability levels were calculated for all scales and subscales. Correlations for all mean score variables were calculated. Frequencies and descriptives, such as for means, maximums and minimums, and standard deviations, were calculated to gain insight into the sample make-up. Finally, measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and measures of variability (standard deviation, variance, kurtosis, and skewness) were calculated for the aforementioned mean score variables.

2.4.2 Confirmatory. The PROCESS v3 macro (Hayes, 2017) was utilised for mediation and moderation analyses. The relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout was tested during the mediation analysis by interpreting the total effect result. To investigate the mediating effect of level of rumination on the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout, model 4 was used. Model 4 estimates the total and direct effect of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout, as well as the indirect effect of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout through level of state rumination. This model generates a bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect using 5000 bootstrap samples and produces point estimates and bias-corrected 95% bootstrap confidence interval estimates of various indices of effect size for the indirect effect (Hayes, 2017).

To investigate the moderating effect of level of interactional justice on the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout, model 1 was used. This model estimates a simple moderation model with the effect of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout moderated by level of perceived interaction justice. Level of state forgiveness and level of perceived interactional justice are mean centred prior to analysis. The model generates the conditional effects of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout at values of level of perceived interactional justice equal to $-1SD$, M , $+1SD$. Model 1 also implements the Johnson-

Neyman technique to identify the values on the continuum of level of perceived interactional justice at which point the effect of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout transitions between statistically significant and non-significant at the .05 level.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations can be seen in Table 2. The average levels of state forgiveness and perceived interactional justice were relatively high, respectively, while the average levels of burnout and rumination were relatively low, also respectively. As expected from the extant literature, level of state forgiveness was negatively associated with level of state rumination, $r(105) = -.63, p = <.001$, (e.g., Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Chan, 2010) and level of burnout, $r(105) = -.33, p = .007$ (e.g., Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Cox et al., 2012). Level of state forgiveness and perceived level of interactional justice were found to be positively correlated, $r(105) = .33, p = .001$.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Main Variables

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1. State Forgiveness	5.01 (1.16)	-	.26*	-.63**	.33*
2. Burnout	3.14 (1.15)		-	.34**	-.33*
3. State Rumination	2.76 (1.50)			-	.25*
4. Interactional Justice	5.16 (1.08)				-

Note. $n = 105$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Correlations for state forgiveness and several offense-specific variables can be seen in Table 3. The results show a moderate negative association between level of state forgiveness

and incident severity, $r(105) = -.44, p = <.001$. The results also reveal an association between level of state forgiveness and time since the offense occurred, $r(105) = -.38, p = <.001$.

Table 3

Correlations for State Forgiveness and Offense-Specific Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. State Forgiveness	-	-.44**	-.38**	.21*	-.07	.29*
2. Incident Severity		-	.29*	-.09	-.07	.15
3. Time Since			-	-.09	.14	-.12
4. Interaction Frequency				-	-.30*	.13
5. Supervisor					-	-.02
6. Relationship Commitment						-

Note. $n = 105$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

3.2 Confirmatory Analyses

3.2.1 H1. To investigate if a relationship existed between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout, the results from the mediation analysis were utilised. When testing the total effect in the mediation model, it was found that there was a significant total effect of level of state forgiveness on level of burnout ($b = -.26, p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.45, -.07]$). The results suggest that level of forgiveness has a negative influence on the level of burnout an individual experiences.

3.2.2 H2. To investigate the potential mediating effect of state rumination on the relationship between state forgiveness and state rumination, model 4 of PROCESS was used. As mentioned above, the analysis firstly found a significant total effect of level of state

forgiveness on level of burnout. Secondly, the direct effect of level of forgiveness on level of burnout was found to be non-significant ($b = -.07$, $t(102) = -.63$, $p = .534$, 95% CI [-.31, .16]). Finally, the mediation analysis revealed that there was a significant indirect effect of level of state forgiveness through level of state rumination on level of burnout ($b = -.19$, $SE = .09$) with the 95% CI excluding zero (95% CI [-.35, -.01]). The indirect effect suggests that the level of state rumination an individual experiences is influenced by the level of state forgiveness they experience, which in turn influences their level of burnout.

3.2.3 H3. To investigate the potential moderating effect of interactional justice on the relationship between state forgiveness and state rumination, model 1 of PROCESS was used and can be seen in Table 4. A main effect of level of perceived interactional justice on level of burnout was revealed, $B = -.27$, $t(101) = -2.35$, $p = .021$, 95% CI [-.50, -.04]. The variables of level of state forgiveness and level of perceived interactional justice were then centred before creating the interaction term. When the interaction term was introduced, the model became non-significant, $B = .11$, $t(101) = 1.14$, $p = .256$, 95% CI [-.08, .30], suggesting that level of perceived interactional justice does not play a moderating role on the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout. The interaction can be seen in Figure 2.

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Moderation Analysis

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Constant	3.09	27.84	.000	2.87	3.32
Forg.	-.18	-1.75	.084	-.38	.02
Int. Just.	-.27	-2.35	.021	-.50	-.04
Forg*IntJust	.11	1.14	.256	-.08	.30
		<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²		
		.38	.14		

Note. Forg. = Level of state forgiveness, Int. Just. = Level of perceived interactional justice, Forg*IntJust = Interaction between Forg. and Int. Just.

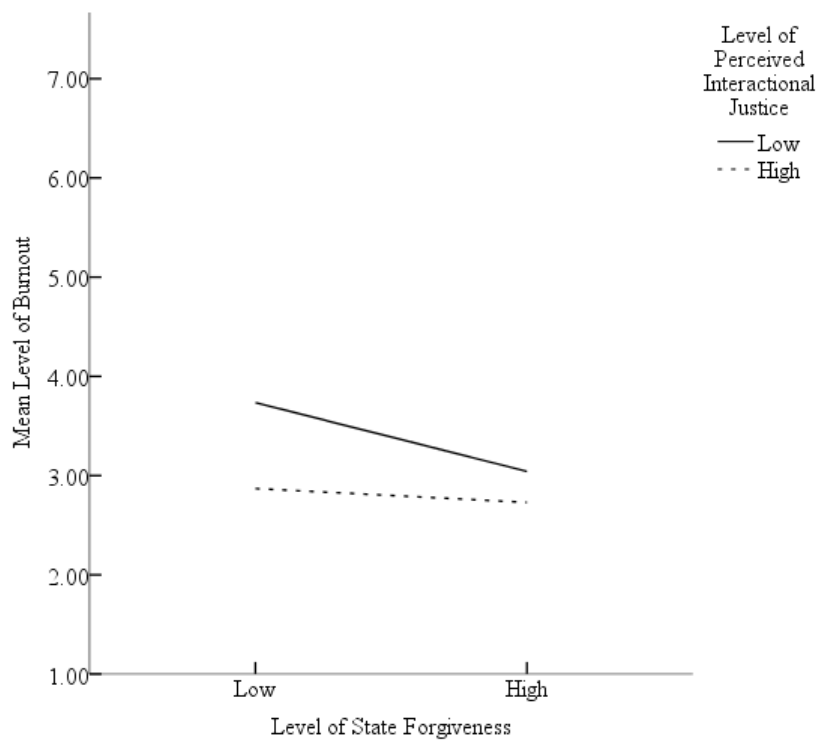


Figure 2. Interaction plot

3.3 Exploratory Analyses

A number of additional analyses were also conducted. Firstly, the influence of the forgiveness subscales (positive forgiveness, revenge, and avoidance) on level of burnout was analysed in order to investigate whether a specific type of forgiveness had a greater influence. Descriptives and correlations of the various forgiveness subscales with burnout can be seen in Table 5. The average levels for positive forgiveness was relatively high, while revenge and avoidance were relatively low. Only the positive forgiveness subscale was significantly negatively correlated with burnout, $r(105) = -.35$, $p = <.001$. Besides this, level of positive forgiveness was significantly negatively associated with both level of revenge, $r(105) = -.56$, $p = <.001$, and level of avoidance, $r(105) = -.71$, $p = <.001$.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Forgiveness Subscales and Burnout

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Burnout	3.14 (1.15)	-	-.35**	.15	.19
2. Positive Forgiveness	5.04 (1.24)		-	-.71**	-.56**
3. Revenge	3.57 (1.56)			-	.53**
4. Avoidance	2.43 (1.24)				-

Note. $n = 105$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Secondly, it was investigated if level of state forgiveness may have a mediating effect on the relationship between level of state rumination and level of burnout. The analysis firstly found a significant total effect of level of state rumination on level of burnout, $b = .27$, $t(103) = 3.71$, $p = <.001$. Secondly, the direct effect of level of state rumination on level of burnout was found to be significant, $b = .23$, $t(102) = 2.48$, $p = .015$, 95% CI [.05, .41]. Finally, the mediation analysis revealed that there was not a significant indirect effect of level of state

rumination through level of state forgiveness on level of burnout, $b = -.07$, $t(102) = -.63$, $p = .534$, 95% CI [-.31, .16]. Therefore, the results suggest that level of state rumination is not associated with level of burnout through level of state forgiveness.

Lastly, it was investigated if level of state forgiveness may have a mediating effect on the relationship between level of perceived interactional justice and level of burnout, which may explain the non-significance of the moderation. The analysis firstly found a significant total effect of level of perceived interactional justice on level of burnout, $b = -.35$, $t(103) = -3.17$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-.57, -.13]. Secondly, the direct effect of level of perceived interactional justice on level of burnout was found to be significant, $b = -.29$, $t(102) = -2.58$, $p = .011$, 95% CI [.05, .41]. Finally, the mediation analysis revealed that there was not a significant indirect effect of level of perceived interactional justice through level of state forgiveness on level of burnout, $b = -.17$, $t(102) = -.63$, $p = .092$, 95% CI [-.37, .03]. Therefore, the results suggest that level of perceived interactional justice is not associated with level of burnout through level of state forgiveness.

4. Discussion

4.1 Key Findings

Interpersonal relationships have taken on a new importance in the contemporary workplace, and, as with virtually all relationships, conflict is inevitable at some point. Despite this, research regarding how conflicts in the workplace may be solved is lacking, particularly in relation to forgiveness in the workplace. This may be due to the fact that forgiveness is not yet seen as an appropriate choice for resolving work-related conflict or may not be seen as a viable option at all (The Fetzer Institute, 2010). Moreover, the majority of the extant literature investigates the antecedents of forgiveness in the workplace, rather than the consequences of. Thus, the present study aimed to contribute to the literature by investigating the following: a) the relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout; b) the potential

mediating effect of level of state rumination on this relationship; and, c) the potential moderating effect of level of perceived interactional justice on this relationship.

4.1.1 H1. It was hypothesised that level of state forgiveness would be negatively associated with level of burnout. The results of the present study supported this hypothesis, finding an association between the level of state forgiveness an individual experiences and the level of burnout they will experience. More specifically, a high level of state forgiveness was associated with a lower level of burnout. This finding is in line with previous research (e.g., Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Chan, 2010; Cox et al., 2012). When considering the components of burnout (exhaustion, mental distancing, and reduced personal efficacy) in relation to the benefits of forgiveness in the workplace, such as increasing feelings of relatedness to others (e.g., Karremans et al., 2005) and reduction of stress and anger (e.g., Akhtar & Barlow, 2018), it seems likely that forgiveness would allay burnout - the results of the present study provide evidence for this.

The results of the exploratory analysis suggest that positive forgiveness is significantly negatively associated with level of burnout. The questions relating to this subscale all involve completely forgiving an offender so it is logical that this would have a positive influence on the well-being of an individual. Moreover, the findings suggest a high level of positive forgiveness is associated with lower levels of both revenge and avoidance. This finding is in line with the literature as acting in a forgiving manner has been linked with the emergence of prosocial behaviours (e.g., Karremans et al., 2005). Although the results of the present study suggest that avoidance and revenge are not significantly associated with level of burnout, it is more likely that these variables have a positive association with level of burnout i.e. as level of revenge/avoidance increases, so too does level of burnout, which would be more reflective of the literature regarding unforgiveness in the workplace. However, only further research may establish this.

4.1.2 H2. It was hypothesised that level of state forgiveness would be negatively related to level of burnout through level of state rumination. The results of the present study indicate that such an association exists, albeit a small one. This finding adds to the current body of literature, with previous research finding that state rumination was associated with difficulty disengaging from negative emotions (e.g., LeMoult et al., 2013) and prolonged feelings of stress and emotional reactivity (e.g., Key et al., 2008; Marchetti et al., 2018). Further, rumination emerging as a result of unforgiveness has also been noted previously (e.g., Madsen et al., 2009), highlighting the importance of forgiving in order to lessen ruminative thinking. Supporting this, there was found to be a negative relationship between state forgiveness and state rumination i.e. as level of state forgiveness increases, level of state rumination decreases. Lastly, following the confirmation of a relationship existing between level of state rumination and level of burnout, it was tested if level of state forgiveness could have a mediating effect on this relationship. The results indicate that level of state forgiveness does not have a mediating effect on the relationship between level of state rumination and level of burnout. As a lack of rumination has been said to be a prerequisite for forgiveness to occur at all (Chan, 2010), this may explain why state forgiveness does not mediate the relationship between state rumination and burnout.

4.1.3 H3. It was hypothesised that level of perceived interactional justice would strengthen the negative relationship between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout. The results of the present study do not support this hypothesis, instead suggesting that level of state forgiveness and level of perceived interactional justice both have independent main effects on level of burnout but do not have an interaction effect. In other words, an individual may experience a high level of state forgiveness and a low level of perceived interactional justice (and vice versa) and this difference in levels will not influence the level of burnout they may experience.

The negative association between level of perceived interactional justice and level of burnout is in line with the literature which has found that a lack of interactional justice is associated with numerous negative outcomes, such as higher levels of stress and feelings of anger and exhaustion (e.g., Greenberg, 2009; Le Roy et al., 2012). In an attempt to explain the non-significance of the moderation results, the potential mediating effect of level of state forgiveness on this relationship was investigated; the results were found to be non-significant. The results again suggest that state forgiveness and interactional justice operate independently of one another, which may be due to the nature of the variables (i.e. state forgiveness is individual-focused while interactional justice is organisation-focused).

4.2 Implications

Taken together, these findings contribute to a greater understanding of the influence of forgiveness in the workplace. The results suggest that opting to act in a forgiving manner when faced with a transgression at work is beneficial for the employee's health. Further, when considering the economic cost which is incurred due to burnt-out employees, practicing forgiveness in the workplace may have the potential to financially benefit organisations. Further research ought to be carried out to further establish potential links between state forgiveness and burnout as it appears likely that doing so will benefit both the contemporary workforce and organisations.

Another important implication is that of the importance of state forgiveness and its association with burnout. Contrastingly to trait forgiveness, which is an individual's innate tendency to forgive, state forgiveness is concerned with forgiveness in relation to a specific transgression. It may be possible that although an individual scores low in trait forgiveness, they could be coached to be more forgiving to specific transgressions, such as those that may occur in the workplace. If more evidence is found for the negative association between level of state forgiveness and level of burnout by future research, it would be worthwhile to investigate

how it is possible to successfully intervene with the negative emotions that arise as a result of transgressions in order to increase state forgiveness. The results of the present study also highlight positive forgiveness (i.e. wholly forgiving an offender) as having a negative influence on level of burnout, thus future research ought to further investigate this relationship.

Moreover, the present study also improves our understanding of state rumination in the workplace. The present study contributes to the literature by suggesting that level of state forgiveness is negatively associated with level of burnout through level of state rumination. As rumination may keep an individual trapped in negative thought processes, thereby prolonging symptoms of burnout, it is imperative that our understanding of how rumination may function in the workplace is deepened. Similarly, as forgiveness may not occur if ruminative thinking is occurring, continued research is crucial. Future research may want to investigate state rumination in the workplace further, for instance by investigating the impact of factors such as job type, hierarchal position in the organisation, and age on level of state rumination.

Lastly, the present study provides evidence for a relationship between perceptions of interactional justice and burnout. Similar to research regarding forgiveness in the workplace, there is currently a paucity of research investigating the influence of interactional justice in the contemporary workplace as other forms of organisational justice are more commonly investigated. As with state rumination, continued research aiming to reveal the influence of interactional justice on work-related outcomes is necessary.

4.3 Strengths & Limitations

A major strength of the present study is that it addresses a gap which currently exists in the literature. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of previous research is concerned with the factors which increase the likelihood of forgiveness occurring or focus on negative responses to conflict in the workplace, such as counterproductive work behaviours or

organisational theft. Contrastingly, the present study focuses on investigating the consequences of forgiveness. In this way, the study addresses a gap in the literature and may be built upon to further close this knowledge gap. Moreover, as participants had to complete the recall measure prior to completing subsequent measures, the present study is granted a degree of ecological validity. This means it is more likely that the results are reflective of the reality of how transgressions are dealt with in the workplace.

As with all research, the present study is not without limitations. Firstly, the generalisability of the results is harmed by the fact that all respondents were Dutch and well-educated, thus it may be the case that these results are only applicable to white-collar workers from the Netherlands. The Netherlands has been noted as having a particularly low-context culture, meaning the people are more direct in their communication style (Lee & Lee, 2007). Considering this with the relatively high average level of forgiveness found in the present study, it is possible that this result was found because the Dutch are more likely to speak up and sort out conflicts as they occur. It may be of interest for future research to investigate high-context cultures, such as Ireland, where conflicts may not be addressed directly and left to fester for longer periods of time.

When considering the relatively high levels of forgiveness and relatively low levels of burnout reported by participants, it is also important to acknowledge that a certain degree of social desirability may be at play. Participants may have felt pressured by societal norms to exaggerate on how forgiving they are when they have been transgressed and also to understate the pressure they experience due to their work. Due to this, the mean rates on level of state forgiveness may be overestimated and the mean rates on level of burnout may be underestimated. Future research may want to consider using less overt measures to quantify these variables.

4.4 Suggestions for Future Research

As the present study is only a single correlational study, future research ought to further investigate the influence of forgiveness on other important variables which impact the organisation and the individual, such as work performance, productivity, or engagement, to name a few. By improving our understanding of how state forgiveness (and forgiveness in general) impacts our work, it is possible to create a stronger, healthier workforce.

Moreover, it may be interesting to take a qualitative approach when investigating forgiveness in the workplace. A qualitative approach could yield more unique and nuanced results than quantitative research affords by giving the researcher the opportunity to probe and determine more than just initial responses and rationales. Further, an interview could combat the social desirability which may be hiding the reality of responses to workplace conflicts as respondents would have less time to consider their answers and mould them into what they deem as socially acceptable.

Additionally, the exploratory analyses represent promising avenues for future studies to pursue. Particularly, further research ought to be carried out in relation to the influence of positive forgiveness on an individual's well-being. As positive psychology ideology becomes more and more popular in the mainstream, this would appear to be a logical next step for researchers. Research on the necessary prerequisites for positive forgiveness to occur, and how to cultivate these prerequisites in the workplace, would be particularly beneficial.

4.5 Conclusion

Cultivating and protecting interpersonal relationships at work is a task that the majority of workers face. While the benefits of friendship at the workplace are numerous, it must also be acknowledged that conflicts are inherent and inevitable. To pre-empt the harmful effects of conflict in the workplace, such as burnout, it must be understood about how workers can

resolve conflicts and protect themselves from becoming incapacitated. The present study provides preliminary evidence to support the notion that acting in a forgiving manner is beneficial for the well-being of workers. As research regarding forgiveness in the workplace advances, it appears that it may not only a viable option, but an optimal one.

5. References

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Appendix

Transgression-related Interpersonal Motivations Scale – 12-item Form (TRIM-12)

1) “Ik heb de ander dit voorval helemaal vergeven.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

2) “Ook als ik aan dit voorval denk, heb ik het beste met de ander voor.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

3) “Ook als ik aan het voorval denk, wil ik dat we gewoon een goede relatie behouden.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

4) “Ik heb mijn wroeging helemaal opzij gezet met betrekking tot dit voorval.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

5) “Ik zou willen dat de ander op één of andere manier ‘teruggepakt’ wordt, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

6) “Ik zou willen dat de ander ook iets vervelends overkomt, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

7) “Ik wil dat de ander krijgt wat hij/zij verdient, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

8) “Ik zou eigenlijk willen dat de ander ook op één of andere manier gekwetst wordt, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

9) “Ik zou wat afstand willen nemen van de ander, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

10) “Ik zou het moeilijk vinden om heel aardig tegen de ander te doen, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

11) “Ik zou de ander liever vermijden, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

12) “Ik vertrouw de ander niet helemaal, wanneer ik aan het voorval denk.”

helemaal oneens 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 helemaal eens

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

Ter afsluiting volgen hieronder nog enkele vragen over uw gemoedstoestand op uw werk.

Geef aan in hoeverre iedere uitspraak in het algemeen op u van toepassing is door het beste antwoord te kiezen.

Schaal van 1 (= vrijwel nooit) t/m 7 (= vrijwel altijd)

1. Ik voel me mentaal uitgeput door mijn werk
2. Een hele dag werken vormt een zware belasting voor mij
3. Ik voel me "opgebrand" door mijn werk
4. Aan het einde van de werkdag voel ik me leeg
5. Ik voel me vermoeid als ik 's morgens opsta en er weer een werkdag voor me ligt

Rumination Measure

1 = helemaal niet mee eens, 7 = helemaal mee eens

- Ik denk niet vaak aan de overtreding
- Ik maak me er soms zorgen over
- Denk aan gedachten over de overtreding
- De overtreding laat me niet gaan

Interactional Justice Measure

1 = helemaal niet mee eens, 7 = helemaal mee eens

1. Iedereen wordt beleefd behandeld op het werk.
2. Iedereen wordt gewaardeerd op het werk.
3. Iedereen wordt met respect behandeld op het werk.
4. Er worden geen ongepaste opmerkingen gemaakt op het werk.