



Follow The Leader: Busyness Analysis

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Background

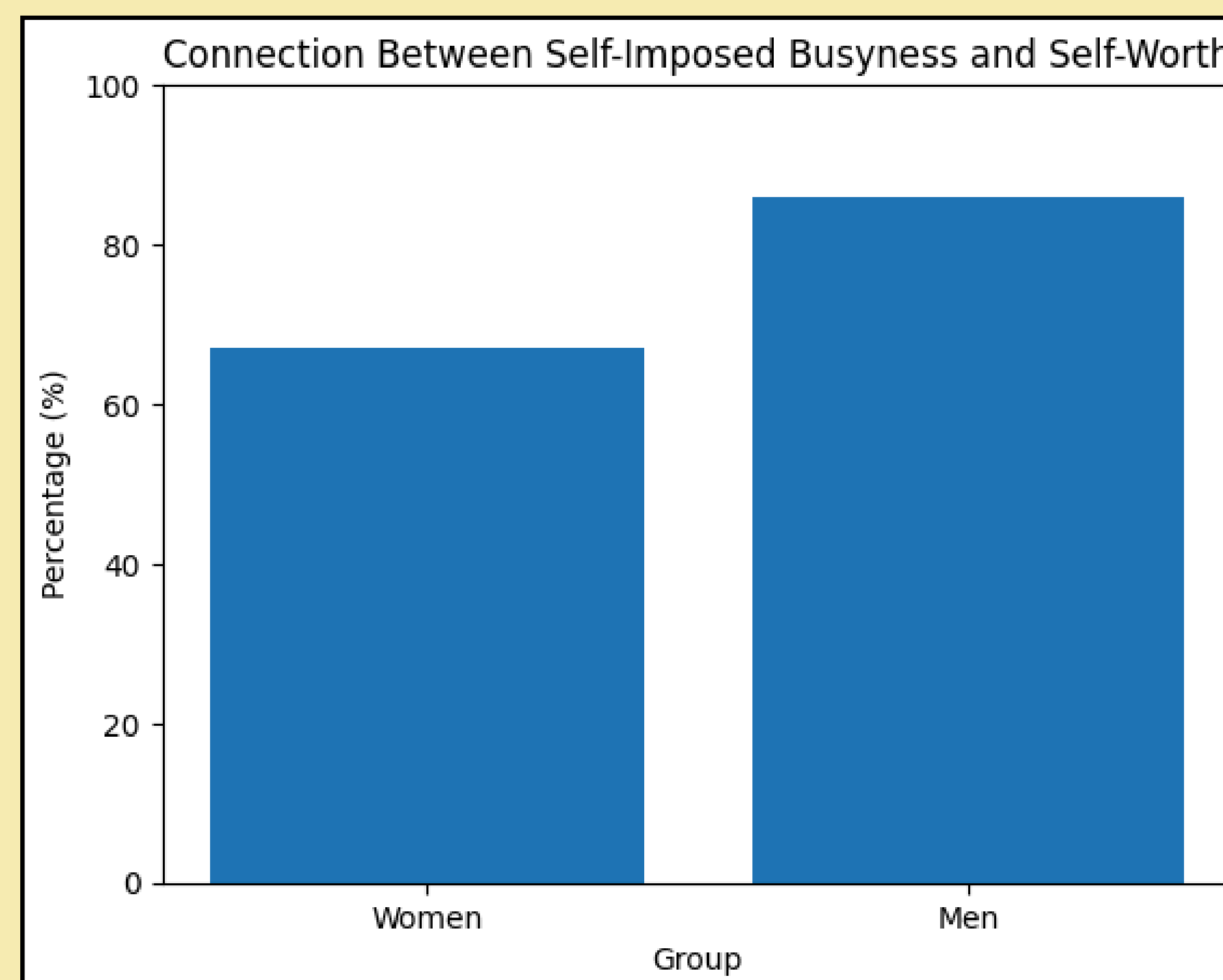
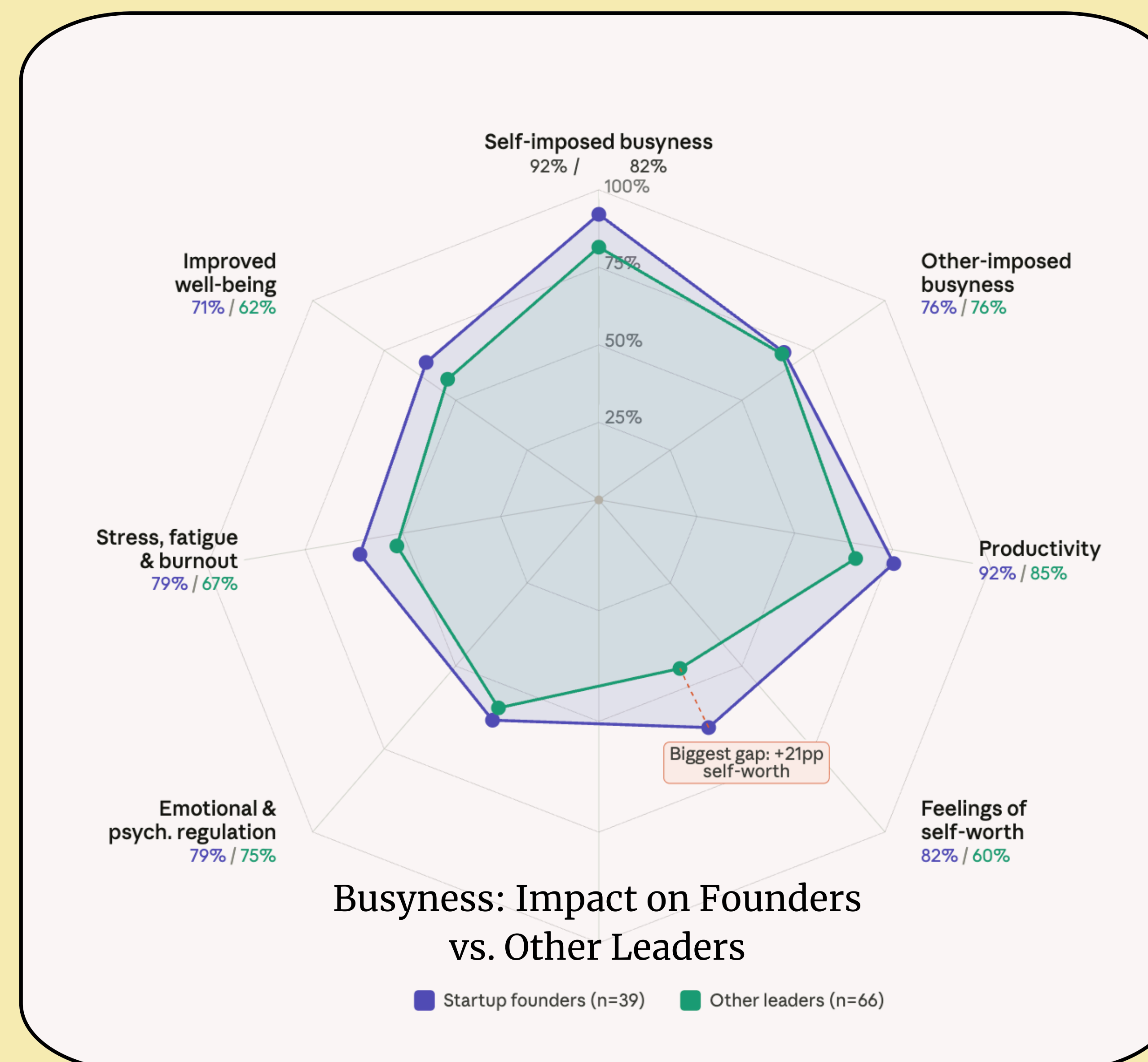
- This research was conducted through the ODESI Lab at the Ross School of Business under PhD Candidate Elizabeth Trinh.
- Builds on the idea that busyness is often mistaken for productivity.
- Explores busyness across multiple themes of professional and personal life.
- Compares perspectives across individual roles and organizational contexts to understand broader patterns.

Abstract

- Examines how business leaders experience “busyness” and its impact on overall lifestyle.
- Uses student-led interviews with leaders and founders, analyzed across roles and gender.
- Finds founders are more internally driven by feelings of self worth in how they choose and interpret busyness, while all leaders face external demands of busyness.
- Aims to generate practical insights for improving workplace structure and leadership effectiveness.

Methods

- Research assistants conducted virtual interviews of industry executives.
- Sent 100+ emails to identify industry leaders, coordinating interviews with those who were willing.
- Asked interview questions regarding busyness, productivity, and professional practices.
- Recorded, analyzed, and annotated data and sorted by theme to come to results.



Results

- Every leader interviewed noted that they self imposed busyness often for reasons of self worth or productivity.
- 67% percent of female leaders who self impose busyness also mentioned issues with self-worth, and 86% percent in men.
- Founders vs. other leaders differed most on feelings of self-worth (+21pp, 81.6% vs. 60.4%), while converging almost exactly on other-imposed busyness (76% vs. 76%).
- Founders scored highest on self-imposed busyness and productivity, reflecting a more volitional relationship with busyness.

Conclusions

- Overall, our findings suggest that busyness is a behavior that leaders actively construct and reinforce.
- Across interviews, leaders consistently linked busyness to productivity and self-worth, even when it negatively impacted wellbeing.
- Patterns across gender and industry further indicate that cultural and organizational expectations shape how busyness is experienced and maintained.
- These insights highlight the need to reconsider how success is defined in the workplace.
- Reducing the emphasis on constant busyness may lead to more effective leadership practices and happier employees.

Aknowledgements

We would like to thank our incredible research mentor, Elizabeth Trinh, and our ODESI lab managers for their guidance throughout the year. Also, a huge thank you to Thejomayi Akkoor, our peer facilitator for her support in the UROP Program.