

News

Are you a victim of organisational burnout?

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Job stress and burnout are stark realities of today's work life. With longer working hours, work pressures, deadlines to meet and barely any time for family and recreation, stress is taking a toll on the lives of a majority of working professionals.

A study by ASSOCHAM last year revealed that 77 per cent working women avoid going to the doctor due to lack of time and 75% suffer from depression and anxiety. Lifestyle diseases in India are expected to cause a loss of 18 million years by 2030, one of the highest in the world. These are all related factors, leading to long term exhaustion and diminished work interest.

What are some of the reasons leading to burnout? Nikul Shah, global HR head, Omnitech InfoSolutions Ltd explains, "Many employees of established companies panic going to work each morning, and when they do arrive they tend to be dispirited and unproductive. They are experiencing burnout. What happened to the enthusiasm and energy that they felt when they were new hires? They will tell you that although they are paid well, they don't feel recognized or appreciated for their work; their bosses aren't fair or don't communicate effectively; the people they work with aren't supportive or their job doesn't provide them with new challenges. These employees are burned out, and nearly all will look for new work within the next 16 months. Most organizations view burnout as an individual problem; something that can be resolved with a good stress management course. The truth is organizational dynamics cause most burnout. Focusing solely on how the individual responds to those dynamics is irresponsible and costly."

Dealing with Stress

A major cause of burnout is excessive stress. Psychologists Herbert Freudenberger and Gail North have theorized that the burnout process can be divided into 12 phases including a compulsion to prove oneself and neglecting one's own needs. At the core of these phenomena, lies accumulated work stress. Dr S Srinivasan, Consultant at Wockhardt Foundation, Life Coach at Balance: The essence of living and Consultant, Healthcare Marketing at Charak advises on how to deal with it, "One must manage stress with an alert mind rather than a slowed down or switched off mind, so as to avoid the problems associated with reentering your stress zone. Employees have to draw their own line and decide when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no'. There is a cost associated with both sides. Self awareness and balance from within is needed. Nobody can stop the juggernaut of the global economy but you can insulate yourself from it, knowing it will have some cost but will help you lead a healthy and happy life in the long run."

Impact on the organization

Often, people feel that burnout is just an individual problem, resulting majorly from excessive work overload and the consequent negativity and dispiritedness. However, it is more of a problem for the entire organisation. Shah elaborates, "Most of us view burnout as an individual problem; something that can be fixed with a good stress management course. The truth is organizational dynamics source most burnout. Focusing solely on how the individual responds to those dynamics is irresponsible and costly. Burnout results in workers' loss of passion and energy for the job and may lead to medical problems. When individuals suffer, organizations suffer. When employees burn out: organizations burn out. And therefore, first it affects with poorer work performance, second, poorer physical condition, and third, behavioral symptoms. Productivity and quality go down and they procrastinate or miss deadlines. Absenteeism goes up. Imagination and innovation come to a halt. Anxiety related illnesses increase."

Coping with Burnout

Since employee burnout comes with significant costs, it is important for HR managers and executives to pay attention to this rising problem. Pratyush Pundir, Director, OnStage retail ventures, explains, “Organisations must manage their people well. What it essentially means is to empower employees at the pace comfortable to them, to manage flow of work in the organisation and create a culture where people take the initiative to work and work does not have to be thrust upon them. To cope with burnout, give your employees adequate time to balance their lives. Help them connect to your overall goals and find a fit with it. It is not something that can be achieved in one day. It has to be an ongoing process, a part of the work culture.”

To keep your staff motivated, it is best to encourage an overall balance and not a ‘work to death’ culture. At the end of the day, human beings are not machines. It is best not to try and turn them into one.