

Work Wellness Institute: Thoughts to Inspire Series

From Burnout to Balance: Building Sustainable, Healthy Workplaces

Interview with Nina Hornjatkevyc, M.Sc., Registered Psychologist

Definition of Burnout:

Burnout is included in the World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon. It is not classified as a medical condition.

Description

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

It is characterised by three dimensions:

- 1) feelings of **energy depletion** or **exhaustion**;
- 2) increased **mental distance** from one's job, or feelings of **negativism** or **cynicism** related to one's job; and
- 3) a **sense of ineffectiveness** and **lack of accomplishment**.

Burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

<https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>

<https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2fcd%2fentity%2f129180281>

The Biggest Predictor of Burnout: Toxic Workplace Behaviours

The McKinsey Health Institute conducted a survey of nearly 15,000 employees and 1,000 HR decision makers in 15 countries.

“In all 15 countries surveyed by McKinsey, toxic workplace behavior was the biggest predictor of burnout symptoms and intent to leave—by a large margin. And toxic workplace behavior is more common than you might think: about one in four employees

report experiencing some form of toxic behavior at work. Employees who report experiencing high levels of toxic behavior at work are almost eight times more likely than those who don't to experience burnout symptoms, according to the 2022 survey.

What is toxic workplace behavior? It's less about the behavior itself and more about **the way it makes people feel**. We define toxic workplace behavior as anything that leads to employees **feeling unvalued, belittled, or unsafe**. This can include **unfair or demeaning treatment; noninclusive behavior; sabotaging; cutthroat competition; abusive management; and unethical behavior from leaders or coworkers.**"

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-burnout>

Addressing Burnout

Organization-level factors target the root causes of burnout, while individual strategies help to mitigate symptoms of burnout.

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep22-06-02-005.pdf>

Short-Term Actions

The following resources outline actions which can be implemented while working on the larger process of addressing and preventing toxic workplace behaviours, lack of inclusivity, and other contributors to burnout.

"Providing employees with **lateral career opportunities**, for example, is 2.5 times more powerful as a predictor of a company's relative retention rate compared with compensation."

"Provide opportunities for lateral job moves. Not all employees want to climb the corporate ladder or take on additional work or responsibilities. Many workers simply want a change of pace or the opportunity to try something new. When employees talk positively about lateral opportunities — new jobs offering fresh challenges without a promotion — they are less likely to quit. Lateral career opportunities are 12 times more predictive of employee retention than promotions. We observed the same pattern in multinationals: The more frequently employees discussed the possibility of international postings, the more likely they were to stick with their current employer."

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toxic-culture-is-driving-the-great-resignation/>



Use a **collaborative** approach that **engages employees in designing wellness programs**.

<https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/burnout>

Ensure **substance dependency treatment resources are among comprehensive mental health services** available

A Mental Health Research Canada "...study revealed a **significant link between burnout and possible alcohol and/or cannabis dependency** among Canadians. Nearly half of individuals displaying signs of alcohol dependency (45%) and cannabis dependency (42%) also reported feeling burnt out most of the time. This finding underscores the potential association between high levels of stress and exhaustion, and the adoption of substances as coping mechanisms or self-medication. It emphasizes the importance of addressing both burnout and substance dependencies in comprehensive mental health support programs."

<https://www.mhrc.ca/findings-of-poll-16>

Preventing and Addressing Causes of Burnout through Integrated Work Practices and Systems

The following sources outline excellent, practical and research supported strategies and resources.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/addressing-employee-burnout-are-you-solving-the-right-problem>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/beyond-burnout-what-helps-and-what-doesnt>

<https://workwellnessinstitute.org/?s=burnout>

<https://hbr.org/2023/05/when-your-employee-tells-you-theyre-burned-out>

<https://drlaura.live/episode-66-flexibility-and-neurodiversity-creating-inclusive-work-environments/>

<https://canadacareercounselling.com/2023/11/20/power-of-career-counselling-services-in-employee-retention/>

