



Resource

Recognizing and Preventing Burnout

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees across Canada have experienced/are experiencing burnout. In response, this document was created to:

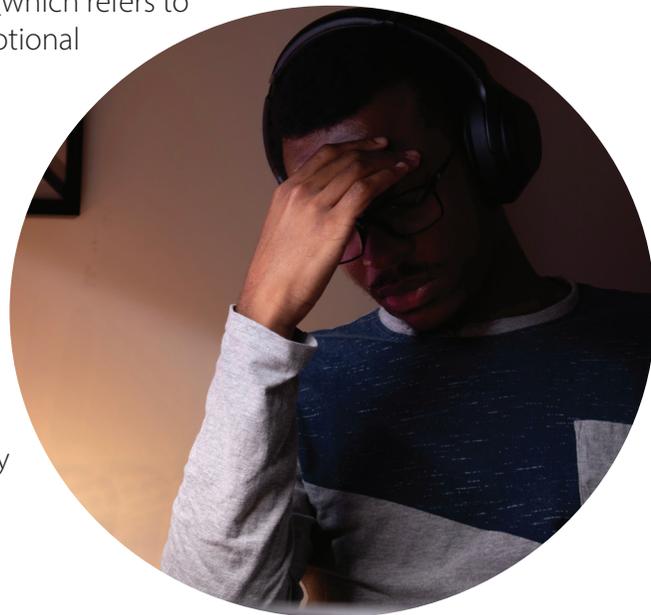
1. Help organizations better understand what burnout is
2. Help organizations support employees at a structural level
3. Help organizational leaders learn best practices for managing teams in times of crisis (including, but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic)

What is Burnout?

- Burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges in response to chronic interpersonal stressors at someone's job (Maslach, & Leiter, 2016, p. 103).
- The 3 key dimensions of burnout are:
 1. Overwhelming exhaustion (loss of energy, depletion, fatigue)
 2. Feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job (irritability, withdrawal)
 3. A sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (reduced productivity, low morale)

How Can Organizations Support Employees at a Structural Level?

- Employees need to feel supported at work.
- One effective way to help employees feel supported is to implement 'structural changes', meaning that the organization can **build in supports for employees** in an intentional, systematic way.
- For example, by **assigning a coach** to each employee to help them develop skills related to their job. This coach could help employees learn new things, navigate difficult situations, and practice specific strategies relevant to their roles. Coaches can offer both instrumental support (which refers to tangible support, like helping someone complete a task) and/or emotional support (which refers to showing care for someone, like offering reassurance during a difficult situation) (Parker et al., 2013).
- Organizations can also **train entire teams** to gain skills related to social characteristics of jobs (i.e., working with other employees), self-efficacy, motivation, and/or goal-orientation (Humphrey et al., 2007). These trainings should be formally implemented, otherwise the initiatives and corresponding benefits may fade over time (Parker et al., 2013).
- If employees feel supported, it can lead to a 'positive support spiral' (Parker et al., 2013) where supported employees tend to then offer support to others, to identify with the organization, want to stay at the organization, and exert more effort for the organization (Edwards & Peccei, 2010).



- It is also beneficial to build employees' **self-efficacy**, or their belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance achievements (Galanakis et al., 2016). Building self-efficacy can lead to increased enthusiasm and dedication to one's job (Christian et al., 2011).
- To build self-efficacy, consider ways to help employees experience success in their roles, to observe colleagues experiencing success, to increase constructive feedback to employees, and to provide opportunities for employees to produce changes in their social work environments (Bresó et al., 2011; Consiglio et al., 2016; Ouweneel et al., 2013).
- Organizations can also employ '**job crafting**', which refers to allowing employees to redesign their own jobs so that they are more satisfied at work (Berg et al., 2008). For example, organizations can work with employees to alter:
 - Number, type, or nature of tasks
 - How often, when, or with whom they interact with at work
 - The way they frame the social purpose of their work to align with their passion

How Can Organizational Leaders Manage Teams in Times of Crisis?

Reduce employee uncertainty

1. If employees feel uncertain in their jobs, meaning they don't have all the necessary information to predict what will happen in their future, they are more likely to experience stress and anxiety (Kim et al., 2021). Thus, we want to **reduce employees' feelings of uncertainty**.
2. To do this, organizational leaders can:
 - a. Try to **only implement change if there is a clear rationale for why it should be done**; if there is rationale for why the change is happening, it should be clearly communicated (Cullen et al., 2014).
 - b. Share information about the decision-making process**, including personal benefits for employees and potential consequences if the changes aren't made (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).
 - c. Make sure the change aligns with the goals of the organization**, and the plan for how the organization is going to meet those goals (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).
 - d. Increase employee involvement in management decision-making** (Coch & French, 1965; Farahnak et al., 2020; Lawler, 1992; Riordan et al., 2005; Vandenberg et al., 1999)
 - e. Provide adaptability training** to help employees learn to adjust to changing situations (Cullen et al., 2014)
 - f. Try to **hire future applicants who are highly adaptable** (Judge et al., 1999; Nikolaou et al., 2007). Employers can do this by providing job applicants with a hypothetical situation in which a large organizational change is occurring, and then ask questions about how they would perceive and manage such a change.
 - g. Acknowledge that **not all times of change are the same** (i.e., crises), and that there isn't just one approach to challenges (Dirani et al., 2020).
 - h. In times of change, provide space for **healthy communication, interactive decision making, and strategic planning in a flexible work atmosphere** with an aim to be both agile and open to growth (Caminiti, 2020; Raney, 2014).

Lead using a transformational leadership style

1. Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders **encourage, inspire, and motivate** employees to innovate and create change that will help grow and shape the organization's future success.
2. To do this (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017), leaders can:
 - a. Create a strong sense of **organizational culture** (the values and expectations for how people should work together).
 - b. Increase employees' feelings of **ownership** that comes from the hard work they have put into the organization. Incorporate individualized consideration behaviors (act as a mentor/coach; listen and attend to subordinates' concerns and needs).
 - c. Ask employees for their ideas.
3. Benefits of transformational leadership include:
 - a. Addressing organizational tensions and improving overall performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).
 - b. Promoting team motivation, decision-making, and organizational commitment (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).
 - c. Improving staff attitudes such as job satisfaction (Podsakoff et al. 1996; Walumbwa et al., 2005) and organizational commitment (Bycio et al., 1995) at all leadership levels in an organization.
 - d. Decreasing negative staff outcomes such as turnover intentions (Bycio et al., 1995) and burnout (Constable & Russell, 1986; Corrigan et al., 2002).

Increase interdependencies and role clarity among employees

1. Teams should be restructured to increase interdependence (Somech, 2008), meaning that **each team member should rely on and be supported by other team members**.
 - a. For example, instead of having one big task that one person is responsible for, leadership could break the task down into several smaller, more manageable tasks that involve multiple employees working together to complete it.
2. Increased interdependence is associated with:
 - a. Lower levels of relationship-oriented conflict.
 - a. Increased feelings of identifying with the team, which has been shown to predict positive team outcomes
3. Leaders should **increase each employees' understanding of the expectations and requirements of their role**, referred to as role clarity (Griffin et al., 2007).



Aim to have relationships of equal quality with all employees

1. Leaders need to make sure they have equal quality relationships with all their employees.
2. If leaders show favouritism, it can lead to various issues, like having employees compete with one another or avoid one another. In turn, that can lead to decreased satisfaction with one's leader and teammates, reduced motivation to work with the team, and increased negative affect (Fletcher & Brannick, 2021).
3. However, when teammates have similar quality relationships with their leaders, it can lead to valuing team outcomes, collaborating with others, and being open to new ideas. In turn, that can lead to increased satisfaction with one's leader and teammates, increased motivation to work on the team, and decreased negative feelings (Fletcher & Brannick, 2021).
4. Leaders can make sure tasks are decentralized, meaning that each member has flexibility to check on each other's progress, coordinate work, and motivate each other without having to 'go through' one person to get the work done (Crawford & LePine, 2013). This increases team identification and social cohesion.

Have a plan to address turnover, including checking in with the employees who are still at your company, and having systems in place for when someone does leave.

1. When an individual leaves a job (known as 'turnover'), it can be perceived by other employees to be positive, or it can be perceived to be negative (Porter & Rigby, 2021).
2. Often times, turnover is negative and concerning, because when one person leaves the organization, it can lead to more turnover (Laulié & Morgeson, 2021; Sgourev, 2011).
3. Employees who were close with the person who left are the ones most at risk for leaving next. Thus, management may need to take action to prevent that person(s) from leaving (Porter & Rigby, 2021).
4. To take action, management can:
 - Leverage social networks to assess the strength of employee relationships.
 - Speak with targeted employees (i.e., those who were close with the leaver) candidly and openly about what they think about the leaver's turnover.
 - Discuss work arrangements with employees to gauge work (dis)satisfaction, offer solutions, and/or potentially offer individualized deals tailored to specific high-quality employees (Rousseau et al., 2016; Porter & Rigby, 2021).
 - Survey employee work attitudes and engagement to target certain teams, departments, or locations that may be at-risk for turnover. If employees are surveyed, managers need to be fully transparent and tell employees why and how the data will be used. The purpose should also be generative (i.e., improve over all workplace culture and solve employee-identified problems), and not punitive.
 - Conduct 'stay interviews' with remaining employees to discuss if they are contemplating departure, and/or reasons they would consider leaving.
 - Offer resources to encourage retention. For example, access to developmental opportunities and rewards (Sender et al., 2016).
5. Have systems in place for what should happen if an employee does leave.
 - Make sure multiple people are trained, so that if someone leaves, one (or more people) can take over the tasks of the 'leaver' until a replacement is found.
 - Reduce the increased workload on 'stayers' so they do not feel overburdened with the new work (Porter & Rigby, 2021).

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