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# RECOGNIZING AND PREVENTING BURNOUT

The way we work these days has made burnout more of a risk, and monitoring and addressing it harder than ever. But it's vital we take on the challenge

After introducing the panel, moderator Claire Baker asked Dr Jeff Gardere to define burnout. Burnout is a state that presents itself mentally, emotionally and physically, often over a long period of stress, Jeff replied. "Their body, their mind, their spirit just can't take that any longer," and the person can become prone to physical and mental illness.

Turning to Erica Coe, Clare asked about McKinsey's recent research on burnout. Erica shared how the company's survey of 15,000 employees and 1,000 C-Suite-level health benefit decision-makers had shown how consistent a phenomenon burnout was worldwide. Sixty per cent of respondents reported some form of mental health challenge, while one in four reported high symptoms of burnout. Those who are experiencing burnout cannot be treated in isolation from the workforce, she said – they are the workforce. No person is immune. And Generation Z reported higher levels of burnout than other demographics.

Employees reporting burnout were much more likely to say they wanted to leave, to report low job satisfaction, to have experienced toxic workplace behavior and to report low engagement at work. "If this isn't addressed, employers are really missing

an opportunity to attract and engage some productive talent," she added.

Claire then raised the subject of how the environment that someone is working in can have a big effect on their mental health, and asked Rhonda what organizations can do about that.

The research shows empathy can moderate burnout, Rhonda replied. Higher-status people often have less awareness of the social and structural environmental conditions that lower-status individuals may be experiencing. Research shows that mindfulness-based compassion training can help here.

## **MORE THAN JUST OVERWORK**

Burnout can come from being overwhelmed with work, Jeff said. "But when you feel that you are nothing more than a quota, or your efforts are not recognized, those things can put you in a place emotionally where you are more at risk of burnout." We have to pay a lot of attention to marginalized populations, he added, because they will be more at risk.

Clare then brought in Jaspreet Gill, who pointed out that you are the ultimate owner of your mental health. "What are the things you can do to manage that and not →



JASPREET GILL



RHONDA MAGEE

get to a point where you are completely feeling burnt out?" she asked. During Covid, Microsoft introduced wellbeing days on top of sick leave, she added. Using the "schedule send" button on our email application is an easy way to make sure we are not interrupting someone's evening with a constant flow of work communications. An email signature saying "respond to me in your own time" goes a long way.

Clare asked Jaspreet about the move from "work-life balance" to "work-life integration". Work-life balance is more applicable to shift workers who are either on or off, Jaspreet replied. For knowledge workers, there's no such thing as work-life balance, we're talking about work-life integration. The digital world allows her to attend a parent-teacher meeting during the day, or volunteer at her kids' school, but when she comes back, her work is still there. She loves her job but needs to recognize she is also a mother, a spouse and a daughter. She has to slow down to be able to balance those roles.

### TOTAL LIFE INTEGRATION

Jeff agreed with Jaspreet that we are now in a place of total life integration. At any hour of the day we might be working. We now have freedom from the nine to five. Jeff's schedule is more like 6am to 9pm, so he has to make time in the middle of the day to get off the computer and pick up the children. "You have to find the joy in the work," he added, so that when you go back to your work you can give it 100%. "Time management used to be learning how to do 14 things in one day, being a robot and getting it done." But you can burn out because you're not getting enough spiritual, emotional and creative rest.

Clare then asked Erica how workplaces assess levels of burnout. The first step is



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deciding to measure it, replied Erica. Work satisfaction and purpose scores are good indicators. Assessing toxic behavior was more difficult, as people are likely to under-report, so it's important to use data from various channels.

With technology these days, it's pretty easy to log how many hours people are working, she added. The challenge is to integrate the metrics with the people data you're capturing, then hold ourselves accountable.

Clare asked Rhonda what solutions employers and employees could find for burnout. "The ability to keep learning over the course of our career helps make sure people feel a sense of purpose and meaning in what they're doing," she said. We're never going to get this perfect – it's an ongoing process.

We need to ask employers, are you interested in retaining your staff, added Jeff. Are you interested in having less sick time being used, and more productivity and happiness in your workplace? If so, you'd better address the mental health needs of your employees, and get them to work on their happiness and time management, so you can address burnout before it starts to happen. "And how about just caring?" ■

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 The rise of remote working has shifted the need for "work-life balance" to a need for "work-life integration". With work schedules more fluid than ever before, we need to make sure colleagues have the time to relax and recharge.

2 Burnout isn't simply a case of working too many hours. We need to differentiate those who are working long hours but are filled with a sense of purpose and autonomy, from those who are burning out. If someone feels valued and feels a sense of achievement in their work, they are less likely to burn out.

3 Assessing levels of burnout in an organisation isn't straightforward, but it is vital. With technology these days it's fairly easy to gather quantitative data on the hours colleagues are working. The challenge is to integrate this with qualitative feedback, discover how healthy working patterns are in our organization then take steps to create an environment where everyone can feel and perform their best.