

Managing Burnout:

A new paradigm for employee well-being

In today's fast-paced and uncertain business landscape, CEOs and leaders face a multitude of concerns that are taking a toll on their employees' well-being as well as their own! Longer working hours, ambiguous business goals, and worries about macro recession are just a few of the challenges weighing heavily on the minds of organisational leaders.

The rise of remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the widespread adoption of hybrid working models by many companies. This combination of home and office work offers employees increased flexibility and reduced commuting time. However, the blend of home and office responsibilities can prove to be a significant source of stress for many individuals and, in some cases, has resulted in employee burnout.

For some workers, the hybrid work setup translates to exhausting commutes and the social pressures of a bustling workplace on office-based days. On the other hand, remote working days may extend into longer work hours, fuelled by the pervasive "always-on" culture. Striking a balance between home and office work can be overwhelming, leading to what is now known as "hybrid burnout." Employees find themselves navigating the stresses of both environments and disrupted routines as they switch between working from home and the office.

As more companies embrace hybrid working, it becomes imperative to address the well-being of employees to prevent burnout and ensure a sustainable work culture. Recognising and actively mitigating the challenges posed by this work model will be crucial in creating a positive and productive hybrid work environment.

Understanding the Burnout Crisis

According to Jennifer Moss, burnout is a multifaceted issue stemming from a combination of poor workplace practices and policies, outdated institutional legacies, and systemic societal issues that have persisted for too long.

While not officially diagnosed, employee burnout serves as a useful term to describe a cluster of symptoms. Those experiencing burnout may feel drained, lack motivation, suffer from anxiety, irritability, and witness a decline in their work performance. Physical manifestations like sleep disturbances, stomach aches, or headaches may also accompany burnout.

Various factors contribute to employee burnout, including overwork, insufficient feedback, lack of management support, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Remote work arrangements, reducing time spent in the office, can exacerbate these concerns.

According to a recent study by Gallup, 76% of employees experience burnout at work sometimes, and 28% report feeling burned out "very often" or "always." These alarming statistics highlight the urgent need for organisations to address burnout and its detrimental impact on employee well-being, productivity, and overall business performance.

The Role of Individuals in Burnout

While organisations can play a significant role by implementing considerate workplace policies and cultivating a positive work culture, individuals also have a responsibility in managing their own well-being and happiness at work.

Recognising the factors that contribute to burnout is essential for individuals to proactively address this issue. Specific personality traits or career choices may render some individuals more susceptible to burnout. Those with higher levels of neuroticism may tend to over-worry, while excessive conscientiousness, especially when tied to perfectionism, can also lead to burnout. Additionally, introverts working in highly social office environments may experience heightened stress levels.

Apart from work-related stressors, employees also face non-work-related challenges such as illness, childcare responsibilities, and personal finances, which further elevate stress levels. This cumulative pressure can leave them feeling ineffective, frustrated, and physically and emotionally exhausted.

To combat burnout, individuals can take specific steps. Learning to say no to non-essential tasks without fear of missing out or disappointing others is crucial. Focusing on activities that align with one's strengths and skills, while reducing draining tasks, can improve overall well-being. Instead of attending multiple Zoom meetings, opting for a personal phone call with someone may be more fulfilling. Building strong support networks is equally important. Having friends and allies at work and beyond can provide much-needed emotional support during challenging times.

The Role of Leadership in Managing Energy

To foster a thriving work environment, Jennifer Moss emphasises the importance of implementing what she refers to as "good hygiene" in the workplace. Remunerating employees fairly, guaranteeing the physical and mental safety of employees by shifting workplace cultures to be purpose-driven, kinder, and more rewarding for employees is essential. Encouraging work-life balance, communicating organisational values, fostering social connections, and promoting fairness and appreciation within the organisation can greatly contribute to employee well-being.

In response to the growing seriousness of burnout and overwhelmed workers, forward-thinking leaders are taking proactive measures to address employee well-being. Recognising the limitations of traditional time management strategies, these progressive leaders are adopting a new paradigm centred on energy management. By shifting their focus towards managing energy levels, they aim to empower their employees to perform at their best while mitigating the risks associated with burnout.

In this evolving approach, leaders understand that time is a finite resource, but energy can be renewed and optimised with the right strategies. Rather than simply trying to squeeze more productivity out of their workforce by demanding longer working hours, they prioritise creating an environment that supports and nurtures employees' energy levels. This shift in mindset is underpinned by the realisation that sustained high performance and productivity are contingent on the well-being of employees.

Cultivate a Culture of Flexibility and Work-Life Integration: Leaders can start by cultivating a culture of flexibility that supports work-life integration. Recognising that employees have diverse personal circumstances, offering flexible work arrangements can help them manage their energy effectively. Providing options for flexible hours, remote work, or compressed workweeks allows employees to strike a balance between their professional and personal lives, reducing burnout and stress.

Encourage Regular Breaks and Micro-recovery: Employees often feel pressured to work continuously without taking breaks, leading to decreased energy levels and heightened stress. Encouraging regular breaks and micro-recovery moments throughout the workday can significantly impact well-being. Short breaks for mindfulness exercises, stretching, or even a walk outside can rejuvenate employees and boost their energy levels.

Prioritise Goal Clarity and Transparent Communication: Amidst uncertainty, leaders should prioritise setting clear business goals and communicating them transparently to employees. Unclear objectives can lead to heightened anxiety and stress. By offering clarity and direction, leaders empower their teams to channel their energy towards achieving specific goals, enhancing focus, and reducing burnout.

Foster a Supportive and Empathetic Work Environment: A supportive and empathetic work environment is crucial in managing employee energy levels. Leaders should actively listen to their employees, be open to feedback, and address their concerns with compassion. Regular check-ins and one-on-one conversations can help identify signs of burnout early and provide necessary support.

Promote Well-being Initiatives and Resources: Organisations can invest in well-being initiatives and resources to support employees' mental and physical health. Offering access to wellness programmes, mental health resources, and stress management workshops can empower employees to take charge of their well-being and build resilience.

Encourage Skill Development and Growth: Providing opportunities for skill development and growth can be energising for employees. When employees feel they are continually learning and growing in their roles, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated, reducing the risk of burnout.

Final Thoughts

As CEOs and leaders navigate the uncertainties of the modern business landscape, prioritising employee well-being is crucial for sustainable success. Shifting the focus from time management to energy management allows leaders to better support their workforce and minimise burnout. By fostering a culture of flexibility, encouraging regular breaks, setting clear goals, and promoting a supportive environment, organisations can empower their employees to perform at their best while maintaining their well-being. Embracing this new paradigm will not only lead to healthier and happier employees but also foster a resilient and high-performing workforce that thrives even in challenging times.

Take action today

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