

THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED PREVENTION OF WORKPLACE BURNOUT

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Abstract

This study presents the formation of stress and the syndrome of burnout, on what level the members of knowledge-based society are concerned and also what effect the knowledge-based approach has in the formation and prevention of the syndrome. Uncertainty, continuous, non-authentic flow of information, discontent, extra work of reorganization, excessive strain, stress are all factors which lead to the formation of burnout syndrome. Staff stress and anxiety arising from burnout produces loss for the venture, so this task needs the knowledge-based approach by the leaders of the venture. Being aware of the fact that the development of personnel knowledge is determined by your skills, aptitude and features, constitutional effects can also influence.

In a distinct chapter the study deals with the role of organizational culture in knowledge-based society with a special regard to the prevention of burnout.

Keywords: stress, burnout, risk, knowledge-based society

1. Introduction

The aim of the study was the following: to get to know the occurrence of the burnout syndrome, to decide on what level the members of knowledge-based society are concerned and what effect the knowledge-based approach has in the formation and prevention of the syndrome.

In the recent years the quality of people's emotional life has got worse in Hungary. The social changes have badly affected the family and personnel relations and so apathetic people are powerless for searching and recognizing new values. The uncertainty of existence restricts the psychic energy to the more and more hopeless survival. The huge emotional vacuum leads to confrontation and frustration.

No doubt that stress is part of your everyday life but the question is how you can handle this situation.

2. Burnout syndrome

The story and definition of burnout syndrome

The syndrome is a physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from stress and emotional burden, which goes with the feeling of hopelessness and incompetence, the loss of aims and ideals and which is characterized by a negative attitude to your own person, job and also to other people.

Scientific studies have dealt with this phenomenon for 30-35 years, but the existence of it was recognized earlier. The first social psychological study was carried out in the 70s, the big breakthrough was in 1974 when *Herbert J. Freudenberger* American psychologist described the *burnout syndrome*. *Christina Maslach* Californian psychologist professor started to do research on this topic. In 1996 *Maslach, Jackson* and *Leiter* redrafted and improved the original questionnaire in compliance with the different fields of work.(14)

- MBI-Human Services Survey: for those working in the field of human service sphere and health workers (i.e.: nurse, priest, social worker)

- MBI-Educators Survey: for educators
- MBI-General Survey: for those working in the field outside human service sphere (15)

The definition of **burn-out** was introduced by the German *Herbert J. Freudenberger*. On the definition of Freudenberger burnout means the feeling of emptiness, the exhaustion of own physical and mental reserves.

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The reasons of burn-out syndrome

Burnout is more than a simple physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, it is a condition which appears with stress. It is an abnormal condition when – in the worst case- the referred person feels chronic fatigue, total aimlessness and the lack of enthusiasm. (14)

In the etiology and pathogenesis of burnout there is no unique opinion, but basically these factors can be divided into two groups:

- **arising from the personality**
- **arising from the quality of work**

The reasons of burnout arising from personality: those who have desire for helping people beyond their power, the martyr type of personality, the maximalist, those with the ambition of too much perfection, the realist disregarding realities, the inflexible personality, those who long for appreciation but not able to measure the success of his work.

The external reasons of burnout arising from the quality of work: the lack of positive working condition, monotonous work, overwork, too much health care, budget restrictions, being overqualified, lack of promotion, low wage, difficulties in making ends meet, or the opposite significantly high salary with huge responsibility non-stop, lack of free time, chaotic duties. (17)

The types of burn-out syndrome

The burn-out syndrome can have 5 different types.

1. Job depression

Change in the behaviour and attitude towards work

2. Lack of personnel performance

Lack of the feeling that you can positively influence people's life and you can be effective and useful in the certain field.

3. Avoidance of problems

The person tries to avoid conflicts disregarding the threatening events because of stress. This condition also goes together with low performance.

4. Emotional emptiness

The person gets so exhausted during his work that he becomes emotionally uninterested.

5. Becoming impersonal

The person becomes impersonal with people and colleagues because of his depression. (17)

The phases of the process towards burn-out

Burnout is not a suddenly appearing condition but a longer mental process which has special phases. The recognition of these is crucial in time since this process is reversible. The phases are the following:

- **enthusiasm:** high emotional strain, being energetic, enthusiasm for job, intensive effort for the needy, privacy and job are too interwoven

- **stagnating:** declining enthusiasm, monotonously done work, the person's expectations towards himself are decreasing, decreasing performance, commitment, openness
- **frustration:** feeling of senselessness, exhaustion, being inflammable, withdrawal, supposing a hostile intention
- **apathy:** being enervated, indifference, decrease of performance
- **burnout:** self-destroying tendencies, inability to work (10)

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The symptoms of burn-out:

1. **Emotional exhaustion:** fatigue, chronic exhaustion, insomnia, susceptibility
2. **Depersonalization:** negative, cynical relationship with colleagues, conscience, withdrawal, reduction of work, shifting the blame onto others
3. **Lower performance:** experience of unsuccessfulness and powerlessness, lack of appreciation, overload (7)

4. Knowledge-based society, the role of organizational culture

According to the approach of the knowledge-based assumption knowledge is the input and production and value-making is the output. The organization is a complex entirety of persons and groups who are in interaction with one another and which endeavours to reach a common goal. The goal of organizations is the effective exploitation of the persons' and groups' knowledge. The formation of personnel knowledge is determined by your skills, aptitudes, features and also experiences and organizational effects can influence it.

If the knowledge-based reorganization happens based on the needs of customers, market and the organization, the organization wishes to keep and preserve the standard of effectiveness on a high level.

Nowadays one of the most important tasks of company leaders is the achievement and continuous reservation of organizational effectiveness. The continuous improvement of the leaders' abilities and the value-maker processes is crucial as far as the effectiveness of the organization is concerned. The management can only work effectively if the organizational culture makes it possible and supports it. That is why it is crucial for the leader to make the organizational culture accept by the members of the group for the sake of effective work.

Organizational culture is a system of values and convictions, which is accepted by the members of the organization as valid and introduced to the new ones as expected behaviour and way of thinking. Organizational culture includes behavioural rules, norms, emotions, climate, the members' dominant values and the philosophy of the organization itself. These patterns might as well survive after the exchange of the members since the processes become routine-like. The elements of organizational culture are the right to decide, division of responsibility, the way of performance measurement, the way of communication inside the company, handling of stressful situations, atmosphere.

Organizational culture is determined by society, A Kono divides it into 5 different types based on the relations of culture and strategy and the employees' performance and satisfaction.

- Vivid organizational culture: Family-like atmosphere, common values, clear aims, being consumer-centred, outstanding inner communication. Employees do not feel huge distance from their employers.
- Bureaucratic organizational culture: process-centred, based on rules. Employees do not take high risks.

- Stagnating culture: It can be characterized by the respect of traditions. They follow older behavioural patterns, insensitive to changes. In cultures like this there are rarely new ideas.
- Vivid culture with the leaders' demand: The leader has a determined role. Employees trust the strong leader and the ideas, information are from him.
- Stagnating culture with the leaders' demand: Characterized by an autocratic leader whose faulty decisions are compulsory to be made.

The influencing factors which had the most effect on organizational culture: progress, change in technology, manpower and in the quality of life.

Integrated conceptions

Knowledge societies own self-forming relations, they make their future including self-destroying abilities. The economic conditions of knowledge society are characterized by a view in the long run, consumer consciousness, effort for cooperation in production and the creativity for it. We live in a society where the economic capital, economic growth and the value increasing functions are all based on knowledge. The financial basis of society is created not by tiring physical work but by knowledge. In the society of the foreseeable future it is not work and special skills, but rather the market of high qualified work which creates the preconditions of the transformation into knowledge-based economy.

According to Max Scheler all knowledge is determined by society and its structure. (17). The definition and importance of practical knowledge is analysed in details by Nico Stehr in his Practical Knowledge (1992). Stehr can separate the definition of practical knowledge from the propaganda of academic society and differentiates the two basic types of practical knowledge: capacity for action or knowledge for action and knowledge in action. (18)

The European States discussed it in 2001 and in 2002 they produced the activity program of the Union for a decade about the development of lifelong learning. The six key messages of the Memorandum are the following:

1. New basic skills for everybody: to ensure the possibility to get and to renew the skills which are needed in the active participation in knowledge society.
2. More investment in human sources: to increase the investment in human sources.
3. Innovation in learning and teaching: to find effective educational methods for lifelong lifewide learning
4. Appreciation of the results in learning: to improve the ways of appreciation in education
5. Rethinking of orientation and giving advice
6. To bring learning closer to homes: to ensure the possibilities for lifelong learning as close to the learners as possible, inside own community.

The main ideas of the document: lifelong learning, lifewide learning and the challenges of knowledge-based society.

In present-day economy knowledge is the mechanism which expresses the identity of a society contrary to capital and industry. In line with this in knowledge economy the demands for human sources are basically changed: the human factor (human capital and social capital), knowledge becomes determining.

Value based management (VBM) is mostly knowledge-making, knowledge transfer and use of knowledge. But knowledge only partly means the traditional trade knowledge and

competences. The competition, which is typical to the new economy, appraised the problem-solving ability, the competences in other cultures and mostly the personnel sources of the personality. It diversifies the competences, new integrated skills become determining, which are called workplace competences. Workplace competence means the set of skills needed for the participation in new production processes.

The knowledge-based society can only be carried out, if the persons understand the society around them, and if they are able to live in an environment-conscious way based on the ideas of humanity and solidarity.

Response to challenges

Emphasising the importance of human factor it can be claimed that the basic condition for the successful work of an organization is its employees' satisfaction. Dissatisfaction results in strain and conflict and so leads to worse performance.

The employees and leaders of the company are satisfied if the organizational culture can be accepted by everybody and the culture and the management have a mutual effect.

The present economic situation, the atmosphere after the more and more often staff-reduction and dismissals can be the reasons of burnout. According to the examinations among the colleagues of the dismissed workers there are significantly more psychic, or heart - and coronary diseases and the risk of heart attack increases fivefold. Several factors can cause the loss of motivation and love of work: the unfavourable role of the company on the market, the dictatorial leading, unrealistic aims, isolated work or the load of serious responsibility (i.e. doctors, judges, lawyers, leaders)

The organizational culture like the 'vivid organizational culture' makes it possible for its employees to feel their own importance and significance in their work so they have less burnt out workers. It is crucial to give the employees the autonomy, the possibility of promotion and the financial and moral appreciation. Discussions, trainings and systems to regulate work load decrease the risk of burnout. You should support teamwork to share responsibility and to decrease strain. (teambuilding)

Prevention of burn-out

It is important to improve communication and teamwork inside the company to avoid the syndrome of workplace burnout, which is caused by stress. You need to support employees to strengthen their self-respect, bring joy after successful activities and support them to make decisions in the scope of effectiveness.

The aim of knowledge-based society is the appreciation of human values. The essential component of a successful venture is the maximal exploitation of the effectiveness of the means of production and also the correct handling of employees' personality. The employees' satisfaction brings success in the mid,-and long run as far as the measurement of effectiveness is concerned. The first step to avoid the syndrome of burnout is prevention by means of self-knowledge, then organizational cognition, preventing the presence of burnout in the organization.

- The venture should ensure that the employee can reach success in his field, feel him important, and be appreciated as an autonomous competent worker.
- The venture should help to create the optimal balance between work and privacy.
- The venture should continuously evaluate whether the employee is aware of certain competences which can help to decide if unsuccessfulness is a personal failure for him.

5. Conclusions

Burnout is the result of a long process, so the aim is the recognition of phases in time with appropriate communication.

The emphasized endangered persons are the following:

-solitude of managers: this post expects power and self-confidence, or at least the emanation of it since it is possible that the manager is full of doubts. Management is a lonely trade, most of them have no time for family, or they cannot find the optimal balance between work and family.

-women, especially in the social field are endangered to greater extent as for burnout. Women tend to find the mistake in themselves in case of conflicts.

-perfectionist who demand perfectness and find it difficult to accept mistakes-caused by colleagues- in teamwork

During a self-knowledge practice of a communicational training the members are asked to assess how much energy they find to their work and other activities, other people and themselves. In the second part of the practice they must divide their love among the previous things. Usually it turns out that they devote most of their energy to work.

The management should call employees' attention to the following:

- healthy nutrition
- enough sleeping
- preserve calm state of mind
- strictly separate work time and free time
- organization of free time without restrictions
- to learn to say 'no' in certain cases

Pieces of advice with the help of which workplace burnout can be prevented with good prospect:

- During work they should concentrate on the most important tasks. They start with the easier tasks since to finish them gives the feeling of success, but since they know they still have the most difficult ones, they are continuously worried.
- Create a schedule: when they start and finish their task. It is needed to find time for the unexpected tasks as well.
- Avoid being perfectionist: do not endeavour to perfectness but to carry out the task appropriately
- Find time to be immersed in thinking when they do not read e-mails, do not answer phones to a limited time
- Carry out their own work as far as possible, the exact definition of it
- In case of stress, spend time in the open air, find 15-30 minutes for meditation

If all the above mentioned stress-decreasing attempts are unsuccessful in case of mid-serious burnout, send the employee home to relax. Provide for appropriate substitution, ask the employee how the workplace can help and ask him to notice the ideas.

A possible solution could be the change in the professional function in every fifth to seventh year, the sabbatical years-successfully applied in other countries. The aim is that after charging the employees go back to their workplace and continue their work with renewed effort and to interrupt the process of burnout phases.

Originally the sabbatical year meant that the agricultural land was left unutilized so that a year later it would be more fruitful. In this case the employees can use the sabbatical year to write books, take part in field trips, or start some totally new activities, for example help a charity.

In case of serious burnout there is only one solution: to leave the profession. In this case the sabbatical year or the change of the workplace is not a solution since the emotional employment will not decrease. Regeneration is only possible in another field.

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