

Chapter 4

Burnout: A Challenge for Companies in the Modern Business Environments

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with burnout as a challenge of our modern business world, given the phenomenon of heavy work investment in our society. The present article is emphasizing the strong connection between business, psychology, and medicine when dealing with people working in a modern, international business environment. The research methods are multi-disciplinary, combining elements of business, corporate culture, psychology, and even medical issues that are relevant in this context. The research methods used in the present paper are qualitative methods, metadata, and interviews (the questionnaire as a qualitative method) completed by the assessment of data and by proposing appropriate indicators ensuring the monitoring of burnout tendencies in companies. The paper proposes an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together aspects of business and economics, psychology, life sciences, sociology, ethical issues, and cultural issues related to work. A tool for detecting burnout is analyzed. The research results can be relevant for managers and human resources departments.

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INTRODUCTION

In former times, jobs were meant to ensure an income for the employees. People did not really assess the tasks they were performing, their job satisfaction or the fulfilment achieved by the job. It was only important to have an income to cover the costs of living. Nowadays the values when choosing a job have changed. Employees do not only want to earn money, they search for the right job, which suits them best and that helps them develop their skills. For many employees, jobs are nowadays a form of validation. This change of values related to the working culture has a strong impact on employers, on human resources departments and on the job culture within a company.

In modern times, people spend more time in the office than in former times. The work investment increases, people invest their energy and their time in working and in achieving good job-related results. A consequence of this development is the phenomenon of “workaholism”. People seem to be dependent on their jobs and they cannot leave their job tasks when arriving home. Even in their spare time, they are thinking about their job and their tasks. The work-life balance is difficult to achieve and to keep, given these circumstances. Some companies used to have extremely high expectancies about work investment, an approach that encouraged people to work extra-hours to have a better performance. Some of the employees could not face these long working hours and collapsed. Other employees did not collapse, but they suffered several disorders. One of these modern times disorders is burnout. Burnout can be described as a state of fatigue due to work overload. Employees are often not aware of such a disorder. They believe it is a temporary state of mind of sadness or of dissatisfaction with their job or a temporary exhaustion that will disappear after a few days off. But the disorder does not disappear, it becomes visible at somatic level. Employees start to feel sick. At this point the employee has difficulties in performing his tasks and in cooperating with his colleagues.

The present article deals with the topic of burnout illustrated as a challenge of our modern business world. The occurrence of this phenomenon is related to the heavy work investment in our society, aimed to fulfil job expectations. The present paper analyses the impact of burnout within a company, considering its impact on employers and employees. It further deals with the topic of finding the right balance related to the proper workload. Too heavy work investment may cause burnout, but underload at work may cause “bore out”, which is another disorder at psychological level. The present paper addresses the question how to deal with these challenges of the modern business world, what measures should companies, managers and human resources departments consider given this development and the change of values in job culture. Case studies illustrate these issues. Metadata is considered, such as the 6th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) – 2015 and 2017 as well as the specific literature. Interviews are used as a qualitative research method. The qualitative approach is complemented by quantitative analysis of data and indicators provided by European Union institutions and OECD and surveys such as the European Values Survey. It is nevertheless difficult to find comparable data, as there is a research gap in analyzing burnout at cross-national level. This is why metadata is being considered.

As an aspect of novelty and originality, the present article presents a tool that could be implemented at company level to detect burnout or to detect when employees have reached too heavy work investment. Such a tool could be useful in organizations, so that the research results can be used by human resources managers.

The topic is analysed using an interdisciplinary approach, considering elements of business, economics, psychology, life sciences as well as sociological, ethical and cultural issues related to the work environment.

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