# Organisational reasons of job burnout

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### ABSTRACT

The article contains theory-cognitional and empirical parts, which aim is to diagnose the organisational reasons of burnout being detected by managers in organisations, which they work in. The group of 45 representatives of managers who are the students of Executive MBA in INE PAN in Warsaw took part in the research. The managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout which occur in their work environment were the subject matter. The tool used for research was questionnaire of polling. The following research problem was worded: What organisational factors which raise the risk of burnout are detected by representatives of managerial staff in their work environment?

The analysis of respondents' statements enable to emerge of the following categories of burnout risk factors: the pressure (of the time, responsibility, expectations), lack of possibilities to develop the occupational abilities and seat promotion, the reasons entrenched in wrong interpersonal relations, lack of appeasement of basic employees' need, blunders in motivational system and work organisation, lack of real possibility of making decisions. Vicariously, the research results indicate senior staff individualistic inertia. The respondents are conscious of burnout risk factors, but they do not take enough effective action building friendly organisational environment and promoting healthy lifestyle. They estimate that the impact of these things on mental hygiene improvement in enterprises is little. They are prone to detect potential resources of burnout in factors, which they do not have direct influence on, for instance in the rules enforced by the high level managers, in law of tough market competition etc. There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women. The article develops knowledge in the area of organisational behavior.

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## INTRODUCTION

People working in contemporary organisations often seem to forget that every individual is equipped in some resource of energy which it needed to be managed reasonably so as it will be the resource of professional achievements and sense of satisfaction for whole period of professional activity. The deep wisdom is in the saying that the more enthusiasm at the beginning of professional career, the bigger risk of burnout later down the line. Burnout is a very serious mental crisis, often so deep that a human is forced into total re-evaluation of his or her professional life, including career change. It is worth it to remember that work is very important in modern person's life, but it is not the only one. Over-motivation, getting completely absorbed into one's work at the cost of

another life spheres can lead to cataclysmic effects for an individual. Vicariously, the employer is also the one who sustains because of such a situation. It can be visible in decreasing quality of employee's work; the surge of blundered mistakes number, the absence costs and staff turnover. In times when the standard of living is mixed up with quality of life and a man because of unhealthy hyperactivity seeks medicine for existential anxieties, the problem of burnout grows into serious challenge for theoreticians and practitioners of management.

The article contains theory-cognitional and empirical parts which aim to diagnose the reasons of burnout which are detected by surveyed managers in their work environments. Due to the lack of psychological knowledge of surveyed persons, the research findings are the opinions about the organisational reasons of burnout, i.e. those that arise from work environment attributes or work tasks points.

Forty-five representatives of managers who are students of Executive MBA in INE PAN in Warsaw were involved in research. The aim of the research was to get to know the executives' opinions about factors (processes, casus) appearing in their work environment that can raise the risk of burnout. Such conceptualization of the research aim arise from the assumption that improvement of organisation quality of functioning, including perfection of management processes requires, i.e. the consciousness of potential disfunctions' sources.

Due to small number of surveyed persons, it was not the representative of study sample, the research cannot form the footing for phrasing strong conclusions, but they are being treated rather as source of knowledge about accuracy, which are worth to confirm in research with study sample meeting requirements of representativeness.

## 1. Literature review

There is no one, generally accepted definition of job burnout (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). In the 1980's burnout was described as dynamical process. Currently it is considered as a state characterizing by chronic and persistence (Schaufeli et al., 2011), therefore burnout is defined as an enduring, negative state connected with work which occurs in case of people that are generally healthy. The syndrome of burnout is marked with exhaustion that is accompanied with psychical and physical discomfort,

the feeling of diminished activity effectiveness, driven down motivation, and disfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work. This state develops progressively and arises from variances between expectations and reality of profession. Burnout often has a character of self-powered mechanism owing to lack of effective strategies of coping with stress (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

The notion of job burnout was has been used for the first time to describe group of symptoms which are the consequence of organisational chronic stress experienced by social service employees (Freudenberg, 1974; Maslach et al., 2001; Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000), teachers (Kyriacou, 2001) and health services (Katsounari, 2015; Newell & MacNeil, 2011). At the beginning of the research of that problem, the attention was concentrated on psychological threats connected with following so-called „missionary" professions in which the high values play crucial role, including sense of mission (Sabo, 2011; Cieslak et al., 2014). Today, this cause is appreciably treated more widely. It is claimed that the burnout can touch the representatives of the professions that cannot cooperate with strong emotions connected with their work (Maslach et al., 1996). Also, vital statistics as the age, the sex and the education level do not influence burnout and its consequences (Matin et al., 2012). The most vulnerable employees are the ones whose work requires constant contact with people who are in some way responsible for the other human whereby their work activity is so emotionally heavy (Gillespie, 2001). On the other hand, it is not possible to mark the names of definite professions or organisational roles, which make the man free from the risk of burnout. These days, according to holistic approach to diagnosing the complex mechanisms of human behaviours (Bergman & Lundh, 2015), it is claimed that the complex combination of individual, psychological and environmental factors underlies the burnout (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015).

Burnout is a multidimensional phenomenon (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). There are at least three models of burnout. The first model describes the core of burnout based on three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization and inefficiency of activity (Maslach et al., 2001). In the second model the burnout is reduced to one dimension: physical and mental exhaustion (Kristensen et al., 2005). The third model is based on premises of social psychology of cognition and assumes that the critical element for burnout development is inability of constructive

coping with problems, reversals and failures. Therefore, the burnout is not only the consequence of stress' experiencing, but the lack of ability of adaptation to an environment where stress factors occur (Shirom & Melamed, 2006).

It can be said that slowly but still the enterprisers and managers' awareness of dependence between employees' mental condition and results of their work rises (Moczydłowska, 2012). This regularity concerns also burnout that carries series of effects for an employee and also for an organisation which hires them (Moore, 2000). Among the individual effects the best examined are the healthy ones. An established strong correlation between burnout syndrome and depression exists (Bianchi et al., 2015; Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016) as well as digestive system and cardiovascular disorders (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Burnout involves the consequences in the area of cognitive processes: decline of concentration ability (Sandström et al., 2005), memory disorders (Oosterholt et al., 2012), dropping of information processing speed (Österberg et al., 2009). Obviously these changes mean the decline of work quality, the risk of making mistakes surge, and being prone to accidents. The high level of cynicism evinced by persons, who are burned out, causes also clear disorders of interpersonal relations in work environments (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). From the management perspective it is also important that the burnout lies on the extremely contrary spectrum against organisational involvement (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Mäkikangas et al., 2012).

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The group of forty-five representatives of managers who are the students of Executive MBA in INE PAN in Warsaw took part in the research. The study sample work in enterprises' segment which represents different trades, Due to comparatively little strength of study sample, the results of research marked some tendencies which are the basis to formulate hypothesis for further research in the group of people who meets the rules of representativeness.

The managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout which occur in their work environment were the subject matter. The aim of research was to diagnose risk factors which can lead to burnout concerning the managerial staff but also these which – in managers' opinion – are experienced

by their subordinates. Thereby, the aim was to diagnose the way of perception the organisation by the managers at an angle of occurring disfunctions in their enterprises which raise burnout risk of employees who work there.

The study sample are the people with different educational background but all of them have experience in management (on average 4 years). In study sample 60% were represented by men. Although the place of conducting the research was Warsaw, the respondents represented all regions of Poland. The tool used for research was questionnaire of polling. The following research problem was worded: What organisational factors which raise the risk of burnout are detected by representatives of managerial staff in their work environment? The study sample had to response the open questions which let them freely make a judgement of their work environment at an angle of occurring risk factors of burnout there.

The survey research which results are included in this paper is based on introspection mechanism. The author is aware that this method do not permit to get intersubjective-verified knowledge and do not give access to real behavior reasons. Notwithstanding these critical comments taken by social science methodologists, the introspective research set in actual fact the grounding of all survey research. The use of that introspective research' results in diagnosis of burnout reasons is based on well-documented in literature statement that an employee is the best source of information about work character or organisation role served by the employee (Woźniak, 2006).

## 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Research participants have mentioned diverse organisational risk factors of burnout: both these ones which are experienced by the managers and the ones experienced by their subordinates. On the basis of respondents' responses analysis, the author divide them into a few categories: widely understood pressure, lack of development possibility, reasons stuck in interpersonal relations, lack of basic needs satisfaction of people working in the organisation, mistakes in way of reinforcement and labor organisation, lack of real possibilities to make a decisions (cf. Tab. 1). Frequency of occurring particular responses has been assumed as criterion for division. Significant differences between responses of the men and women were not stated.

Tab. 1. The managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout

| THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE | THE NUMBER OF RESPONSES [N=45] | % [N=45] |
|---|---|---|
| **Pressure** | | |
| Too many duties against possibilities of employees (time possibilities, psychophysical possibilities) | 27 | 60 |
| Result motivation, pressure for results | 25 | 55,5 |
| Time regimentation, fixed deadlines | 22 | 48,9 |
| The pressure comes from responsibility | 10 | 22,2 |
| The pressure of oneness and uncritical acceptance of company management philosophy | 7 | 15,5 |
| **Lack of employees' basic needs satisfaction** | | |
| Low level of salary, Lack of salary rise | 27 | 60 |
| Lack of stabilization sense | 26 | 57,8 |
| Lack of possibility to extract an owned knowledge | 23 | 51,1 |
| Lack of possibility to rest because of expectations of endless availability and persistent willingness to work (politics „never sleep") | 4 | 8,9 |
| **Lack of possibility/perspectives of development** | | |
| Lack of perspectives of perpendicular or seat promotion | 28 | 62,2 |
| Lack of possibilities of professional competences' development | 23 | 51,1 |
| **Reasons in interpersonal relations** | | |
| Wasting energy on debilitating conflicts, bad climate in work environment | 17 | 37,8 |
| Lack of communicational abilities of managers | 6 | 13,3 |
| Politicization of the promotion | 6 | 13,3 |
| Lack of trust | 6 | 13,3 |
| Rare meetings with managers (limited possibility of knowledge flow) | 5 | 11,1 |
| **Mistakes in motivation system** | | |
| Too little praises and possibilities to experience the success | 21 | 46,7 |
| **Lack of possibilities to make decisions truly** | | |
| Lack of sense of real influence on what is happening in the organisation | 12 | 26,7 |
| „Terror" of imposed procedures | 5 | 11,1 |
| **Lapses in labor organisation** | | |
| Exhaustion because of general disorganisation | 5 | 11,1 |
| Too broad field of tasks | 3 | 6,7 |
| Lack of clear well-communicated strategy | 3 | 6,7 |

The research participants, pointing the risk factors of burnout present in their work environment, have emphasized the meaning of pressure which the employees on different levels of organisational structure are reconciled to. It is both the pressure that comes from ever growing expectations of measurable work results, time constraints and the one connected with responsibility. The pressure of oneness and unthinking acceptance of steps enforced by line managers is thought as especially disturbing (it was pointed out by over 15% of study sample). The saying „if everybody thinks the same, it means nobody thinks" is well-known. It is hard to make engagement and innovativeness climate in situation when it is expected from the employees to passively „chime in" and moreover the employees are chronically succumbed the pressure ergo they are exhausted because of persistent organisational stress.

The next element considered by managers as risk factor of burnout is lack of development perspectives. Flattening of organisational structures causes abatement of seat career chance. The limitation of funds for perfection of the employees' professional competence puts up in the air employees' possibilities for horizontal promotion. Such a situation creates, especially for ambitious people, justified frustration

and increasing feeling of lack of work satisfaction. This is quite a pessimistic image, replenished by fact that in opinion of over 50% of respondents, the employees hired in their enterprises cannot fully use possessed knowledge, performing their duties.

The situation is even harder if other needs' deprivation, including the most basic ones, co-occurs with lack of development perspectives. 60% of management representatives taking part in the research expressed the view that the employees hired in managers work place earn too less money when compared to work difficulty and work – related responsibility. Over 57% of respondents also pointed out chronic lack of security needs' satisfaction caused by lack of professional stabilization. Also motivational immaterial impulses are being used too rarely according to 46% of study sample and the employees' mental energy is too often being wasted on devastating conflicts and coping with bad workspace atmosphere. There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women.

On the one hand the fact that managers are aware of threats might gratify. These threats come from disfunction of organisation operation marked by managers. Unfortunately, everything indicates that this awareness does not transfer on particular actions that reduce the rate and the strength of stress factors. The attitude of peculiar helplessness - which is visible in respondents' statements – importantly clashes with role of organisation manager perceived by them, i.e. the person who has to feel responsible for work environment quality of their and their subordinates. Large part of respondents believe that they have little opportunities to make changes which effect would be the improvement of mental hygiene in a workplace. That belief needs to be considered very disturbing. The management participating in the research is rather prone to cut off from the problem and detect potential sources of burnout in factors which direct influence on does not exist, for instance in rules imposed by the high level managers. In rules of hard business struggle on the market etc., this feeling of real decisional influence lack occurs also as a factor of burnout (it is indicated by over 37% of study sample). Therefore, it is needed for one more potential crucial burnout cause to be indicated: peculiar inertia and helplessness of management who – possibly because of insufficient interpersonal competence – does not take effective enough actions which build friendly organisational environment and promote healthy work style.

## CONCLUSIONS

The managers see numerous and diversified factors which raise the risk of burnout and occur in the different levels of organisation structure. These factors are most of all the ones which cause chronic stress and frustration: time and responsibility pressure, lack of development and promotion opportunity, reasons stuck in wrong interpersonal relations, lack of employees' basic needs' satisfaction, including mainly living and security needs, mistakes in motivational and labor organisation system, lack of real opportunity to make decisions. Thus it can be assumed that managers participating in the research have knowledge about potential risk factors of job burnout. There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women.

The awareness of burnout risk occurring in managers' workplace that was expressed by examined managers does not co-exists with actions on change of situation. The analysis of respondents' statements indeed permits for wording the conclusion about peculiar lack of feeling responsible for present situation. It is hard to agree with that they do not have influence on organisational culture, shape of employees' motivational system or system of labor organisation. The vast majority of respondents correctly diagnose the problems which occur in their workplace but they gloss over these problems, expressing the conviction that they are not responsible for that state of matters, but it is under influence of circumstances which do not depend on respondents or other people. The problem of lack of management responsibility sense for building the work environment consistent with mental hygiene rules requires further in-depth research but on the basis of data presented in this article it can be said that managers cut off from sense of responsibility for those organisational elements that have influence on mental condition of employees and managers themselves.

Due to fact that the study sample does not meet the expectations of representativeness, it is justified to continue the research that led to further, in-depth diagnosis of burnout risk factors. In particular it seems to be indicated to conduct comparative analysis of presented in this article managers opinion with opinion of employees who are not in the management.

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