

Organisational Risk Factors for Burnout

What is burnout?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines burnout as 'a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'. Burnout is a specific phenomenon which is localised to the workplace and is defined by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy.

What are the organisational risk factors for burnout and how can we mitigate them?

Organisational risk factors for burnout are aspects within a work environment that contribute to an increased risk of burnout. Research has identified several areas that contribute to burnout. Addressing these areas can help organisations create a more supportive and conducive work environment that reduces the risk of burnout, creating a healthier and more sustainable workplace.

Risk factor	Effect	Strategy to mitigate
Workload	High workload, constant pressure to meet deadlines and lack of control over work pace can lead to burnout.	Set manageable workloads that are aligned with employees' skills and capacity. This may benefit from discussions between employees and managers about workload distribution, prioritisation and resources to accomplish tasks efficiently.
Resources and support	Lack of tools, resources and support to complete work can result in frustration and feeling overwhelmed, leading to burnout.	Provide the resources, training and support to empower employees to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Regular check-ins and opportunities for skill development can also help prevent burnout.
Work-life balance	An imbalance between work and personal life can contribute to burnout as	Promote a healthy work-life balance by encouraging flexible work arrangements suitable to the role, setting clear boundaries for communication outside of

	employees struggle to find time for relaxation, family and personal interests.	usual work hours, and discouraging a culture of constant overtime.
Role clarity	Employees who are unsure about their roles, responsibilities and performance expectations are more likely to experience stress and burnout.	Provide clear job descriptions, role expectations and performance metrics. Regular communication and opportunities for employees to clarify their roles and tasks can mitigate burnout.
Control	Lack of control, in that there is limited autonomy, can contribute to feelings of powerlessness and frustration, leading to burnout.	Empower employees through autonomy and involving them in decision making processes. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout.
Reward	When employees feel their efforts are not adequately recognised or rewarded, they can experience burnout.	Implement regular feedback and recognition mechanisms to acknowledge employees' contributions. Recognising achievements and providing constructive feedback can boost morale and job satisfaction, and enable career advancement.
Community	Poor quality relationships and social interactions in the workplace can contribute to burnout.	Foster a positive and inclusive work environment that values collaboration and avoids isolation. Encourage teamwork and provide opportunities for social interactions.
Fairness	A perception of unfairness in organisational policies, procedures and interactions can contribute to burnout.	Ensure that organisational policies and procedures are transparent and equitable. Establish clear guidelines for performance evaluations and promotions. Address any perceived unfairness promptly and consistently.
Values	The alignment between an employee's personal values and the values of an organisation. When these don't align or there is a perceived lack of meaningfulness in the work, burnout can occur.	Align employees' work with the organisation's mission and values to create a sense of purpose. Provide opportunities for employees to engage in meaningful work that resonates with their values.

The [Understanding Burnout in the NSW Public Sector report](#) identifies three universal key drivers of burnout that remain constant and relevant across all organisational units and demographic groups. The key drivers identified are a subset of the organisational risk factors for burnout and are a valuable starting point for identifying critical areas to focus on.

While key drivers provide a solid foundation, this guide focuses on how to use the broader spectrum of organisational burnout risk factors identified in research for comprehensive prevention efforts.

Taking action to address burnout risk factors

Addressing burnout involves implementing targeted strategies to mitigate the identified risk factors and create a healthier work environment. Here are steps on how to address burnout effectively:



Assess burnout risk factors

Assessing organisational risk factors for burnout involves evaluating various aspects of a workplace to identify conditions that may contribute to burnout among employees.

The People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) provides insights on the different risk factors identified in the research. Use the PMES results to identify patterns, trends and specific areas where burnout risk factors are prevalent. Analyse the data to pinpoint the primary sources of stress, dissatisfaction and burnout among employees.

To assist with this, the PSC has mapped the 2023 People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) questions to the burnout risk areas. By focusing on the selected questions, organisations can gain insights into the potential burnout risk areas and develop specific strategies to mitigate burnout. A template for assessing burnout risk using the PMES results is provided in this guide.

Consult with employees

Engage in conversations with employees and teams to gain qualitative insights about their experiences and perceptions of burnout risk factors. Encourage open and honest conversations where employees can share their concerns, suggestions and ideas for improvement.

Prioritise the burnout risk factors that have the most significant impact and focus on addressing these first.

Create an action plan

Based on the findings from the survey and employee consultations, outline a detailed action plan that addresses the identified burnout risk factors.

Prioritise the action steps according to their urgency and potential impact in reducing burnout. Create a comprehensive action plan that outlines strategies for addressing identified burnout risk factors. Outline specific strategies, goals, tasks, responsibilities, and timelines for implementation.

Engage stakeholders across the organisation in the development and execution of the action plan.

Implement changes

Collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as HR, managers and employees to ensure a coordinated effort in implementing changes.

Communicate the changes transparently to the entire workforce, explaining the purpose, benefits and expected outcomes. Explain how the action plan aligns to the organisation's commitment to wellbeing and other action plans that support inclusion and diversity.

Review and adapt

Regularly review the progress of the implemented changes by monitoring key performance indicators, survey results and employee feedback. Assess whether the action steps have led to positive changes in addressing burnout risk factors and improving overall wellbeing.

Create channels for employees to provide ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of the burnout prevention initiatives.

Based on the review, identify areas that require further adjustment. Continuously adapt the action plan based on insights gained from the review process to ensure ongoing improvement. Burnout prevention is an ongoing process.

Remember that burnout risk factors can vary from one team to another. Conducting a thorough assessment and involving employees in the process can help you gain a better understanding of the specific factors that contribute to burnout in your workplace and guide your efforts to mitigate them.

Reflect on the following questions identified by The McKinsey Health Institute to help address burnout effectively¹

Do we treat employee mental health and wellbeing as a strategic priority?

Do we effectively address toxic behaviours?

Do we create inclusive work environments?

Do we enable individual growth?

Do we promote sustainable work?

Are we holding leaders accountable?

Are we effectively tackling mental health stigma?

Do our resources serve employee needs?

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/addressing-employee-burnout-are-you-solving-the-right-problem#/>

Template: Assessing burnout risk factors using PMES results

Record your PMES results below and use these insights to commence action planning to reduce burnout risk. Further analysis by demographic dimension may also provide additional insights for targeted strategies. For example, frontline employees or specific business areas.

Breaking down survey results into favourable, neutral and unfavourable categories offers a focused approach to identify, prioritise and address specific issues. Resources can be allocated to address the unfavourable category promptly, while a plan for gradual improvement can be developed for the neutral category, and best practices from the favourable group can be shared across the organisation. This approach ensures resources are allocated effectively, fostering employee wellbeing and a culture of continuous improvement.

Risk factor	PMES question	% Favourable	Neutral	% Unfavourable
Workload	I have the time to do my job well			
Control	I have a choice in deciding how I carry out day to day work tasks			
	Senior managers listen to employees			
	My manager involves my workgroup in decisions about our work			
	I have the opportunity to provide feedback on change processes that directly affect me			
Reward	My manager provides recognition for the work I do			
	I receive adequate recognition for my contributions from my organisation			
Community	There is good cooperation between teams across my organisation			
Fairness	My manager appropriately deals with employees who perform poorly			
	My performance is assessed against clear criteria			

Risk factor	PMES question	% Favourable	Neutral	% Unfavourable
	I am paid fairly for the work I do			
	Senior managers support the career advancement of all employees			
Values	I support my organisation's values			
	Senior managers model the values of my organisation			
Resources and support	I have the tools and technology to do my job well			
	I have received the training and development I need to do my job well			
	I get the support I need to do my job well			
	I am supported through changes that affect my work			
Role clarity	I understand what is expected of me to do well in my job			
Work-life balance	My manager supports flexible working in my team			
	How satisfied are you with your ability to access and use flexible working arrangements?			
General stress and wellbeing	The amount of stress in my job is manageable			
	There are effective resources in my organisation to support employee wellbeing			
	I am satisfied with current workplace practices to support employee wellbeing			