

Addressing burnout in the NSW public sector

Overview

In today's fast paced and rapidly evolving environment, workplace burnout has emerged as a critical concern affecting employees worldwide. The changing work environment has amplified the risk of burnout, leading to detrimental effects on individuals and organisations.

The World Health Organisation defines burnout as a 'syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'. It 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

The 2022 People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) results found that 38% of sector employees felt burned out at work. The survey data was analysed to understand the key drivers of burnout in the NSW public sector. Three key drivers were identified, providing key areas for the sector to effectively address burnout. These were:

- Time to do my job well
- Support to do my job well
- Access to effective wellbeing resources

This factsheet provides actionable strategies to effectively reduce the risk of burnout and implement changes that foster a healthier and more sustainable workplace that prioritises employee wellbeing.

Actions for organisations and people managers to address burnout

	Organisations	People managers
Data and insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Promote engagement in the annual PMES as the key measure of burnout across the organisation. This will help in understanding where burnout is occurring as evidence for prevention strategies and focusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Encourage open and confidential communication with team members about burnout concerns□ Use survey data to identify team-specific burnout issues and tailor interventions accordingly

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	<p>on targeted interventions for teams/areas at higher risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Analyse survey data to identify trends and implement strategies to address burnout. □ Listen and act on employee feedback. Feedback may come in formal or informal mediums; it will be important to address actionable aspects of this feedback and show your employees that you care by working to enhance their overall experience at work □ Establish a data-driven feedback loop for continuous improvement □ Provide training for managers on recognising and addressing burnout among their team members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use survey data to assess the effectiveness of your strategies and make necessary adjustments. Monitor and evaluate the impact of your efforts through future surveys.
Workplace culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Promote a culture that values employee wellbeing and recognises the importance of work-life balance. Emphasise that employees' health and wellbeing are essential to overall performance. □ Provide collaborative spaces that will facilitate greater levels of team interactions and support to help mitigate burnout risk. □ Promote and offer flexible working practices to employees. □ Ensure organisations track and encourage usage of paid time off to support employees in managing work-life balance and the demands of their non-work roles and responsibilities. □ Encourage open communication between employees and management. Enable managers to create a team culture where employees are comfortable to share their concerns, challenges, and potential burnout symptoms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Create an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their concerns, challenges, and potential burnout symptoms. □ Regularly share information with employees on the indicators and impacts of burnout. □ Encourage day-to-day practices in the team such as breaks to go for a walk, regular lunch breaks and regular mental breaks. □ Set expectations and respect boundaries that work should not be done in personal time, while acknowledging that there may be instances of urgency where work in personal time is necessary. □ Encourage employees to take leave days instead of working when unwell. □ Encourage employees to use leave to support mental health needs. □ Consistently role model the above expectations and behaviours that you have set with your employees around

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Role clarity and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop clear job descriptions and expectations for all roles. <input type="checkbox"/> Design roles to allow for autonomy and control where practically possible <input type="checkbox"/> Invest in ongoing training and development programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Review and provide efficient systems and processes for employees to conduct their work. 	<p>managing their wellbeing and mitigating risk of burnout.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Foster a collaborative team environment where team members can support each other. Encourage knowledge sharing, problem solving as a group, and helping one another during busy periods.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly communicate role expectations and the broader purpose of their work. <input type="checkbox"/> Work with employees to set achievable goals and expectations. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure workloads are manageable and aligned with individual skills and capabilities. <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly check in with team members to monitor workloads and their own appraisals of their wellbeing. Creating this as a recurring agenda item and prioritising listening to work-related issues will also create a psychologically safe environment for employees. <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor work distribution to prevent burnout caused by uneven workloads. Be prepared to redistribute tasks when necessary to ensure fairness and equity. Workload demands may fluctuate, so monitoring regularly is important. <input type="checkbox"/> Give employees a sense of control and autonomy over their work, where possible. Allow them to make decisions and have input on projects. Micromanaging can contribute to burnout, so trust employees to review and monitor work outcomes and timelines effectively. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure employees have the necessary tools, resources, and support to perform their job effectively. Address any barriers they might be facing and provide support when needed as early as possible.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Focus on career development of employees.
Capability uplift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Invest in ongoing learning and development opportunities for all employees. □ Hire, develop and promote effective people managers. □ Train managers to be empathetic, approachable, and supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provide learning and development opportunities for employees to develop the capabilities required to successfully perform their current role and build capabilities to progress to their next desired role. □ Foster a growth mindset and encourage team members to take ownership of their professional development.
Performance and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Implement recognition programs that acknowledge employees' efforts and achievements. □ Where possible, establish performance targets based on output, rather than time to do the work or where the work is conducted. □ Establish a culture of regular feedback and performance improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Provide timely and constructive feedback to team members. □ Recognise and celebrate team achievements and individual contributions. □ Create opportunities for skill-building and professional development aligned with performance goals.
Work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Encourage employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Encourage senior leaders to lead by example and share their self-care strategies such as taking breaks or using leave days to disconnect from work. □ Encourage using the organisation's flexible working policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Encourage employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Respect boundaries and discourage excessive overtime. Lead by example in taking breaks and using leave days to demonstrate the importance of self-care. □ Support and encourage employees to use annual leave regularly. □ Offer flexible work arrangements where possible. Accommodate individual needs to reduce stress and promote work-life balance. Encourage access to flexible working practices to help employees to manage the commitments they may have outside of work.
Wellbeing resources and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Offer access to employee assistance programs (EAPs) and resources such as stress management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Promote mental health awareness and provide access to resources to manage employee wellbeing.

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	<p>workshops, mindfulness training, and wellness programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Equip employees with techniques to cope with stress and maintain their wellbeing. Review these offerings with employees to gauge their effectiveness and offer segregated wellness resources to meet different employee needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Encourage team members to prioritise self-care and wellbeing.□ Normalise discussions around wellbeing in the workplace.

Specific actions to address key drivers of burnout

The following actions are specific to the three key drivers of burnout identified in the analysis.

Key driver	Organisation	Manager	Employee
Time to do my job well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Review the PMES data to identify organisational units or key roles that have lower scores for this item. □ Review the design of roles at risk of burnout. Identify efficiencies and where possible redesign aspects of roles to reduce burnout risk by making workloads more manageable. □ Focus on developing employee workload management capabilities. Provide opportunities to access development programs and resources that enable employees to demonstrate behaviours aligned to the 'Results' pillar of the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework, specifically the 'Deliver results' and 'Plan and prioritise' capabilities. □ Offer time management training to help employees prioritise tasks, manage their time, and work efficiently. Provide tools and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Leverage available training, resources and tools that help build capability in relation to the 'Optimise business outcomes' and 'Project management' capabilities. □ Set clear outcomes and regularly assess workloads to ensure they are realistic and manageable. Avoid overloading employees with too many responsibilities or tight deadlines. This aligns to the 'Manage and develop people' capability. □ Use workload management tools and methodologies to allocate tasks effectively. □ Have regular conversations with employees to monitor workload levels and future resourcing requirements. □ Set realistic expectations by establishing clear expectations for task completion and quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Leverage available training, resources and tools that help build capability in relation to the 'Deliver results', 'Plan and prioritise', and 'Work collaboratively'. □ Be open to learning and trialling improved and efficient ways of working. □ Monitor workload consistently and escalate any risks as soon as possible.

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	<p>techniques for effective time tracking and organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Equip people managers with the technology and/or process to forecast workload and resource allocation to support their employees with a manageable load within the time to perform their role. □ Provide opportunities to access development programs and resources that enable people managers to demonstrate the behaviours aligned to the capabilities 'Optimise business outcomes' and 'Project management'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Maintain open communication channels to clarify task requirements and expectations. 	
Support to do my job well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Review the PMES data to identify organisational units or key roles that have lower scores for this item. □ Focus on enabling managers with skills to effectively support their team to perform their jobs well. Review development programs and resources available that align to the 'People management' pillar of the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Leverage available training, resources, and tools that help build capability in relation to the 'People management' pillar of the NSW Public Sector Capability Framework. □ Identify targeted learning and development activities (formal and informal) that enable employees to develop the capabilities required to successfully perform their role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Seek clarity on role requirements, ensuring that you understand expectations and can escalate when support may be required. □ Take time to recognise the needs that you have in relation to the support available to you. □ Clearly communicate what support you require specifically from your manager, and your colleagues; and

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Review existing data on this capability across people managers to understand whether this is an area of opportunity. □ Encourage team-based working models and enable employees to work collaboratively as a team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Empower employees to make decisions within their scope of responsibilities. □ Set and communicate clear role expectations of your team. □ Ensure that employees have access to the necessary tools, technology, and equipment to perform their jobs effectively. Address any resource gaps to prevent frustration and inefficiency. □ Ensure that employees have access to relevant information and resources needed to complete tasks. Maintain well organised knowledge repositories and communication platforms. □ Equip employees with problem solving resources such as templates, guidelines and best practice case studies. □ Pair experienced employees with less experienced ones to provide guidance and support. □ Offer coaching and mentoring programs to help employees navigate challenges. □ Create a team culture that encourages and rewards behaviours 	<p>provide feedback when your support needs are not being met.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Have regular performance and development discussions to identify opportunities to develop capabilities required to successfully perform current role and progress to chosen role.

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		<p>aligned to the ‘Work collaboratively’ capability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage cross-functional teamwork to leverage diverse skills and perspectives. <input type="checkbox"/> Create an environment where employees feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help when needed. Address concerns promptly to prevent feelings of frustration. <input type="checkbox"/> Have regular conversations with employees to understand what support they need and adapt your support mechanism based on their input and changing circumstances. <input type="checkbox"/> Have regular individual career planning discussions with employees and identify learning and development activities that enable them to build capabilities required for progression to chosen roles. 	
Access to employee wellbeing resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in consultation with each business unit to discuss what the wellbeing-related challenges and needs are within their teams, as well as how they best receive and engage with support resources. This will allow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Take time with your team to engage in regular discussion about wellbeing, reinforcing key messages from available wellbeing strategies and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in maintaining healthy work practices. <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule time to review resources and participate in wellbeing initiatives and feedback mechanisms.

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	<p>for different mediums, and a human-centered design approach to ensure engagement with a wide range of employee needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Promote and regularly reinforce the key wellbeing messages within available resources with all employees.□ Focus on empowering managers to create and maintain a culture of wellbeing. Reinforce the need to set expectations around wellbeing, and for people managers to role model them as well.□ Review the NSW public sector 'Mentally Healthy Workplace Strategy' and any existing wellbeing resources to ensure that it includes recent research and practical tips to support employee wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ As a team, schedule time to discuss and set boundaries and practices that will exist in the team to support everyone's wellbeing. As the people manager, leading by example will be critical to embed these practices as team culture.	

PSC resources to assist with addressing burnout

The PSC has developed a suite of resources to assist organisations with addressing burnout.

Action planning templates

The PSC has developed various [templates](#) to assist with action planning. These include templates for comparing scores across organisations, demographic groups, and burnout risk groups, and action planning to address the key drivers of burnout.

Workplace burnout organisational risk factors

Organisational risk factors for burnout are aspects within the work environment that contribute to an increased risk of burnout. Addressing these risk factors is crucial for creating a healthier and more sustainable workplace.

The key drivers identified here serve as a valuable starting point for prioritising the organisational risk factors for burnout. While the key drivers provide a strong foundation, it is essential to recognise that comprehensive prevention efforts should also address the broader spectrum of risk factors identified through research.

The PSC has developed a [guide](#) on using PMES questions to assess the risk factors for burnout and targeted strategies to mitigate them.

Further reading

Further information on addressing burnout can be accessed in the [Understanding Burnout in the NSW Public Sector](#) report.