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Need to adopt integrated strategis for coping with burnout: Indian context

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Abstract
Burnout refers to an over-worked employee who has ceased to feel the joy and challenges once inherent in a job. It is a syndrome wherein a person beak down physically and emotionally due to continuous work over a long period of time. Executive burnout results in human wastage and is likely to lead to organisational burnout. Organisations need to pay attention to this problem.

Keywords: Alarms of burnout, burnout syndrome, coping with burnout, humanising organizations, organisational climate.

Introduction
Burnout is a syndrome wherein a person breaks down physically and emotionally due to continuous over work over a long period of time. Work addicts or work aholics are susceptible to burnout.
There are different views on work-aholics. One view is that is a positive attribute in the modern competitive environment. A person who gets through his work efficiently and effectively is seldom a workaholic. There are certain sectors which demand that employees work longer hours. That is not workaholism but a part of the job. A workaholic is characterized not by the amount of time he spends at work but by the fact that he cannot switch off even when he is removed from his work environment and cannot even relax with his family.

The five stages of burnout
The only good thing about a burnout is that it proceeds gradually:

Stage 1: The stage of job contentment
Symptoms: Enthusiasm to work. High energy levels. Positive attitude. Good outlook.

Stage 2: The stage of fuel shortage
Symptoms: Physical and mental fatigue. Frustration and disillusionment. Low moral.

Stage 3: The stage of withdrawal and isolation
Symptoms: Avoiding contact with co-workers. Anger, Negativism. Emotional distress.

Stage 4: The stage of crisis
Symptoms: Very low self-esteem. Absenteeism. Cynicism. Terminally negative feelings.

Stage 5: The final breakdown
Symptoms: Alcoholism or drug addiction. Suicidal tendencies. Heart attacks.

Burnout alarms
The below mentioned situations/ symptoms are burnout alarms:
- Being cynical always, negativity and irritability
- Exploding at irrelevant things
- Frequent headaches or migraines
- Weight loss or gain

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- Pain in the heels
- Insomnia
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness and fatigue
- Palpitations
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Inability to focus
- Depression etc.

Causes of executive burnout
Pareek (1995) describes the following nine causes of executive burnout or glowup:

1. **Level of stress:** An optimum level of stress is necessary for executive glowup. An executive is like a stringed instrument. If there is less tension in the strings (hypo-stress), the instrument will not produce the required notes. If the strings are tensed too much (hyper-stress) they may break. Thus, an optimum level of tension needs to be maintained for the instrument to make good music. Similarly, studies have shown that an optimum stress is needed to produce challenges and sense of adequacy.
2. **Type of stress:** Stress can be functional, contributing to glowup, or dysfunctional, contributing to burnout. The first has been called 'eustress' and the second 'distress'. Eustress is the stress of achievement, triumph, and exhilaration. Distress is the stress of disappointment, inadequacy, defeat and helplessness.
3. **Personality:** There are certain personality dimensions which make a person resist the dysfunctional effects of stress, and certain others which are the characteristics of a stress-prone personality. The following personality dimensions have been found to contribute to stress-proneness and executive burnout: external locus of control (a feeling that the executive is being controlled by other people and forces), low inter-personal trust, low self-esteem, rigidity and suspiciousness, withdrawal, alienation, and machiavellism (a tendency to manipulate people).
4. **Nature of the job or the role:** if the job is highly routinished, does not allow any diversity of freedom, and does not provide opportunities for creativity and growth, it can lead to burnout.
5. **Non-work life:** The executive's social or economic conditions, family life and relationships, family and other obligations, health conditions, etc. also contribute for his glowup or burnout.
6. **Life style:** The pattern of structuring one's time may be called the life style. A stress-dissipating life style is characterised by a relaxed life, taking up creative pursuits, spending adequate and meaningful time with family and friends, and getting involved in activities which can give satisfaction (religion, ideology, culture, social causes, working for the underprivileged, etc.). On the other hand, a stress-absorbing life style is characterised by narrow interests, limiting oneself to work and leading a tense and structured life.
7. **Role style:** Role styles are broadly classified into approach and avoidance. If the executive acts out of hope of success, influence, orderliness, relevance, acceptance or growth, this is the approach style. The avoidance style is indicated by an executive acting out of fear of failure, helplessness, chaos, irrelevance, exclusion or inadequacy.
8. **Coping styles:** There are eight different modes or styles or coping with organisational stress, four dysfunctional and four functional. Dysfunctional styles are characterised by fatalism, fault-finding, showing aggression towards oneself or towards others, and defensive mode (denying the stress, or justifying or rationalising it). Functional styles are characterised by the hope of a solution to a problem, or attempts to solve the problem alone, or seeking others help or jointly working with others for the solution.
9. **Organizational climate:** A supportive organisation climate can as much contribute to executive glowup as a hostile climate to executive burnout. An organisation climate perceived as developing excellence in people is significantly associated with low role stress, and one perceived as characterised by strong control over people with high role stress.

Need to adopt integrated strategies
Executive burnout results in human wastage and is likely to lead to organisational burnout. Organisations need to pay attention to this problem. The Human Resource Development (HRD) system, being adopted by many organisations, partly helps in dealing with executive burnout. Several HRD elements are helpful: the goal-setting process, self-assessment and performance analysis, performance counselling, reward system, training and career planning. Instrumented feedback (increasing self-awareness of employees through feedback on some psychological instruments and helping them to develop new orientations and strategies), process group work like encounter groups or T-groups, and transactional analysis have been found useful. However, more integrated strategies need to be adopted. Several interventions are suggested for the various factors enumerated earlier:

- **Developing self-obligating orientation**
  Stress arising out of a sense of obligation to others often leads to burnout. Such stress becomes distress. On the other hand, if something is done by a person as an obligation to himself, it results in eustress. The conversion mechanism may involve changing form a compulsive obligation-to-others to deobligating and self-obligating. One is seen as a burden while the other as a commitment.
- **Increasing self-acceptance**
  Several process interventions are available to increase the internality of an individual and to help him accept himself. The individual then develops mechanisms of dealing with his limitations, using his strength more effectively, and develops internal standards of discipline and commitment. T-groups, motivation development labs, transaction analysis, and various similar approaches help people to recognise their limitations and yet continue to respect themselves for their strengths.
- **Increasing role efficacy**
  We have found role efficacy programmes very effective in reducing executive burnout. These programmes help managers to develop action plans for creativity, initiative, growth, influence, etc. in the job or in the role itself. Recent research has demonstrated the importance of decision latitudes for burnout. It was found that if work processes were redesigned to allow increase in

decision latitudes, it results in a reduction of strain and increased output levels.

- **Intervening in non-work life**
  An organisation needs to pay more attention to its interface with the community in which the employees live. A recent study showed that one of the major sources of stress was the uncertainty of housing accommodation and schooling facilities for children on new appointments or transfers.

- **De-scripting**
  Persons compulsively living their life scripts experience more harmful stress. A way to get out of such a compulsive script may be to redesign the life style, which may include relaxation, physical work and exercises, attention to diet, diversified interests and hobbies, and higher commitment to work. Several companies are helping executives adopt more spontaneity in designing their life styles for more balanced living. Several programmes have been suggested for achieving relaxation and for improving somatic conditions for coping with stress.

- **Interventions for role effectiveness**
  Since role stress is the main source of either burnout or glowup, attention may be focused to increase effectiveness of organisational with very satisfying results. Such interventions include exercises to define roles more clearly, increase linkages among various organisational roles, help people to perceive significant functions in their roles, help them to build their strengths in their role performance, etc.

- **Training in assertion and collaboration**
  Executives can be helped to cope with role stress more effectively if they learn both positive assertion and effective collaboration. Assertion involves taking and stating one's position, without fear and without aggression towards others, at the same time having respects for others views. Packages for assertion training have been developed to help people influence their own destinies. Equally important for effective coping is collaboration, i.e., taking help form others on one's own problems and helping them when such help is needed. This may lead to the most effective coping mode (inter-persistive) found to be related to glowup in our studies.

- **Humanising organisations**
  The organisational climate has a significant effect on executive effectiveness. While demands on people are necessary, and executives need to take up increasing challenges, a supportive climate in the organisation can divert the stress generated out of these and help towards executive glowup. There is some evidence to show that this climate can be altered through appropriate interventions.

To summarise, both the individual executive and his organisation need to act to prevent burnout. The primary role of the individual executive should be to alter his life style, increases his role efficacy and learn new orientations to be able to influence and control his destiny in the organisation. The organisation should pay major attention to the redesigning of roles, training of executives in stress re-designing and personality building areas, diagnosing and improving the climate and attending to some aspects of non-work life of employees.

How to fight burnout?
In order to fight burnout situation, it is recommended that
- Pace yourself as if you are running a marathon.
- Do not burn into details, delegate.
- Try work smarter not just harder.
- Give yourself regular breaks at short intervals.
- Review your reasons for working hard.
- Make a list of your priorities and follow it.
- Enjoy life, after all you have only one.

Conclusion
Burnout can prove to be costly both for an individual and the organisation. Burnout workers have lower morale, higher absenteeism and greater turnover. For the organisation, the cost of recruiting, hiring and training new staff to replace burnout workers is far higher than retaining and rehabilitating burnt-out workers. Often burnt-out individuals are the prime of their lives or peak of their careers. Hence, it is not always easy to find replacements for them.

The burnout can be beated by
- Bite as much as you can chew: you can only do so much in a day. Spread the workload and the responsibility.
- Say 'no'. Often, in a busy work environment, you are called upon to do work that you are not experienced in, or lack training for.
- If you are in a poor physical working environment-perhaps the office is too hot or cold- you will feel stressed. Either turn down the air conditioner or turn the heating up. A comfortable surrounding increases productivity.
- Switch off for a 10-15-minute break each day. Just a 15-minute nap will refresh you.
- Avoid caffeine. Caffeine raises your heart rate and anxiety levels. Drink water instead. Dehydration can lead to headaches and an inability to concentrate.
- Exercise for cardiovascular fitness three to four times a week (moderate, prolonged rhythmic exercise, such as walking, swimming, cycling, or jogging is best). The oxygen level in your blood increases with exercise.
- Eat well and regularly. Have balanced meals at regular intervals.
- Keep your sense of humour. Smile. At the end of the day no problem is worth risking a heart attack for.

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