


**A LOOK AT BURNOUT SYNDROME IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.030-008>**Sandra Cristiane Machado de Oliveira<sup>1</sup> and Aduino Luiz Carrino<sup>2</sup>****ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the quality of life at work and the role of organizational psychologists who work to understand and improve the functioning of organizations, aiming at the well-being of employees and healthy environments. It focuses on the presence of Burnout Syndrome, an emotional disorder caused by overwork, which generates physical and emotional exhaustion. This scenario can result in a heavy organizational environment, with demotivation and disconnection of employees. Thus, the present study presents as a problematization the respective question: How does Burnout syndrome occur and what are the main motivational factors for this occurrence? In the search for answers to this problem, this work has as its general objective to demonstrate the presence of Burnout syndrome and its consequences in the business environment, the methodological procedure undertaken in the research is based on secondary data from bibliographic and electronic research, in order to understand how Burnout Syndrome occurs and what are the main motivational factors for this occurrence. It also addresses stress, differentiating it into "stress" (good) and "eustress" (bad), explaining how adequate levels can boost creativity, while in excesses it has negative impacts, characterizing "eustress". Finally, the text proposes a discussion about the object of study to seek answers to the problematization and achieve the objectives established in the research.

**Keywords:** Burnout Syndrome. Professional Exhaustion. Business Environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

A study on Burnout Syndrome in the business environment The research investigates the quality of life at work, where there are specialized organizational psychologists who explore the topic to understand and improve the functioning of organizations and the well-being of employees, aiming to promote healthy and balanced environments that meet physical and emotional needs.

This work plays an important and effective role in the cognition of Burnout in business environments to promote a more productive and sustainable organizational climate. Thus, we point out as relevant the realization of this study, it is extremely important for Commercial Management and to become aware that happy and engaged people provide an environment of high performance and productivity for organizations.

The emotional issue is a topic that has great focus nowadays and many professionals end up sick and even going through Burnout without even realizing it.

Therefore, it is very important to raise awareness of the risks of overwork, pressure, and stress.

With this view, we present as theoretical support, some authors that you have probably heard about this term stress, a few times during the day. Nowadays it is very common and used even by children when they feel irritable or anxious.

In the literature, there are two terms: stress and eustress, as mentioned in the article by Azevedo (2010) and Kitamura (2023). Stress is characterized as good and eustress is characterized as bad. A small level of stress leads to greater creativity when the situation calls for new ideas and solutions (Chiavenato, 2008). An exorbitant level of stress, on the other hand, brings negative physical and psychological consequences to the human being, so we call eustress.

When we bring the topic to the business context, we can see that the evolution of the management view of *headcount* associated with the quality of life of workers is extremely important for better turnover management in this post-pandemic scenario and also for the administration of a healthy organizational climate. With this transformational leadership, employees feel more motivated and engaged, with a sense of belonging to something much greater within the organization, directly impacting their quality of life and the company's productivity. (Souza et. al, 2023, p. 6)

That said, we can make an addendum, with the explanation made in a research by Gary Evans "The Importance of the Physical Environment" from Cornell University (2005, p. 50), the environment has a direct influence on our behavior. As Chiavenato (2010) adds,



the environment can affect our physical integrity and psychological and intellectual well-being.

Therefore, we understand that the reflexes are directly linked to the moral integrity of people, given this, we can see that the new vision of management in organizations focused on the employee, has been gaining strength over the years, exercising and propagating empathetic projects and attitudes of health and safety at work, taking care of people and valuing their employees better.

This work contemplates as a methodological path the collection of secondary data based on bibliographic and electronic research, being based on renowned authors in the area of Business Administration, Public Health and Mental Health.

Thus, the present study problematizes the respective question: How does Burnout syndrome occur and what are the main motivational factors for this occurrence? In the search for answers to this problem, this work has the general objective of demonstrating the presence of Burnout syndrome and its consequences in the business environment.

To achieve the general objective, we delimit the respective specific objectives, contextualize the Burnout syndrome, verify the possible business events that may cause this syndrome in the subject, investigate the Burnout syndrome in the business environment.

Thus, we begin to discuss the object of study, in order to dialogue possible answers about the problematization and aim at the objectives established in the present study.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

### **A BRIEF LOOK AT BURNOUT SYNDROME**

The term "burnout" is of English origin and refers to something that has stopped working because of energy exhaustion (France, 1987). It was used for the first time in 1974 by Freudenberger, who defined it as a feeling of failure and exhaustion, resulting from the excessive use of energy and resources (França, 1987; Perlman and Hartman, 1982).

Research on burnout began with health professionals, who, because of their roles, need to maintain direct and continuous contact with other people (such as health, mental health, and social services workers). According to Lautert et al. (1995), in the hospital context, stress is visible in the behavior of professionals, resulting in unmotivated, apathetic and fatigued teams, which leads to conflicts and dissatisfaction among them. However, they often face a dehumanized and impersonal healthcare system, which they have to adapt to.

Interest in studies on burnout has grown due to three factors, pointed out by Perlman and Hartman (1982). First, the importance of improving Quality of Life and the changes in



the concept of health promoted by the WHO (World Health Organization). Secondly, the increase in the demands and expectations of the population in relation to social, educational and health services. And, finally, the awareness of researchers, public agencies and clinical services about the severity of burnout, realizing the need to deepen research and prevention, since its effects were more complex and harmful than previously known.

In the 80s, studies emerged with worrying results. Burnout symptoms were identified in professional groups that were not considered to be at risk, as it was believed that, as they were vocational professions, these workers obtained bonuses in various spheres, from personal to social. In addition, people with seemingly balanced personalities were found to develop burnout upon entering certain work environments.

After more than 25 years of studies on burnout, Maslach and Leiter (1997) state that the problem is no longer limited to professions in the areas of health and education. Nowadays, burnout is seen as a phenomenon that can affect practically all professions, especially those that involve intense and constant interpersonal contact.

They highlight that many professions require frequent interactions, whether with clients, colleagues, supervisors or in work teams. Currently, it is perceived that, due to the nature of the positions, there are professions at risk and at high risk of burnout, while few are considered low risk.

In this way, burnout has been analyzed from four main approaches throughout its development.

The first approach was to the clinic, introduced by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974. He noted that burnout occurs when a person works intensely without meeting their own needs, resulting in a state of exhaustion. For him, burnout was the price paid for dedicating himself deeply to helping other people.

Christina Maslach (1976), in turn, brought a social-psychological view. She pointed out that the work environment and the type of activities performed are the main factors that lead to burnout. Stress, in this case, arises from the role played by the person, aggravated by the overload of tasks.

Cary Cherniss (1980) expanded this view by focusing on the organizational perspective. He argued that the characteristics of companies and their organizational structures are largely responsible for burnout. In addition, Cherniss (1980) pointed out that the three dimensions of burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low achievement are mechanisms that people develop to deal with stress and frustration in the workplace.



And finally, psychologist Christina Maslach is one of the pioneers in the study of burnout, with an approach that emphasizes the influence of social and organizational factors on the development of the syndrome, considering the impact of interpersonal relationships and the work environment on the emotional exhaustion of professionals (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This approach indicates that contemporary society, with its focus on individualistic values and little incentive to communitarianism, does not facilitate the involvement of professionals in careers dedicated to the care of other people Farber (1991); Byrne (1999).

## CONTEXTUALIZATIONS OF BURNOUT SYNDROME

Although there is still no consensus on the definition of burnout, the proposal by Maslach and his collaborators is the most accepted among researchers. Burnout is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon, composed of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased professional fulfillment at work. These dimensions have been discussed in several studies over the years, among the authors who articulate a thought about these three dimensions of the syndrome, we can highlight Maslach (1976), Maslach and Jackson (1981), Leiter and Maslach (1988 and 1997), Maslach (1993), Maslach and Golberg (1998).

With this view, emotional exhaustion is characterized by a lack of energy and a deep emotional exhaustion. This state can be accompanied by frustration and tension, especially among workers who feel they are no longer able to serve their customers or colleagues as they once did.

The main cause of exhaustion at work is overload and personal conflicts in relationships. In this way, depersonalization, or dehumanization, refers to the treatment of customers, colleagues, and the organization as objects, resulting in emotional insensitivity. In this state, affective bonds are replaced by a rational approach, leading to feelings of cynicism and emotional dissimulation. Individuals in this condition tend to experience anxiety, irritability, loss of motivation, decreased work goals and commitment, as well as a reduction in idealism and more self-centered behavior.

The decrease in personal fulfillment at work is marked by a negative self-evaluation. Workers feel dissatisfied with their professional development and unhappy with themselves, experiencing a drop in perceptions of competence and success at work, as well as difficulties interacting with others, such as customers, patients, students, or colleagues.

Burnout Syndrome is recognized as a form of occupational stress that affects professionals involved in care activities, such as services, treatments or education Maslach



and Leiter (1999). This syndrome manifests itself in professions that require continuous attention and care for other people Maslach and Jackson, (1981; 1984a, 1984b); Leiter and Maslach, (1988), Maslach, (1993), This experience develops in a complex social context Maslach and Goldberg, (1998). Burnout reflects a crisis of the individual in relation to his work, but not necessarily in relationships with colleagues. Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996).

According to Maslach and Leiter (1997, p.18), burnout is not only an individual problem, but is related to the social environment in which the person works.

While there is a growing consensus on the concept of burnout, it is crucial to differentiate it from stress. Many authors consider stress and burnout to be synonymous, but this view is inadequate, because, despite their similarities, these concepts are not identical Farber, (1991). Burnout is often seen as a form of work-related stress Maslach and Jackson, (1982); Cordes and Dougherty, (1993) or as an intensification of the typical symptoms of stress Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978).

The temporal and relational aspect of burnout is what distinguishes it from stress. This relational basis originates from the emotional tension and resources that the individual uses to deal with interactions in different work situations Maslach (1993). In addition, the negative or maladaptive nature of burnout also differentiates it from stress. According to Byrne (1993), burnout represents the final phase of the individual's frustrated attempts to cope with the stress caused by adverse working conditions.

It is relevant to note that depersonalization can be a valid coping strategy, allowing a certain interpersonal distance between the professional and the client. However, this dimension becomes negative when it is linked to emotional exhaustion, generating feelings that are difficult to control and that affect the professional's performance and perception of competence.

According to Bregalda and Valle Filho (2020), Burnout Syndrome (BS) emerges as a psychic disorder of a depressive nature, gaining prominence as a state of physical and mental exhaustion intrinsically linked to exhausting working hours. Its relevance is recognized as a public health problem approved by the status of legitimate medical diagnosis by the International Classification of Diseases, ICD-11, of the World Health Organization (WHO). In Brazil, BS affects approximately 30% of more than 100 million workers, and is particularly alarming among health professionals, reaching a surprising prevalence of 78.4%.

Yu et al. (2019) In the context of Korean medical professors, it was identified that individual characteristics of self-concept have an influence on the overall perception. The



study revealed that a more positive professional self-concept is correlated with higher self-esteem in the profession, and there is a trend towards a lower incidence of burnout among these professionals.

## BURNOUT SYNDROME IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Several variables are linked to burnout, so Cordes and Dougherty (1993), in their analysis of several studies, classified the factors that contribute to burnout into three categories. The first refers to the characteristics and functions of the position, highlighting that the relationship between the professional and his clients is the most significant. In this category, aspects such as overload, ambiguity, and conflict are important.

The second category encompasses organizational characteristics, which include contextual factors and systems of rewards and punishments. Finally, the third category involves personal characteristics, such as age, gender, length of work, and social support.

Researchers Leiter and Maslach (1988) Maslach and Jackson, (1984a); Maslach and Leiter, (1997); Leiter and Harvie, (1996); Layman and Guyden, (1997); Maslach and Godberg, (1998), argue that burnout syndrome results from both personal and environmental factors, but most studies indicate that environmental factors, especially job characteristics, are more associated with high levels of burnout than personal, demographic, or personality factors.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF BURNOUT IN THE WORKPLACE

What is currently known about the possible consequences of burnout highlights the importance of recording its impact, considering the amount, potential severity, affected domains, and, in many cases, the irreversibility of the consequences. Burnout often results in deterioration of physical and emotional well-being. Affected professionals often feel exhausted, fall ill frequently and face problems such as insomnia, ulcers and headaches Maslach (1976; 1978), as well as issues related to blood pressure, muscle tension and chronic fatigue Maslach and Leiter (1997). Studies also indicate a relationship between burnout and alcoholism, mental illness, marital conflict, and suicide.

To deal with physical problems, many professionals resort to the excessive use of tranquilizers, drugs and alcohol. Other health problems associated with burnout include flu, colds, headaches, anxiety, and depression, as pointed out by Aluja (1997). The main psychological effects include depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic disorders, accompanied by feelings of inferiority, resignation, and unhappiness. Individuals with high levels of burnout tend to count the hours until the end of the day, think frequently about the





next vacation, and use medical certificates to relieve stress and tension at work (Wisniewski and Gargiulo, 1997).

From an organizational point of view, burnout syndrome is strongly related to low employee morale, absenteeism and turnover Maslach, (1978). The intention to leave the company and what is called "psychological exit" from work are significant consequences, representing some of the strategies that individuals adopt to cope with emotional exhaustion Lee and Ashforth, (1993, 1996). Although resignation is not common due to labor market restrictions, "psychological disconnection" is a more serious problem.

This refers to a depersonalization and low engagement with the goals and results of the team and the organization. The individual can remain in the job, but his performance decreases, resulting in a performance far below his potential, which can aggravate his physical and psychological well-being, also affecting the quality of organizational results. Cordes and Dougherty (1993) associate burnout with negative organizational outcomes and various personal dysfunctions. In addition, Maslach and Leiter (1997) state that burnout can cause a significant deterioration in work performance, also impacting the individual's family and social relationships.

The importance of meaningful work, strong relationships, positive team structures, and social connections are crucial for both professional and personal well-being.

Factors that precede Burnout, especially in the context of teachers, have impacts that affect both personal states and life situations, and can intensify negative challenges. Frequent reports highlight the worsening of depression and anxiety due to professional stress.

Thus, when considering aspects of teachers' personal daily lives as influences on stress and mental health, it is essential to analyze healthy habits and their maintenance. Studies by Padilla and Thompson (2016) explore how teachers' exhaustion is related to their social network, family, sleep, and leisure. Pfeffer (2018) notes that people often do not understand their reactions to stress at work, resulting in failures in the emotional skills to deal with such situations.

## METHODOLOGY

The present analysis of the Burnout Syndrome was carried out through a literature review. The objective was to examine some studies and scientific articles already published that address the causes, effects and interventions related to Burnout in the workplace.

A selection of articles from academic journals and books that address the theme was carried out. The sources were accessed through Google Scholar, with inclusion criteria





consisting of studies that presented empirical data or relevant theoretical reviews on Burnout Syndrome.

The evaluation of the data was carried out in a qualitative way, allowing the identification and classification of the main topics addressed in the studies, including risk factors, effects on mental health and prevention strategies.

The research strictly followed ethical guidelines, ensuring that all sources were correctly cited and acknowledged. Limitations include dependence on available research and possible lack of agreement on definitions and metrics of the syndrome.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: A LOOK AT BURNOUT AND THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT**

The study of Burnout Syndrome in the business environment reveals a worrying scenario, where emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the feeling of low personal fulfillment directly affect employees and the productivity of organizations. These symptoms are frequent in high-pressure environments and where there is an overload of responsibilities, which can lead to serious physical and mental health problems, as noted in the reviewed literature.

### **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO BURNOUT**

From the collected data and the bibliographic analysis, it was identified that Burnout is driven by a combination of personal and organizational factors. Factors such as work overload, lack of recognition, lack of social support, and role ambiguity were recurrent in the discussions. Professionals who face high emotional demands and have little control over their tasks are more susceptible to the syndrome. This result is in line with studies by Chiavenato (2008), who points out that stressful work environments may initially promote a healthy level of stress, but in excess, they result in eustress – negative and harmful stress.

In addition, the literature highlights the influence of organizational structure on Burnout. As Cherniss (1980) points out, the type of management and corporate culture have a direct impact on the well-being of employees. Organizations that prioritize productivity over employees' quality of life tend to have higher rates of Burnout, something particularly exacerbated in the post-pandemic scenario, where many professionals faced new forms of pressure and isolation in remote work.



## IMPACTS OF BURNOUT ON THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The data analyzed point to several negative impacts of Burnout for both the employee and the organization. Among them, the following stand out:

**Increased absenteeism and turnover:** Employees with high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization often use more medical certificates and, in some cases, end up leaving the company. This entails additional costs for the organization, such as the need to hire and train new employees; **Decreased productivity and performance:** Emotional exhaustion decreases employees' ability to focus on their tasks and maintain high-quality performance. Professionals affected by the syndrome demonstrate less motivation and engagement, which directly affects the results of the team and the organization as a whole; **Compromised mental and physical health:** Symptoms such as insomnia, anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular problems are common among those who suffer from Burnout. These effects, according to Maslach and Leiter (1997), not only impact the individual, but also increase the cost of health insurance and the need for therapeutic interventions for the organization.

## BURNOUT MITIGATION AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Based on the references used, it is possible to outline some practices that can help reduce the incidence of Burnout in companies. The concept of transformational leadership, as highlighted by Souza et. al. (2023), plays a crucial role in motivating employees, as inspiring and empathetic leadership can create a healthier work environment. Another relevant point is the promotion of a safe physical and psychological environment, as pointed out by Gary Evans (2005), where the physical environment directly affects the behavior and well-being of employees.

Investing in psychological support and social support programs can help employees face stressful situations in a more positive way. Additionally, policies that encourage work-life balance, such as flexible working hours and regular breaks, are key to preventing emotional burnout.

## COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS STUDIES

Compared to the initial studies by Freudemberger (1974) and the advances in the 1980s, which focused mainly on health professionals, it is now perceived that Burnout is a more comprehensive phenomenon. Professionals from all sectors can be affected, especially those who are in constant interpersonal contact and who occupy positions of high responsibility. The findings of this study corroborate the view of Maslach and Jackson



(1981), who maintain that Burnout is multidimensional, varying in severity according to the work environment and the characteristics of the function performed.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

While the study provides a comprehensive overview of the factors that contribute to burnout and its impacts on the business environment, it is recognized that the use of secondary data represents a limitation. For future investigations, it is recommended to carry out empirical studies with primary data, such as interviews and questionnaires applied directly to professionals in different sectors. Such research can deepen the understanding of the nuances of Burnout and the strategies that best adapt to specific contexts.

In summary, the analysis of the results reinforces the importance of a healthy work environment, capable of minimizing the risks of burnout and maximizing the productive potential of employees. Investing in the physical and mental well-being of employees not only improves the quality of life of workers but also contributes to a more productive and sustainable organizational climate.

## THE CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS OF COMPANIES

Burnout Syndrome has a significant impact on companies, affecting employee productivity, increasing absenteeism and turnover, which generates extra recruitment and training costs. Burnout also results in depersonalization, creating a toxic work environment and damaging interpersonal relationships, which can affect the quality of services and customer satisfaction, as well as compromising the company's reputation.

Financially, companies suffer from the loss of business, increased health costs, reduced profits and the need to hire temporary labor. Creativity and innovation are also hindered, limiting the organization's competitive capacity.

To mitigate these impacts, it is crucial to implement preventive measures, such as promoting employee well-being, properly managing workload, and creating an environment that values mental health and work-life balance.

## SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES.

**Work-Life Balance:** Encourage clear boundaries, flexible schedules, and after-hours disconnection to avoid burnout; **Social Support:** Promote collaboration among colleagues and programs to strengthen interpersonal relationships to increase emotional resilience; **Autonomy and Participation:** Give employees more autonomy and involve them in decisions about their tasks to increase their sense of accomplishment and control; **Workload**



**Assessment:** Evaluate and redistribute tasks regularly to avoid overload and burnout;

**Positive Work Environment:** Create a culture that values well-being, recognizes achievements, and provides opportunities for growth, improving satisfaction and reducing burnout.

Burnout requires a broad approach to its prevention and mitigation. Strategies such as work-life balance, social support, stress management, greater autonomy, redistribution of workloads, and a positive work environment are essential to face Burnout.

Reflecting on business sayings such as: "everything is urgent and deadlines are tight" illustrates the constant pressure of routine in the twenty-first century, where the search for speed often leads to burnout. Although time off work is a form of treatment for Burnout Syndrome, it is crucial that the Human Resources department and coordination are involved in the professional's reintegration, identifying and eliminating stressors in the work environment.

Adjustments in the working day and redistribution of tasks may be necessary to lighten the load. Increasingly, companies must provide regular psychological support, as healthy employees tend to perform better, developing skills such as emotional intelligence, promoting mental health, and improving quality of life.

## PREVENTION OF BURNOUT SYNDROME IN COMPANIES

To prevent Burnout Syndrome, it is essential that companies adopt measures based on organizational models of social interaction and cognition. The first step should be training and awareness about the syndrome. Thus, some important practices include:

**Review of Work Objectives:** Evaluate the realism and feasibility of the team's goals, in addition to reviewing performance evaluation methods and workloads with the participation of employees; **Secure Recruitment:** Implement recruitment mechanisms that promote job security and empower employees by offering clarity in roles, feedback, training, and autonomy; **Clarity in Authorities:** Establish clear lines of authority and responsibility, in addition to fostering creativity and autonomy at work. **Stress Analysis:** Assess stress levels and mental load in tasks, distributing responsibilities in a balanced way and monitoring overtime; **Measurement Mechanisms:** Create tools to assess equity in the workplace and strengthen team spirit and social bonds; **Organizational Climate Assessment:** Constantly monitor the work climate and culture, considering aspects related to Burnout.

Feedback mechanisms, such as satisfaction and performance reviews, are crucial for identifying risky behaviors. Among psychometric tools, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is widely used.



The systematic implementation of these practices, combined with a specific analysis of each case and dialogue with employees, can help Human Resources in the prevention of the syndrome.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At this point, we move on to the final considerations, for which we highlight the relevance of the study of Burnout Syndrome in the business environment, a topic that is increasingly pertinent in the current scenario. The main objective of demonstrating the presence of Burnout and its consequences in organizations was achieved through a detailed analysis of the factors that contribute to the development of the syndrome, as well as the consequences for employees and companies.

It is observed that Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal fulfillment, affects professionals from different areas, especially those in direct and continuous contact with other people. The impacts range from a drop in productivity to physical and mental health problems, such as insomnia, depression, and anxiety. In this context, the promotion of healthy and sustainable work environments, which contemplate both the physical and emotional well-being of employees, becomes essential.

This study reinforces the importance of management practices that value human capital and promote transformational leadership, which fosters a sense of belonging and motivation among employees. In addition, the survey points out that an adequate physical environment and a positive organizational climate have a direct influence on the quality of life at work and on the productivity of companies.

Finally, when reflecting on the results obtained, it is concluded that awareness and prevention of Burnout Syndrome are fundamental to promote a more productive and balanced work environment. By implementing management practices focused on health and well-being, companies not only reduce turnover and absenteeism, but also contribute to strengthening a healthy organizational culture, in which the employee is seen as the organization's main asset.

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