

Full Length Research Paper

Burnout Syndrome and Worker Mental Health

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This paper shows that exhaustion or mental stress added to the physical load that accompanies that exhaustion may come from the stressor workplace. Such fact has been widely observed in the present days; although most mental health issues in the organizational context are still parts of a difficult subject to talk about. Both in production lines or offices, *Burnout Syndrome* is a common reality shared by most workers. Starting from this context, this paper aims to discuss the worker mental health, and the central issue is the occurrence of *Burnout Syndrome* and how this can be prevented by promoting the Quality of Working Life, in order to develop and maintain the workers' motivation and commitment, also taking into account the organizational culture prevalence. This paper developed a literature review based on information about the syndrome and highlighted the importance of an environment that can show health benefits. This research results points to the need for including programs to promote the Quality of Working Life to ensure the worker motivation, satisfaction and empowerment to maintain mental health. Therefore, it is concluded that organizations still need to identify the worker as the company main power so that the end result is a common good to both.

Keywords: *Burnout Syndrome*; Quality of Working Life; Worker Mental Health, motivation; mental stress.

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to note that professionals from different areas are often exposed to factors that are decisive in their day-to-day. Among them it is possible to point to the high competitiveness that is increasingly present in the labor market and with a trend to grow in an increasingly wider range. And it is in this context that competition added to exorbitant hourly loads, which aim to maintain the employee as much as possible in the work environment, whether physical or online, result in the absorption of the worker entire 'potential available'.

It is possible find studies that indicate this worrying scenario and with an increasing frequency in the labor market, dramatically increasing the variables that favor the workers physical and mental fatigue. We can mention, for example, the major positions that require greater autonomy due to the important decisions to be taken, which decisively reflect in the others future and which are increasingly renouncing to the power. And it is in this stressful environment that barriers are established, or even the total annulment of the worker quality of life, that *Burnout Syndrome* appears.

Pereira (2002) establishes this syndrome as a psychosocial phenomenon and which covers three main

dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low sense of accomplishment. This syndrome is directly linked to the negativity character that is excessive to the aspects found at work, unlike the stress and job satisfaction, which are psychological constructs and have transitory character. Burnout, literally, can be translated as a flame that no longer features artifices to burn, that is, it is just the ember that is left, and that is how the professionals feel when they are affected by this syndrome.

Santos (2009) points out that the liquid society (Being liquid means being unable to stop and stay stopped. We move and we will continue to move because of the impossibility of achieving satisfaction (Bauman, 2001) results in anxious and insecure people, and mainly with the focus excessively targeted to professional performance, which is not used to stagnation. They want more; they desire to feel the taste of changes around them, face the risks and contradictions, because it is all a transitory issue and does not generate the necessary adaptation.

This means so that it is no longer possible to identify in the people inserted in the workplace as parts of a

whole, of the same compound, which work for the general success, but there is a break in the connection, an exacerbated competition, in which the other is seen as an obstacle to success, happiness and individual achievement. The steps that lead to the highest step of the podium cannot be shared. These should be given only and precisely in an individualistic manner without looking at the sides, because the colleague is no longer a confident person, but a voracious opponent.

With this anxious and insecure scenario, we face a visibly paranoid environment and fully favorable to Burnout, because there is a lack of good interpersonal relationships at work, which include availability to dialogue and reflection and which configure a social support essential to people, since the possibility of finding in co-workers receptivity to dialogue and reflection can provide social support, a moderator in the Burnout process (SANTOS, 2009).

According to Silva (2007), adaptive organizational cultures are able to arouse confidence, enthusiasm, and entrepreneurial spirit in the worker, unlike not adaptable rigid cultures based on bureaucratic ideas and control, and end up hindering the creativity and motivation development, inserting a barrier to the implementation of good practices for quality of life.

Intrinsic to the persistent need to maintain a support network in a more humanized and less voracious working environment, is the Quality of Working Life, so superficially mentioned, but little used in the daily practice by many organizations. Providing better working conditions to workers, motivation, and satisfaction of their needs by providing the commitment is strictly related to increased productivity. But we must highlight that, sometimes, in the desire to promote QWL, companies end up seeking standardized programs, which in addition to not benefiting the work, end up having adverse effects to what was expected.

Quality of Life, since the early days, is taken as necessary to the human race, in which geometry principles were initially important allies in improving work techniques, both for farmers in farming or for reducing physical efforts of many workers (VASCONCELOS, 2001).

Starting from the point that the Quality of Working Life (QWL) is still an issue that provides many challenges, and knowing that there is still a long way to be crossed, so that it is no longer an optional condition, but an important mechanism, which if properly inserted, is able to present important results also in environments that are often already damaged by the workers emotional fatigue, the issue of QWL support becomes a differential in the work environment.

Heloani and Capitão (2003) point out that currently one should no longer face mental health as the simple cure for diseases, but rather as manner so that the population becomes a target of changes that aim the

health conditions improvement as much as its accessibility. These authors, when mentioning Bleger (1984), claim that just the disease absence does not matter, but rather the full and total development of individuals and the community to which they belong. Therefore, the approach should be focused on health and on the observation of people in their daily life.

THEORETICAL BASIS

This paper was prepared based on various authors. Regarding those that, in their corresponding works, used as a central topic the *Burnout Syndrome*, the following authors were appointed: Pereira (2002), Santos (2009), Garcia et al.(2003), International Code of Diseases (ICD 10, 1997) and Bauman (2001).

Regarding the organizational cultures that have a decisive role in the possibility of inserting programs beneficial to the worker's health, authors such as Silva (2007), Hofstede (1991) and Freitas (1991) were the used.

Finally, in the most focal points of this paper, about the Quality of Working Life (QWL) and the need to understand the worker as a primary part of the organization, the authors like Vasconcelos (2001), Bleger (1984), Carvalho (2003), Chiavenato (1999), Walton (1973), Fernandes (1996), Angeluci et al.(2005), Alves (2011), Dejours(1987),and Ibañez and Zanella (2014) supported this paper.

METHODOLOGY

This paper (is based on a literature review and is approved by the Ethics Committee of Uniararas through the protocol 280/2015, identification 8469) and is characterized as a qualitative bibliographical research, since the data presented was obtained through research in books, websites and scientific papers available online.

Different authors point out the literature review definition. For Chauí (1994) the method consists of an investigation that follows a way or planned manner and is determined to learn something; rational procedure for the knowledge following a fixed path.

Santos (2012) points out that the method also known as literature review seeks to demonstrate the academic contribution current stage around a particular subject, and which is able to provide a comprehensive overview of other researches and previous results, these fundamental to establish the starting point for further researches and provide the merit to the researcher.

And to Noronha and Ferreira (2000), the literature reviews are studies which examine bibliographical production in a given thematic area, within a time cut, providing an overview or a report on the state-of-the-art

of a specific topic, evidencing new ideas, methods, sub-topics that have received greater or lesser emphasis on the selected literature.

RESULTS

The Burnout Syndrome-related studies started around the late 80s, through observations of those who mostly dedicated to take care of others, the health professionals, and that by the character required to the occupation they spent most of time establishing a closer and constant contact in the relations with other people.

Garcia et. al.(2003) point out that until then, groups that were not considered at risk for the syndrome, classified as 'people with personalities apparently adjusted and balanced' and were not taken into account by presenting good levels of personal and social gratification, were exactly those that began to show signs characteristic of the syndrome.

Stress and *Burnout* are often regarded as equal, therefore, it is necessary to emphasize their differences since stress can be characterized as a difficulty to find coping resources for dealing with stressful situations, but still there is a search for balance and this can be achieved. But in *Burnout* there is a chronicity of this stress state and the tools used for the balance restoration are no longer valid.

Dissatisfaction with work is typically associated with the environment and hygienic factors, and these are the ones that avoid negative attitudes, but which also do not lead the worker to have positive attitudes. They comprise since company policies and administration, interpersonal relationships with supervisors, supervision, working conditions, salaries, status, and labor safety; the satisfaction is connected with work, content and these are motivational factors that encompass accomplishment, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and progress (VASCONCELOS, 2001).

It is important to point out that this syndrome is directly related to the difficulties that the worker finds to establish both the communication and the space needed for a good adaptation, and that generally the environments that show a more rigid and inflexible organizational culture are the most favorable to this kind of condition.

When talking about the inexistence of a standard definition of the organizational culture construction, Hofstede (1991, *apud* SILVA, 2007, p. 23) organizes some points that should be taken into consideration: "organizational culture is holistic, because it focuses on a whole that is more than the sum of its parts; it is historically determined, because it reflects the organization history; and it is socially built, when created and maintained by the group of people that make up the organization".

Therefore, the company organizational culture is a predominant factor and it directly affects the possibility or not of the opening for the quality of working life implementation or adequacy. The organizations values and beliefs typically have a very big influence on decision-makings regarding organizational processes, and, even if a company can have innovative ideas, this not always means that they are willing to change their core for inserting projects aiming the worker health.

The organizational culture attractiveness, to the cognitive power this exercises, results in a mechanism of very powerful and improved controls, which despite seeming subtle, is able to homogenize the workers conduct and eliminate the existing conflicts, but on the other hand, it also affects negatively, nullifying the individual reflection (FREITAS, 1991).

Organizational culture has influence not only regarding the issues of organizational processes standards change acceptance, but it also affects the behavior of workers that are part of it, through their history, regulations, and rules, causing specific manners to act and interact with each other in the organizational environment.

Although much is said about QWL, little is actually accomplished, and it is important to note that issues related to the topic of quality of working life have been emerging over time, and these maintain a close relationship between employees' motivation and the satisfaction with the work. The first factor is crucial, because it is through this that routine labor activities will be accomplished in order achieve the satisfaction.

About this factor, Chiavenato (1999) points out that the employee who shows high levels of motivation accomplishes his assignments showing a greater aptitude and greater capacity.

Then, it is understood that organizations must gather efforts for providing the worker an environment that healthily motivates him. The investment in maintaining the quality of working life must be a commitment, because when finding in the workplace (and in the activities accomplishment), personal satisfaction, this has a result directly focusing on the organization productivity, and which is a highly important gain aiming this so essential factor that is the worker mental health.

For Walton (1973, *apud* FERNANDES, 1996) the expression Quality of Life has often emerged in an attempt to describe certain environmental and human values, and which until then have been neglected by the industrial societies that valued, first of all, the technology advances, productivity and economic growth.

For this author, the variables model to be considered in the QWL evaluation would be those contained in Table I.

Inserting actions targeted to the quality of working life is a factor of extreme importance to worker's health, because it is at work that he spends much of his

Table I: Conceptual Categories of Quality of Working Life (QWL)

CRITERIA	Indicators of Quality of Working Life
1. Fair and Adequate Compensation	Internal and external equity; Justice in compensation; Sharing of productivity gains;
2. Working Conditions	Reasonable workday; Safe and healthy physical environment; Absence of insalubrity;
3. Use and Development of Capacities	Autonomy; Relative self-control; Multiple qualities; Information about the work total process;
4. Growth opportunity and Safety	Career possibility; Personal growth; Salary advancement perspective; Employment security;
5. Social Integration in the Organization	Absence of prejudices; Equality; Mobility; Relationship; Community sense;
6. Constitutionalism	Protection right to worker; Personal privacy; Freedom of expression; Impartial treatment; Labor rights;
7. The work and the Total Space of Life	Balanced role at work; Stability of timetables; Little geographical changes; Time for the family leisure;
8. Work Social Relevance in Life	Company image; Company social responsibility; Products liability; Employment practices.

Source: Walton *apud* FERNANDES (1996, p. 48)

day. After a long time, companies are beginning to understand that the real power of work is the worker and the motivation is essential for his activities proper development, especially if the environment is able to provide the fulfilment of needs such as well-being, health and safety. Therefore, when achieving the personal satisfaction, certainly his tasks accomplishment will beneficially reflect within the organization.

In this context, we can mention Angeluci et al. (2005) regarding the QWL insertion and the generation of numerous benefits in its implementation, such as the clear reduction of costs with workers' health, reduction of stress prevalence and occupational diseases, these also added to the secondary gain and increased productivity.

There are many existing projects which aim to promote the worker health through QWL, but it is valid to say that using standardization is not always an effective plan, because each organization is unique and consists of details, showing different needs. Therefore, a well-defined analysis should be carried out taking into account the company existing structures, identifying

needs and seeing the possibilities for inserting improvements.

This way the importance of planning specific strategies is clear, so that the program insertion matches the possible investments, which return in improvements, and not in results contrary to the expected.

Alves (2011) points out that it is necessary to carry out a diagnosis of the activities problems and limitations, and also of the company human and physical resources, so that this becomes the planning starting point aiming the actions implementation.

The same author provides the table 2, bringing some actions related to QWL that can serve as the basis for the actions that have already been used successfully by organizations that targeted their strategy to the workers' health.

Regarding the worker's health, Dejours (1987), points out that the enjoyable work is that one in which the worker is liable for an important part of its design. This way, being able to participate in inventions, making good use of creativity, the ability to solve problems and

Table 2: Actions and/or programs for promoting QWL and their results

Actions/Programs	Main results observed
Physical exercises (E.g.:labor gym)	Increase in workers' mood and satisfaction and in tolerance to stress, improving interpersonal relationships, reducing absenteeism, reducing accidents at work and medical expenses.Important ally in occupational diseases prevention and rehabilitation and in productivity increase.
Workers training and development	Contribution to the intellectual capital increase and in activities improvement.Provides professional satisfaction and increased productivity.
Ergonomics	Improved performance in activities and reduced accidents at work.
Benefits	Motivation, professional satisfaction, personal needs satisfaction, increased productivity.
Performance evaluation	Overall increase in worker productivity, performance and professional satisfaction.
Hygiene and safety at work	Provides a healthier environment, prevention of health risks, decreased occupational accidents, absenteeism and turnover; increased productivity.
Positions and salaries analysis	Maintains its human resources, improves the human resources administration, increases employees motivation and satisfaction, and increases productivity.
Alcohol and drugs control	Risk reduction, improvement in operational safety and workers health, improved self-esteem, decreased occupational accidents and absenteeism.
Preparation for retirement	Motivation, professional satisfaction, increased self-esteem, improved interpersonal relationship, discovery of new skills and competencies, benefits in the worker social and family life.
Nutritional guidelines	Reduction in obesity, change in risky behavior, increased performance and mood, increased productivity.
Alternative therapies	Increased tolerance to stress, improved interpersonal relationships, increased productivity.
Music therapy	Increased self-esteem, professional performance and tolerance to stress, improved interpersonal skills, diseases prevention.
Anti-smoking	Increased self-esteem, performance and mood, diseases prevention.

Source: ALVES (2011, p. 67)

use the intelligence are the focus of an assertive search.

The participation possibility in choices that will involve his future in the organization is one of the ways to 'empower' the worker. This way, the involvement and leadership are encouraged and there really is the feeling that he is an important part for the company. This validates not just the search for QWL insertion, but also the possibility of adequacy in the organizational rigid culture, providing greater efficiency through the valuation of innovation and entrepreneurship, and the search for improving the quality standards.

According to the International Code of Diseases (ICD 10, 1997) negative attitudes among workers, with customers, organization, or with the work itself, are perceived as subjective experiences and lead to various practical and emotional damages to all, mainly affecting the worker.

The work leave, often, is present in the professional

life, which due to high stress load in the workplace results in chronicity, and keeping away becomes an outlet that, often, partially solves the problem. Professionals most affected by stress are those who daily deal with people, also defining the syndrome as Professional Exhaustion or Professional Neurosis.

The environment that favors the *Burnout* Syndrome occurrence usually has high rates of employee turnover, absenteeism, decline in final quality and also in productivity, more cases of health leaves, and workers low morale, among numerous others (GARCIA, 2003).

DISCUSSION

When returning to Table I, about the pillars of Walton (1973), it is possible to notice that some pillars are more relevant to this research. Pillar number five,

comprising Social Integration in the Organization, which QWL indicators are the absence of prejudices, equality, mobility, relationship, and community sense. The work environments in which labor activities are developed require, first and foremost, respect for the similar, regardless of skin color, gender or creed. Only this way, without prejudice, labels and stereotypes, there is a possibility of coexistence and the establishment of quality interpersonal relationships in organizations, in addition to the importance of equal opportunities among workers.

Pillar number two, Working Conditions, comprises the reasonable workday, safe and healthy physical environment; and absence of insalubrity. This pillar comprises the importance of the worker physical health, which must be in constant improvement to be kept healthy and not just understood as the absence of diseases. The physical environment, in which activities are performed should be airy, light and with well implemented ergonomic issues. It also includes the use of safety equipment, furniture in good condition, possibilities of adaptation and the related.

Finally, we can list the pillar number four of Growth Opportunities and Safety, in which we find the career possibility, personal growth, prospect of salary advancement and employment security. The possibility of being in continuous growth encourages the taste for the new, new challenges and new opportunities. The status change of remaining stagnant and safe, compared to the possibility of rise in personal and professional terms, developing new intellectual skills is notorious.

Therefore, we can notice that in the face of the increasing stress levels that cause *Burnout*, making use of Walton pillars would be one of the ways to seek balance between the needs and possibilities, always focusing on what is beneficial and likely to be inserted in the worker life in such a way as to promote health, exercising the Quality of Working Life preventively, thinking about the social and personal well-being, aimed at the organization humanizing and strengthening of closeness bonds. An organization is humanized when it assigns responsibilities and autonomy to its employees, as well as focus on the personal development of the individual, regardless of his position.

Regarding the insertion actions in promoting Quality of Working Life as exposed in the Table II, it is important to note that these serve as a basis for strategies that have worked in other organizations, and if well worked according to an analysis specific for each company, certainly there will be positive results because it contains aspects of different nature, but which always converge in favor of the worker and his health, whether personal or professional.

Ibañez and Zanella (2014) point out that the psychology comes to help the human being to organize

in their way of thinking and acting, in a critical period, where people not only handle their tangles of personal problems, but also bring so many other complications in their lives. At this time, in which the ethical and moral references are fading, the values are reversed or even replaced, by dividing the man in parts that do not know how to keep the resilience in the face of difficulties, working conditions have been favorable to burnout and to physical and mental exhaustion.

Therefore, knowing the worker health, his absences and excesses are paramount so that not only the activities effectiveness and performance are kept, but mainly so that damages are understood and can be handled and solved.

CONCLUSION

Starting from the core issue, on which the interest for the subject arose, and from the need to understand the importance of the worker quality of life in a preventive manner, facing the increasing occurrence of *Burnout Syndrome*, it is seen that there is still much to be done in the labor context, so that the worker can actually enjoy a better Quality of Working Life.

We can say then that it is still possible to identify a growing share of workers exhausted with their labor assignments and still performing very little quality of life activities that would be beneficial to their mental and physical health.

The initial step must be given through awareness, in which organizations are able to identify the worker as the primary focus of the organization, in the pursuit of maximizing human potential. These will be able to increase profit if motivated, healthy, encouraged to development, participating in an equal context, and in which they are understood as part of a whole that can grow a lot with their presence and contribution.

People spend most of their lives at work, which requires a harmonic relationship, because it is this relationship that will respond to the worker satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In this sense, an organization that has actions targeted at its employees quality of life will transmit them trust and security, because these are organizations that care about 'empowering' their employees. For that purpose, the human potential must be prioritized even despite the crisis, because it is through this potential that companies' final profit will have results.

About the Author

Henry William Scatolin graduated in psychology from Unimep, master and PhD in Clinical Psychology from PUC- SP.

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