

Burnout

This handout presents the Maslach Burnout Inventory¹, as summarized by Cate Huston². In this framework, there are 6 “mismatches” which cause burnout. While just identifying a root cause (and how circumstances outside our control have contributed) can sometimes help combat an ailment, there are also proactive steps that you can take to tackle these issues and work towards an antidote.

Lack of Control→

Focus on what you can control

There is nothing like a global pandemic to make you feel powerless in your everyday life. Many people reacted by focusing on hobbies or learning about epidemiology. While these new activities can help you feel in control over something, make sure that any diversions are a healthy use of your energy.

Lack of control within the workplace can manifest when workers don't have authority over their tasks or environment. To address this, you can ask your manager for more autonomy or responsibility.

Lack of Fairness→

Push for equity

Fairness can appear in a number of ways: inequity, cheating, or poor dispute resolution practices. Most people are concerned with fairness (or at least the appearance of fairness) so if you believe there is inequity in the workplace, bring it to the attention of your employer or colleagues.

Conflict in Values→

Explore the conflict

This occurs when the goals of an organization conflict with your personal goals. If you find a conflict in values in the workplace you can either work to align your individual values to the organization or search for a different job which has more meaning for you. Particularly during the pandemic, there has been an increased emphasis on personal responsibility. Assessing your personal values can help you find balance and assess risks.

Insufficient Reward→

Celebrate more!

Rewards can come in many forms: monetary, social (recognition for your efforts), or intrinsic (the feeling of doing a good job). If your expectations for a reward are not being met, you are more likely to feel dissatisfied.

At work, you can adjust your expectations, adjust the amount of effort you are contributing, or ask directly for the reward.

One way to create an intrinsic and/or social reward is to make space for celebrations. Even a small celebration that you organize yourself can help you feel valued.

Lack of Community→

Make effort socially

A strong sense of belonging is essential for each individual to contribute effectively on a team. Positive social ties help mediate the stresses of work and create a sense of shared values. While the pandemic has challenged our social ties in new ways, it is important to consciously build social ties however you can.

Work Overload→

High quality rest

This is the most common factor associated with burnout. This can happen when your job demands overwhelm available time, skill, resources, or ability. Voice any concerns with your supervisor. Be sure to avoid chronic overwork and build in non-negotiable time for rest. In particular, when working from home, utilize strategies to maintain separation of work and life. Hold yourself to a schedule and find a way to disconnect during off-work hours.



¹ Christina Maslach, Michael Leiter. *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It*.

² Cate Huston. *Pandemic Burnout; Now What?* <https://cate.blog/2021/07/05/pandemic-burnout-now-what/>