ORGANISATIONAL REASONS OF JOB BURNOUT

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A B S T R A C T
The article contains theory-cognitive and empirical parts which aim at diagnosing the organisational reasons of burnout detected by managers in. The group of 45 managers who are the students of Executive MBA in the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw took part in the research. The managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout which occur in their work environment were the research subject. Survrey was the main research tool used in the study. The following research problem was formulated: What organisational factors raiseing the risk of burnout are detected by managerial staff in their work environment?
The analysis of respondents' statements enable to identify of the following categories of burnout risk factors: pressure (of time, responsibility, expectations), lack of possibilities to develop occupational abilities and of prospects, the reasons entrenched in wrong interpersonal relations, lack of basic employees' need, deficiencies of the motivational system and work organisation, failure to meet the making decisions. Indirectly, the research results indicate senior staff individualistic inertia. The respondents are conscious of burnout risk factors but they do not take enough effective action to build friendly organisational environment and promote healthy lifestyle. They estimate that the impact of these factors on the mental hygiene improvement in the enterprises is little. They are prone to detect potential sources of burnout in factors which they do not have direct influence on, for instance in the rules enforced by the high level managers, in law of tough market competition etc. There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women. The article develops knowledge in the area of organisational behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

People working in contemporary organisations often seem to forget that every individual is equipped with some energy resource which need to be managed reasonably so that it becomes the resource of professional achievements and the sense of satisfaction for the whole period of professional activity. There is a deep wisdom is in the saying that the more enthusiasm at the beginning of professional career, the bigger risk of burnout later down the line. Burnout is a very serious mental crisis, often so deep that a person is forced into a total re-evaluation of his or her professional life, including career change. It is worth it to remember that work is very important in themodern person's life, but it is not the only one. Over-motivation, getting completely absorbed into

one's work at the cost of another life spheres may lead to catastrophic effects for an individual. Indirectly, the employer is also the one who suffers because of such a situation. It can be visible in decreasing quality of employee's work; the surge of blunders, the absence costs and staff turnover. In times when the standard of living is mixed up with quality of life and a man because of unhealthy hyperactivity seeks medicine for existential anxieties, the problem of burnout grows into serious challenge for theoreticians and practitioners of management.

The article contains theory-cognitive and empirical parts which aim at diagnosing the reasons of burnout detected by surveyed managers in their work environments. Due to the lack of psychological knowledge of surveyed persons the research findings are the opinions about the organisational reasons of burnout, i.a. those that arise from work environment attributes or work tasks.

Forty five managers who are the students of Executive MBA in the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Sciences (INE PAN) in Warsaw were involved in research. The aim of the research was to get to know the executives' opinions about factors (processes, cases) appearing in their work environment that may raise the risk of burnout. Such conceptualization of the research aim arise from the assumption that improvement of organisation functioning, including perfection of management processes requires i.a. the awareness of the potential sources of disfunction.

Due to small number of surveyed persons, the study sample was not representative, the research cannot be the basis for phrasing strong conclusions but they are to be treated rather as a preliminary source of knowledge for further research with study samples meeting the requirements of representativeness.

1. Literature review

There is no generally accepted definition of job burnout (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). In the 1980's burnout was described as dynamic process. Currently it is considered as a state characterized by chronicity and persistence (Schaufeli et al., 2011), therefore burnout is defined as an enduring, negative state connected with work which occurs in case of people that are generally healthy. The syndrome of burnout is marked with exhaustion that is accompanied with psychical and physical discomfort,

the feeling of diminished effectiveness, lowered motivation, and disfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work. This state develops progressively and arises from discrepancies between expectations and reality of professional life. Burnout often has a character of self-powered mechanism owing to lack of effective strategies of coping with stress (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

The notion of job burnout was used for the first time to describe a group of symptoms which are the consequence of organisational chronic stress experienced by social service employees (Freudenberg, 1974; Maslach et al., 2001; Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000), teachers (Kyriacou, 2001) and health service professionals (Katsounari, 2015; Newell & MacNeil, 2011). In the beginning the attention was concentrated on the psychological threats connected with practicing the so-called „missionary" professions in which values play crucial role, including the sense of mission (Sabo, 2011; Cieslak et al., 2014). Today, this issue is treated appreciably more widely. It is claimed that the burnout can touch the representatives of the professions who cannot cope with strong emotions connected with their work (Maslach et al., 1996). Statisctics such statistics as the age, sex and education level do not influence burnout and its consequences (Matin et al., 2012). The most vulnerable employees are the ones whose work requires constant contact with people who are in some way responsible for the other human whereby their work activity is so emotionally heavy (Gillespie, 2001). On the other hand, it is not possible to name professions or organisational roles which make one free from the risk of burnout. These days, according to the holistic approach to diagnosing the complex mechanisms of human behaviours (Bergman & Lundh, 2015), it is claimed that the complex combination of individual, psychological and environmental factors underlies the burnout (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015).

Burnout is a multidimensional phenomenon (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). There are at least three models of burnout. The first model describes the core of burnout based on three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization and inefficiency of activity (Maslach et al., 2001). In the second model the burnout is reduced to one dimension: physical and mental exhaustion (Kristensen et al., 2005). The third model is based on premises of social psychology of cognition and assumes that the critical element for burnout development is inability of constructive coping with problems, reversals and failures.

Therefore, the burnout is not only the consequence of stress but also the lack of ability of adaptation to an environment where stress factors occur (Shirom & Melamed, 2006).

It can be said that the entrepreneurs' and managers' awareness of the dependence between employees' mental condition and results of their work rises steadily (Moczydłowska, 2012). This process concerns also burnout that carries series of effects for an employee and also for an organisation which hires them (Moore, 2000). Among the individual effects the best examined are the healthy ones. There exists an established strong correlation between burnout syndrome and depression (Bianchi et al., 2015; Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016) as well as digestive system and cardiovascular disorders (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Burnout involves the consequences in the area of cognitive processes: decline of concentration ability (Sandström et al., 2005), memory disorders (Oosterholt et al., 2012), dropping of information processing speed (Österberg et al., 2009). Obviously, these changes mean the decline of work quality, the higher risk of making mistakes and suffering from accidents. The high level of cynicism evinced by persons, who are burnt out also causes disorders of interpersonal relations in work environments (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). From the management perspective it is also important that the burnout lies on the extreme end of the spectrum against organisational involvement (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Mäkikangas et al., 2012).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The group of forty-five managers who are the students of Executive MBA in INE PAN in Warsaw took part in the research. The members of the study sample work in different segments of the econony. Due to the comparatively little strength of the study sample the results of research only marked some tendencies which may be the basis to formulate hypotheses for further research in groups of that meets the rules of representativeness.

The managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout which occur in their work environment were the research subject. The aim of the research was to diagnose risk factors which may lead to burnout of the managerial staff but also those which – in managers' opinion – are experienced by their subordinates. Hence, the aim was to diagnose

the perception of the organisation by the managers at with regard to occurring disfunctions which raise burnout risk of employees.

The study sample are the people with different educational background but all of them have experience in management (on average 4 years). 60% of the studied managers were men. Although the place of conducting the research was Warsaw the respondents represented all regions of Poland. Survey was the tool used in the research. The following research problem was formulated: What organisational factors which raise the risk of burnout are detected by managerial staff in their work environment? The study sample had to responto open questions which let them make a free judgement of their work environment from the perspective of burnout risk factors.

The survey research described in this paper is based on the introspection mechanism. The author is aware that this method does not permit to obtain described knowledge and does not give access to real behavior reasons. Notwithstanding these critical comments by social science methodologists, the introspective research is in fact the grounding of all survey research. The use of introspective research results in the diagnosis of burnout reasons is based on a that is well-documented in the literature statement that an employee is the best source of information about the work character or organisation al role served by him or her (Woźniak, 2006).

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Research participants mentioned diverse organisational risk factors of burnout: both the ones which are experienced by the managers and the ones experienced by their subordinates. On the basis of respondents' responses analysis, the author divided them into categories: widely understood pressure, lack of development possibility, reasons rooted in interpersonal relations, lack of basic needs satisfaction of people working in the organisation, mistakes in support methods and labor organisation, lack of real possibilities to make decisions (cf. Tab. 1). Frequency of particular responses was assumed as a criterion for division. Significant differences between responses of the men and women were not observed.

The research participants, pointing at the risk factors of burnout present in their work environment, emphasized the meaning of pressure which the employees on different levels of organisational

Tab. 1. Managers' opinions about organisational risk factors of burnout

CATEGORY OF RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES [N=45]	% [N=45]
Pressure		
Too many duties in relation to the capacities of employees (time possibilities, psychophysical possibilities)	27	60
Result motivation, pressure on results	25	55,5
Time regimentation, fixed deadlines	22	48,9
Pressure related to responsibility	10	22,2
The pressure on unanimity and uncritical acceptance of company management philosophy	7	15,5
Lack of employees' basic needs satisfaction		
Low level of salary, Lack of salary rise	27	60
Lack of sense of stability	26	57,8
Lack of possibility to exploit own knowledge	23	51,1
Lack of possibility to rest because of expectations of endless availability and persistent willingness to work („never sleep" policy)	4	8,9
Lack of possibility/perspectives of development		
Lack of perspectives of promotion	28	62,2
Lack of possibilities of professional competences development	23	51,1
Reasons rooted in interpersonal relations		
Wasting energy on exhausting conflicts, bad climate in work environment	17	37,8
Lack of communication abilities of managers	6	13,3
Politicization of promotion	6	13,3
Lack of trust	6	13,3
Rare meetings with managers (limited possibility of knowledge flow)	5	11,1
Mistakes in motivation system		
Too little praises and possibilities to experience the success	21	46,7
Lack of real possibilities to make decisions		
Lack of sense of real influence on what is happening in the organisation	12	26,7
„Terror" of imposed procedures	5	11,1
Lapses in labor organisation		
Exhaustion because of general disorganisation	5	11,1
Too broad areas of responsibility	3	6,7
Lack of clear well-communicated strategy	3	6,7

structure are exposed to. It is both the pressure that comes from ever growing expectations of measurable work results, time constraints and the one connected with responsibility. The pressure of unanimity and silent acceptance of steps enforced by line managers is considered especially disturbing (it was pointed out by over 15% of respondents). The saying „if everybody thinks the same, it means nobody thinks" is well-known. It is hard to create engagement and innovation climate in a situation when it is expected from the employees to passively „tune in" and the employees are chronically succumbed the pressure, thus they are exhausted because of persistent organisational stress.

The next element considered by managers as risk factor of burnout is lack of development perspectives. Flattening of organisational structures lowers the chance of promotion to higher positions. The limitation of funds for the development of the employees' professional competences makes the possibilities of horizontal rather uncertain. Such a situation creates justified frustration and decreasing work, especially for ambitious people.. This is quite a pessimistic image, reinforced by fact that - in the opinion of over 50% of respondents - the employees hired in their enterprises cannot fully use the possessed knowledge gets performing their duties.

The situation gets even harder if other needs deprivation, including the most basic ones, co-occurs with the lack of development perspectives. 60% of management representatives taking part in the research expressed the view that the employees hired in their work places earn too little money when compared to work difficulty and work – related responsibility. Over 57% of respondents also pointed out chronic lack of security caused by the lack of professional stabilization. Also motivational immaterial impulses are being used too rarely according to 46% of srespondents and the employees' mental energy is too often wasted on unproductive conflicts and coping with bad workplace atmosphere.

On the one hand the fact that managers are aware of threats might be somewhat comforting. These threats come from the disfunctions of organisation operation named by the managers. Unfortunately, everything indicates that this awareness does not transfer on particular actions that reduce the rate and the strength of stress factors. The attitude of peculiar helplessness - which is visible in respondents' statements – clashes with the role of organisation manager perceived by them, i.e. a person who feels responsible for their and their subordinates' work environment quality. Large part of respondents believe that they have few opportunities to make changes which would improve the mental hygiene in the workplace. That belief needs to be considered very disturbing. The management staff participating in the research is rather prone to cut themselves off from the problem and detect potential sources of burnout in factors on which they don't have direct influence, for instance in the rules imposed by the high level in the rules of hard business struggle on the market etc. This feeling of lack of real influence on decision making occurs also as a factor of burnout (it is indicated by over 37% respondents). Therefore, one more potential crucial burnout cause needs to be indicated: peculiar inertia and helplessness of management who – possibly because of insufficient interpersonal competences – do not take effective actions to build friendly organisational environment and promote healthy work style.

CONCLUSIONS

Managers see numerous and diversified factors which raise the risk of burnout and occur on different levels of organisation structure. These factors are most of all the ones which cause chronic stress and frustration: time and responsibility pressure, lack of development and promotion opportunities, reasons rooted in bad interpersonal relations, lack of employees' basic needs' satisfaction, including living and security needs, mistakes in motivational and labor organisation system, lack of real opportunity to make decisions. Thus it can be assumed that managers participating in the research have knowledge about potential risk factors of job burnout. There are no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women.

The awareness of burnout risk occurring in managers' workplace that was expressed by examined managers is not accompanied by the actions to change the situation. The analysis of respondents' statements indeed permits to conclude that there is a peculiar lack of sense of responsibility for the present situation. It is hard to agree that managres do not have influence on organisational culture, shape of employees' motivational system or system of labor organisation. The vast majority of respondents correctly diagnose the problems which occur in their workplace but they gloss over these problems, expressing the conviction that they are not responsible for that state of matters, but it is under the influence of circumstances which do not depend on respondents or other people. The problem of lack of management's sense of responsibility for building the work environment consistent with the mental hygiene rules requires further in-depth research. However, on the basis of data presented in this article it can be said that managers cut themselves off from the responsibility for the organisational elements that have influence on mental condition of the employees and managers themselves.

Due to the fact that the study sample does not meet the requirements of representativeness, it is justified to continue the research that may lead to further, in-depth diagnosis of burnout risk factors. In particular, it seems to be worthwhile to conduct comparative analysis of managers' opinion presented in this article with the opinion of employees who are not in the management positions.

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