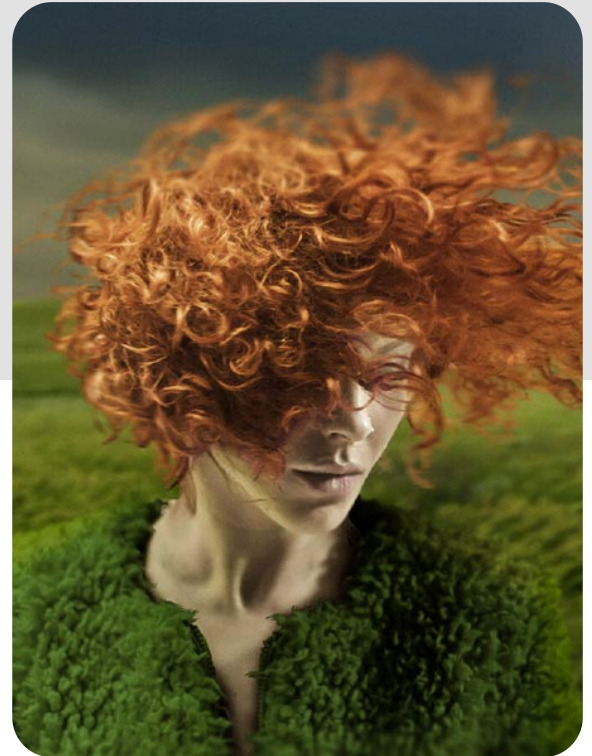


COPING WITH STRESS AND BURNOUT IN ORGANIZATIONS

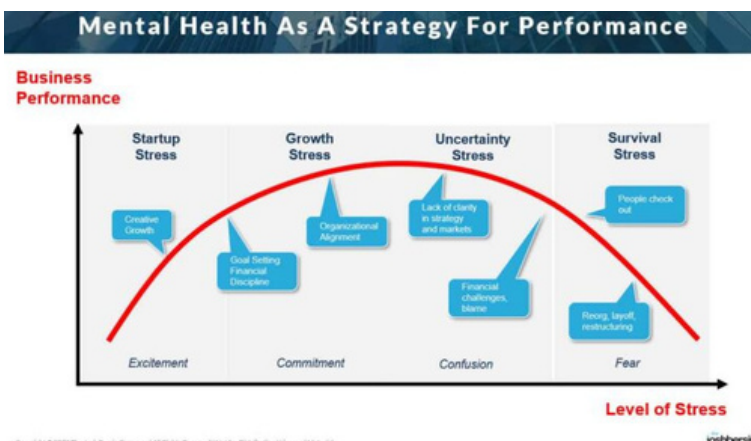
Our lives are characterized by daily stress, and this takes a toll on our health. More and more organizations are recognizing the price of psychological stress on the mental health of employees — absences due to illness, the need for psychological treatment, or decreased productivity, many of which stem from ongoing stress that was not addressed in time.

In an article by Josh Bersin, one of the world's leading experts in human resources, he explains that mental health is a real and serious problem in the labor market. Employees suffering from anxiety, depression, OCD, and other mental illnesses indeed suffer greatly. Instead of thinking of all of this as 'a health problem to be solved', mental health should be viewed as a strategy. Regardless of the business environment, if the inner strength of each person is given freedom and expression, their work performance will improve, their level of happiness will increase, their psychological resilience will grow, and their ability to cope with crises and various challenges at work will improve.



Stress and the Organizational Life Cycle

At the beginning of a new position or a new business we have started, we may feel stress, but at the same time we are also filled with optimism and motivation toward the new thing that is about to come. As the business or company grows, the pressures multiply and intensify. It becomes harder to break new records, to implement new and unconventional ideas, and time and again the organization needs to think about how it surpasses itself. We feel this increased need to perform well and succeed, yet we wonder how it can be done.



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According to Bersin's diagram, during the second phase, stress rises and performance improves. Team members in the organization learn how to work together, challenge themselves, and improve products and outputs.

After that, something else happens — the slope of the organization's growth curve decreases and becomes increasingly flat. The company's product stops keeping pace, competition in the market grows, perhaps the economy collapses. No matter how much the organization tries, it fails to fulfill its expectations and aspirations. In this situation, it reduces its expectations.

At this stage, the stress continues to rise. Its slope begins to become negative, and they move into the declining part of the curve. The organization experiences more stress, more confusion, more distractions. In the next phase, employee layoffs may occur, and the team or company needs to rebuild itself.

Sometimes managers make many mistakes and increase the stress in the organization, harming organizational functioning. They tighten the reins regarding financial management, instruct employees to 'do more with less,' focus on employees who are not meeting the organizational targets set for them, and begin a draconian performance management process — or they bring in a group of consultants to help them make difficult decisions.

Consumers Can Also Create Stress

Employees can also face angry customers, in addition to coping with managers. Therefore, mental health is a systemic matter, which should be emphasized and addressed at every location and level in the organization where personnel operate.

According to Bersin, regarding solutions and promoting the psychological wellbeing of employees in the organization, managers have a significant role.

For example, instead of pushing only for organizational growth and innovation and placing these above everything, one can ask employees how they are doing, give them a sense of security, and allow them space for self-expression — both personally and professionally.

When people have higher psychological wellbeing and greater psychological resilience, their professional effectiveness and creativity at work will also grow.

This approach is far preferable to applying excessive pressure on employees, at a level that is ineffective (right side of the curve). When managers put employees under excessive stress, they may lose interest in the task or behave in unethical ways.



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How Can Managers Reduce Stress in the Organization?

Organizations wishing to reduce stress levels in their organization should first place emphasis on leadership. This can be treated as a strategy — if the leadership team in the organization first places emphasis on the mental health of employees, the economic success will follow.

Recommendations

- Teach every employee to look at themselves — are they stressed and stressing others? Are they taking care of themselves? Taking breaks when they feel they need to? Requesting feedback on their work?
- The manager should pay attention to whether they are pressing the employee too hard. Saying 'achieve more with less' — these are exactly the things that cause harm. The more pressure is placed on people, the more errors there may be and unethical behaviors may increase.
- Build a safe work environment where people can express their opinions without fear and share ideas as well as failures.
- Create empathetic and supportive relationships with those being managed, colleagues, and teams — a place where the employee can be authentic, share pressures and difficulties, while also receiving hope.
- Develop and encourage a learning orientation. Challenge employees, create learning opportunities for them, and invest in their development and growth.
- Provide meaning — show employees the value and contribution they make to the organization and to society.

In summary, we are in a challenging period organizationally and professionally. Many organizational changes were created in the wake of COVID-19 and the wave continues. Both employees and managers are dealing with non-trivial challenges. Precisely in these challenging times, developing psychological resilience — both at the individual level and at the organizational level — is of the utmost importance, and there are quite a few ways to develop and improve it.

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