

CommuniTea

Recognizing and Addressing Burnout – Breakout Summarization
Thursday, October 10, 2024

Breakout #1 – Burnout Self-Awareness / In Others / Causes

During the breakout sessions, burnout was characterized by a state of emotional, physical, and mental fatigue caused by extended periods of excessive stress. Most participants expressed being overwhelmed, emotionally depleted and struggling to meet ongoing demands in the workplace.

The following is a condensed version of what was discussed in self-awareness for breakout #1:

Physical signs:

- chronic fatigue and exhaustion
- change in sleep habits and appetite
- headaches

Emotional signs:

- loss of motivation
- increased irritability or negativity/short fuse
- feeling detached from family/co-workers

Behavioral signs:

- Procrastination
- Withdrawal from responsibilities and others
- Reduced performance, negative attitude

Cognitive signs

- Difficulty concentrating and forgetfulness
- Feeling overwhelmed with work, more errors
- Decreased sense of accomplishment

Recognizing symptoms in others:

- Signs of exhaustion
- Increased irritability
- Frequent tardiness or absences
- Decline in productivity – lower quality of work/errors
- Communication – a disinterest in conversation
- A small number commented that it is sometimes difficult to recognize symptoms in others.

Causes:

- Lack of self-care / guilt
- Job insecurity (funding)
- Lack of support (feeling unheard)
- Workload & unrealistic deadlines
- Community – feeling disconnected
- Unclear job expectations
- Poor work/life balance

Breakout #2 – How to Mitigate Burnout in Self & Others

The following is a condensed version of what was discussed in how to mitigate burnout, breakout #2:

- Self-care: exercise, meditation, sleep, hobbies
- More breaks / step away from the screen
- Reach out for help – support groups
- Learn to say no to take on additional work
- Delegate work/manage productivity
- Request/offer work transparency (forecasting)

What can WHOI do to help

- Reach out to those struggling – tune in
- Create a safe space
- *Supervisor training in communication/empathy and recognizing burnout (mandatory)
- Support Tech Staff and funding issues, finding resolution (hot topic)
- WHOI should not say “yes” to everything – facilities and groups are stretched thin.
- Hire sufficient support staff for high demand positions – flex time/workload issues
- Address mental health issues and the stigmas

*There is a sense that senior management/supervisors who go above and beyond a normal working capacity can sometimes carry a stigmatized view about others who do and do not function in the same capacity. There is also a sense of lack of empathy from sr. management and/or from supervisors, which there is a growing push for mandatory training.