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IN THIS ISSUE:

EXCLUSIVE EXTRACT:

DIVERSITY INTELLIGENCE

GENDER PAY GAP

BUSINESS REDEFINED

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE

FUTURE EMPLOYEE COMPETENCY

VISION

“WHEN THE RAISON D'ÊTRE IS TO BE
UNIQUE, DISRUPTIVE, A BOX SHAKER,
HR HAS TO BE A CREATIVE EQUAL”

KIRSTIN FURBER
PEOPLE DIRECTOR
CHANNEL 4





ARTICLE BY KAREN MEAGER (PICTURED) & JOHN MCLACHLAN,
ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS & CO-FOUNDERS - MONKEY PUZZLE TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

THE SWEET SPOT

THE CYCLE OF BURNOUT WILL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY, IF ORGANISATIONS DO NOT REINVENT WORKPLACE CULTURES TO BECOME PREVENTATIVE RATHER THAN REMEDIAL. MANY OF THE CULTURAL ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED TO PREVENT BURNOUT EMBODY BEST PRACTICE LEADERSHIP AND OD PRACTICES, BUT DIAGNOSING CORE SYSTEMIC ISSUES IS EQUALITY CRUCIAL.

Organisational culture is so critical to work-related stress and burnout and yet few make the connection. One of the most prominent academic researchers in this area is Christina Maslach, creator of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory*. Current data about working through lockdown backed up her original work in normal times, that there are six areas of organisational life that contribute to burnout; workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values. Work overload is an obvious trigger, but boredom can also lead to burnout, as less work is not always the answer. The sweet spot is found where people are challenged, enthused and stretched, but not overwhelmed. Not surprisingly, many organisations have seen motivation and morale nosedive during the pandemic because, in an attempt to cut down workload, they have inadvertently cut all the stimulating work. Therefore, there needs to be a reassessment of the intensity and complexity aspects of workload, as we go forward.

Research shows that where people have a moderate level of autonomy, burnout is lowest. That's because too much autonomy can be stressful for people, as it leaves them with too much ambiguity and responsibility. The key here is clarity, in giving people direction, but just the right level of autonomy. Focus too is important, as multitasking and context

switching exacerbate burnout and so it's better to set one or two priorities as the main focus. One thing hasn't changed in the new world of work, people still need to feel that their efforts and achievements

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are recognised and that they are rewarded appropriately for their work. Without this, there is emotional deficit in relation to the perception of effort versus reward and this leads to people feeling despondent and frustrated, which only adds fuel to burnout. Here it's important to remember that reward can fall into many categories, not just pay and formal processes.

Meaningful social connection is a critical mitigator against burnout. When people are driven and ambitious, but do not value their colleagues or connections at work, burnout levels are generally high. Remote working has to some extent left people feeling more disconnected than ever. So the objective is to create community through building meaningful interactions between people, rather than transactional ones. This will be especially important for organisations moving to a hybrid working model post pandemic. Where people feel that an organisation is generally fair, burnout is lower. At the core of organisational culture is values and if there is values mismatch, rifts and tensions are never far behind. The issue with a lot of organisational values is that they are aspirational rather than an accurate articulation of what is being experienced on a day-to-day basis. This is understandable, but it is important to humanise values and honest and open conversations about values mismatches. At a time when many organisations are considering moving back into the office, creating a hybrid model or more flexible working practices, now is an ideal time to perform a burnout reset.

FOR FURTHER INFO
[MONKEYPUZZLETRAINING.CO.UK](https://www.monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk)