

COMPLIANCE AND BURNOUT: THE INTEGRITY PROGRAM AS A TOOL TO COMBAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL EXHAUSTION SYNDROME IN THE WORKPLACE



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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to address the burnout syndrome and its clinical picture and the compliance program as a tool to prevent and combat the disease in the workplace. Burnout, also known as the professional exhaustion syndrome, is increasingly present in the reality of workers and its development is related to the physical and mental exhaustion caused in the work environment, due to intense demands for results and overwork. In this sense, in the face of numerous cases of companies that subject their employees to stressful situations and in many cases with human rights violations, the compliance program is an alternative for the development of a healthier work environment, which promotes the well-being of its employees through its mechanisms and tools. The culture of integrity is premised on the prevention, detection, and remediation of illegal practices, as well as pernicious situations that have a negative impact on the legal entity, as is the case of a company with a high rate of workers with burnout syndrome. The program aims, therefore, to balance the goals and objectives proposed by the institution and the realization of human rights and the right to a healthy work environment. To achieve the proposed objectives, it is worth mentioning that the present study was elaborated and developed in an inductive way. Carried out and substantiated through bibliographic reviews, including online academic journals, as well as the use of information already available in books, articles and other published sources.

Keywords: Compliance. Integrity Program. Burnout.

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INTRODUCTION

Burnout syndrome is a phenomenon widely studied in several areas of knowledge, such as psychology, health, and administration, and its conceptualization was first used in the mid-1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger to describe the state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low professional fulfillment that affected health professionals. Although there are some areas of activity that are more susceptible to it, such as health, education, social assistance, among others (LIMA, 2008), the term has been widely used in all fields of work, describing the signs of symptoms that characterize this syndrome.

Burnout symptoms can occur in response to chronic stress at work, caused both by competitiveness and by the increased burden of demands and, consequently, responsibilities. The syndrome is a serious problem that can significantly affect people's professional and personal lives.

In view of the considerable increase in cases of burnout in the workplace, some companies have implemented compliance programs that consist, on the part of the company, in the development of mechanisms and tools, with the objective of preventing and combating numerous pernicious situations in the corporate scenario, including the development of the syndrome among its employees.

In this sense, measures aimed at promoting the physical and mental well-being of their employees are already part of the reality of many institutions, *e.g.*, we have companies that stipulate more lenient goals, more flexible schedules and the availability of psychological support. Renowned companies have already adhered to these good practices in their reality, as is the case of Nestlé, a supporter of the "Mind in Focus" movement, a movement idealized by the Global Compact Network Brazil, which highlights the importance of mental health care in the corporate environment; the company Danone, which establishes a mental health support center; and the insurance company Porto Seguro, which at the beginning of the pandemic, developed the "Don't Fire" movement, to enable the financial security of its employees⁶.

This article aims to present the compliance program and the measures that a company can develop to combat burnout, characterized as a complex phenomenon that

⁶ Information collected by Forbes. Available at: <https://forbes.com.br/carreira/2021/08/como-8-empresas-atuaram-na-pandemia-para-preservar-o-bem-estar-e-a-saude-mental-de-seus-colaboradores/#foto1>. Accessed on May 15, 2023.

affects professionals from different areas and requires a multidisciplinary approach and joint efforts to train health professionals, employers and the media, as well as government with the guarantee of developing a healthy work environment.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the proposed objectives, the present study was developed in an inductive way, in which the reasoning constructed is the result of observations of concrete reality (PEREIRA, 2018). Carried out and substantiated through bibliographic reviews, including online academic journals, as well as the use of information already available in books, articles and other published sources. The keywords used in the work are "compliance" and "burnout".

After the introduction of the theme and the objectives that guided this research were established, it was necessary to review the literature and academic productions available on the subject, in order to theoretically substantiate the main points to be addressed in the research process.

In order to analyze the compliance program and the mechanisms necessary for its structuring and implementation in the fight against and prevention of burnout syndrome in the workplace, this section was subdivided into two parts: initially, it is necessary to understand the emergence and conceptualization of the syndrome; And then the compliance program and its pillars are addressed, which when implemented effectively, can contribute to the promotion of well-being and the prevention of burnout.

A BURNOUT SÍNDROME

The first studies on burnout syndrome became popular in the United States of America in 1974, after the psychoanalyst Freudenberger (1974, p.159) mentioned that "the dictionary defines the verb "burn-out" as failing, wearing out or becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength or resources". In the description of Maslach and Jackson (1981), the burnout syndrome correlates with several indices of personal suffering, which include physical exhaustion, insomnia, increased consumption of alcohol and other drugs, and marital and family problems. Since then, its concepts and definitions have been widely disseminated and improved by researchers around the world.

Several multidimensional factors are associated with the burnout syndrome and these dimensions are divided into three strands described by Benevides-Pereira (2002):

the first of them is emotional exhaustion, in which physical and mental exhaustion takes the individual to his limit, no longer having energy for any other activity; the second is depersonalization, in which the process of personality alteration makes the person cold, indifferent and ironic towards the people they relate to on a daily basis; and, finally, reduced professional achievement, in which some feelings such as dissatisfaction, insufficiency, lack of motivation, failure and low self-esteem are evidenced. In addition to these factors, the individual's personality can also influence the development of burnout, with characteristics such as perfectionism, stress tendency, and low self-esteem being pointed out as possible risk factors (GIL-MONTE, 2005).

The symptoms of this syndrome encompass various spheres of human behavior and are progressively externalized, as exhaustion becomes more and more intense. Benevides-Pereira (2002) determines a subdivision of these symptoms and classifies them as physical, psychic, behavioral and defensive.

In this sense, the syndrome can cause constant fatigue, headaches, muscle pain and sleep disorders, for example, progressing to lack of attention and concentration and memory changes; Subsequently, it reaches the feelings that interfere in the individual's behavior, such as irritability, negligence and increased consumption of licit and illicit substances, and, finally, reflects on the interest in work or leisure activities and the tendency to isolation, and may even lead to suicide.

There can be confusion when we talk about burnout syndrome compared to depression, as the symptoms are similar. The diagnosis of major depressive disorder, therefore, occurs in a shorter period of time and, according to Nóbrega *et al.* (2022), involves some signs, for example feelings of guilt, depressed mood, suicidal ideation, sadness, feelings of failure/worthlessness, anxiety, feelings of being a nuisance to others, among others. The authors Guimarães and Cardoso (2004, p. 55) reported that:

[...] Based on the clinical picture of depression, which seems to reflect a low level of superiority, a general sense of frustration and defeat, individuals with a high level of burnout also showed depressive symptoms. The results confirmed expectations. In addition, depression is significantly related to superiority, although there was no observed relationship between the main symptom of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion) and superiority. It is concluded that depression and burnout are related as close, but are not considered identical.

Thus, the appropriate differential diagnosis should take into account a comprehensive evaluation of symptoms and the exclusion of other conditions that may be causing similar symptoms (Nóbrega *et al.*, 2022).

Burnout syndrome has significant impacts both in the professional and personal spheres of affected individuals. In the professional context, it can lead to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism and employee turnover, in addition to negatively affecting the organizational climate (Carlotto & Câmara, 2008). In the personal aspect, it can result in physical and mental health problems, difficulties in interpersonal relationships and compromised quality of life (Benevides-Pereira, 2002). The individual will tend to professional isolation due to the accumulation of frustrations for goals that he feels unable to achieve.

A study by Silva *et al.* (2015) conducted with professionals linked to primary health care in Sergipe found that almost 11% of the participants had symptoms compatible with burnout syndrome and a significant 54.1% had a higher risk of developing this condition. Among the risk factors identified, younger age, excessive workload, and professional dissatisfaction stand out.

The promotion of a healthy work environment, support for employee complaints and opinions as well as encouragement of mental health care, in addition to the regular practice of physical exercise are essential in reducing the risk of developing the disease. Zorzanelli *et al.* (2016, p. 82) that:

[...] in Brazil, since 1999, burnout has been part of the Ministry of Health's list of work-related diseases, listed there as a mental disorder, under the ICD-10 code Z73.0 ('feeling of being finished'/exhaustion').

However, on January 1, 2022, burnout syndrome was considered an occupational disease, which means that the same labor and social security rights guaranteed in the case of other employment-related diseases are foreseen. It was included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization (WHO). The syndrome now has the code QD85 - it was Z73, after the change in the 11th International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11).⁷

Furthermore, as with many other notifiable passive diseases in the country, "[...] burnout syndrome is part of the disorders that must be notified through the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN) of the Ministry of Health" (FONTES, 2022, p. 8).

With the occurrence of *the Corona Virus Disease*, COVID-19, and the concern for the physical and emotional health of society and health professionals who faced the front

⁷ Source: <https://g1.globo.com/economia/concursos-e-emprego/noticia/2022/01/11/sindrome-de-burnout-e-reconhece-como-doenca-ocupacional-veja-o-que-muda-para-o-trabalhador.ghtml>

line, the burnout theme received greater visibility in the media. The pandemic has significantly increased the levels of stress and exhaustion of health professionals, putting them in a situation of emotional and mental vulnerability. In this regard, the media played a crucial role in expanding and raising awareness of the term burnout, through reports of the challenges faced by professionals on different communication platforms, bringing to the population a broader understanding of the dimension of the problem. As concluded by Spoorthy *et al.* (2020), the media contributed to raising awareness among the general public about the importance of taking care of workers' mental health during times of crisis.

To face burnout, it is important that organizations develop effective restructuring strategies aimed at intervening in the phases of initial symptoms of the disease or even avoiding triggering agents. Leadership action plays an extremely important role in preventing burnout, since leaders must be able to support workers, promote a positive work environment, and encourage worker participation in decision-making (TANAKA *et al.*, 2018).

In addition, as discussed by Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998), social support and the development of resilience can be effective strategies for preventing burnout. In this sense, Santos *et al.* (2019) highlight that the early detection of symptoms ends up enabling preventive interventions, and it is necessary to direct greater attention to the mental health of health professionals.

In accordance with Zorzanelli *et al.* (2016), there is no specific treatment for burnout, but interventions that aim to control occupational stress in general, whether they are aimed at the individual, at the organization of work, or combined, for example, with cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy associated with a restructuring of the work process.

Another important issue is the need to consider individual and contextual differences in the manifestation of burnout; *e.g.*, Purvanova and Muros (2010) highlight that there are gender differences in the prevalence and manifestation of burnout, with women presenting a higher risk of becoming ill. This approach is important for the development of personalized interventions adapted to the individual and contextual characteristics of workers. Not all individuals have all the symptoms and others, however, may present some different from those normally known. It is important to emphasize that the proper diagnosis must take into account a comprehensive evaluation of the clinical picture and exclusion of other organic or psychiatric considerations that may be causing similar symptoms in the individual.

Although burnout syndrome has gained greater visibility and understanding, based on the fact that people are getting to know more about its signs, the last few years, according to a recent article by Bianchi *et al.* (2022), the lack of consistent and standardized data makes it difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the prevalence of burnout. Through a systematic review, the authors identified considerable variation in the prevalence of the syndrome in different countries and populations. As Fontes (2022, p. 7) mentions:

[...] it is not necessary for something to be a disease or to be in the ICD for it to exist, to be recognized and treated. On the other hand, we need to ask ourselves, as a society, about the ways to do this.

Scientific research is a fundamental tool for understanding the best approaches to deal with burnout and its prevention mechanisms, and a joint effort is needed by health professionals, employers, government and society in general to effectively address this public health issue.

THE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM IN THE WORKPLACE

After conceptualizing the syndrome and the effects caused by it, it is necessary to understand, therefore, how the compliance program implemented by companies has come to be characterized as a tool to combat and prevent the disease in the workplace.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for companies to violate human rights, harming the physical and mental health of their employees. Absurd cases of vexatious punishments when goals are not met, prohibition of the use of the bathroom during working hours, workloads that go beyond those allowed by the legal system. It is in the face of this catastrophic scenario that the compliance program becomes even more necessary within companies.

The term compliance comes from the American vernacular, more specifically from the verb "to comply", which means to be in compliance with something. For Fonseca and Panhoza (2022, p. 151), "the word itself comes from the English language and in a few words summarizes the duty of compliance with previously established ethical norms and standards". Here, the consonance between the commitments assumed by the company and its ethical, moral and legal norms and standards is addressed. Regarding the origin of the word and its concept, Frazão and Medeiros (2018, p. 71) point out that:

The term compliance comes from the English verb to comply (with), which means to comply or act in accordance with. The expression refers to the systematic set of actions adopted in the corporate environment to ensure that the activities carried out by companies do not violate current legislation.

In this sense, the integrity program consists of a set of mechanisms and tools developed and implemented by the institution with the objective of preventing, detecting and remedying illicit practices – that is, crimes – and pernicious situations that can reflect negatively on the company, such as burnout syndrome.

Regarding the preventive aspect of the program, Saavedra (2020, n.p.) points out that, "one of the purposes of compliance management systems is to anticipate, to anticipate scenarios that represent damage to the parties involved in the institutional activity".

Although compliance is closely related to the fight against the crime of corruption practiced by companies – in Brazil, it was after the disclosure of the Operation Car Wash scandals that companies began to implement the program effectively – the benefits of implementing the program go beyond the prevention of corruption crime.

Through the measures stipulated in the program, it is possible for the institution to adhere to mechanisms capable of promoting the well-being of its employees, improving the professional environment, including the realization of human rights.

The compliance program will only be effective when it has the support of senior management, this is the first pillar of the program. It is necessary that those who occupy the highest hierarchical positions understand its importance and support the program. It is the characteristic of the program known as "*tone from the top*", which can be translated and understood as "the example comes from above". Gazoni (2019, p. 87) confirms that, "the biggest secret of the efficiency of a compliance program lies in the fact that there is the support of Senior Management".

Subsequently, it is essential that the company develops codes of ethics and conduct, in which they stipulate and demonstrate the commitments assumed by it; All the policies, standards, and guidelines that the company follows must be present there. They are often identified as the institution's missions and values. Regarding this pillar of the program, Saavedra and Valadares (2020, n.p.) highlight that:

[...] It functions as a general norm, in which values and/or principles are concentrated, as well as conducts, which embody these values and, on the contrary, disallowed conducts.

Still on this topic of the program, the elaboration of codes of ethics and conduct by companies, the aforementioned authors, Saavedra and Valadares (2020, n.p.), point out that:

The Code must contain the duties of employees and the conducts considered offensive to the interests of the organization and added to this the possible punishments applicable in case of proven violation of the obligations listed.

Corporate training is also a vital tool for the prevention of burnout in companies; It is necessary, therefore, for companies to communicate about the syndrome, contextualize their employees about the disease and highlight the importance of care. Regarding the training, the aforementioned authors Saavedra and Valadares (2020, n.p.) masterfully point out:

It is worth noting that all standards must be reinforced and subject to a training calendar so that they are effectively applied and experienced, otherwise they will become mere documents with no real value. In addition, the inapplicability of any rule maintained in force represents a breach in the compliance system, violating the integrity of the organization. The practice must be aligned with policies and procedures, with internal controls having a means to verify this congruence and to correct any deviations.

Many companies are already adhering to measures to combat and prevent the disease in their compliance programs, through softer goals, more flexible workloads, and the availability of psychologists within companies.

This exhaustion and excessive demand are the main factors causing burnout syndrome in the workforce of companies. According to studies developed by Harvard (n.d., p. 02), with regard to human resources:

The burnout described here doesn't just impact the person who is burnt out. It often impacts performance and relationships as well. Performance impacts could be related to not working as many hours, not getting certain tasks or projects done, lower quality of work, or diminished problem solving and decision-making skills⁸.

Thus, the compliance program has been seen as an important tool to be structured by companies, with the potential to prevent, detect and remedy numerous situations that go beyond merely legal delimitations, such as, for example, the fight against corruption crime.

⁸ The burnout described here doesn't just affect the person who is burnt out. It usually affects performance and relationships as well. Performance impacts can be related to not working as many hours, not performing certain tasks or projects, decreasing the quality of work, or reducing problem-solving and decision-making skills.

The program has been evidenced, therefore, as an instrument for promoting well-being among employees and the development of a healthy work environment, which ensures the physical and mental integrity of everyone who makes up the company and is essential for its operation. Valuing employees highlights the institution's ethical and transparent commitment, also materializing human rights, including the dignity of the human person and the right to a healthy environment, important points within the compliance culture.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Thus, through the research carried out and without the desire to exhaust the theme discussed, the present study intended to demonstrate that burnout is a complex phenomenon that requires a multidisciplinary approach to understand and cope with it.

As previously evidenced, it is important to know the symptoms of burnout and, likewise, its prevention mechanisms, not only by health professionals but also by other areas of activity and even self-employed professionals.

In this sense, the compliance program developed by companies must also be guided by the observation of human rights and the promotion of the well-being and physical and mental integrity of the company's employees, through the implementation of measures that ensure these benefits.

The promotion of a healthy work environment, support for employee complaints and opinions as well as encouragement of mental health care, in addition to the regular practice of physical exercise are essential in reducing the risk of developing the disease.

Prevention and intervention strategies must take into account the individual and contextual characteristics of workers and be based on solid scientific evidence.

The establishment of an adequate balance between personal and professional life associated with a positive work environment in which the culture of compliance is a reality and support that encourages the practice of self-care strategies is essential so that individuals can recognize symptoms, seek help and adopt preventive measures.

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