

More can be done to beat employee burnout in Singapore

The consequences of burnout to employees on a personal level may be understood, but the same cannot be said of the costs to employers.

These costs range from high financial expenses to low productivity rates.

Ms Linda Teo, country manager of Manpower Group Singapore, said: "Besides an increase in medical spending, employee burnout can negatively impact the company's performance, productivity, employee morale and attrition rate."

A study published last month in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* journal found that physician burnout costs the United States US\$4.6 billion (S\$6.2 billion) every year.

Putting a price tag on the costs of burnout could allow organisations to better understand its impact, according to NUS Business School Assistant Professor Joel Goh.

Prof Goh, who co-authored the study, told *The New Paper*: "Many organisations can understand the ethical costs of burnout but not so much of the economic aspect. We quantified the costs as best as possible, so that they have a sense of how significant burnout is."

He added: "The better we understand burnout, the better we can tackle it. Burnout is an important problem that, at least in the US, has been under the radar, but now it is gaining traction in public consciousness, which is great."

While the study was based in the US, parallels can be drawn to Singapore.

Agreeing that burnout is a cause for concern, Ms Teo said: "Companies should be concerned because the number of employees suffering from burnout is likely to increase due to Singapore's highly competitive environment."

She also believes that other factors such as globalisation could play a role too.

"Some employees are required to work longer or irregular hours to cater to their counterparts' and clients' time zones, which may lead to a burnout if not managed properly," she added.

Institute for Human Resource Professionals chief executive Mayank Parekh said: "Technology has resulted in employees having to attend to work outside of office hours."



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While more companies put measures in place – such as teleworking or flexible hours – to help employees manage stress, Mr Parekh believes that more can be done.

The Conditions of Employment report by the Ministry of Manpower shows that 72 per cent of the workforce last year are in companies that offer at least one flexible working arrangement, up from 70 per cent in 2017, he said.

Ms Teo believes that employers who take concrete measures to address burnout could reap benefits like higher employee engagement rates or having an edge over their competitors in a talent war.

Mr Parekh said: "More can be done to drive awareness and implementation of these initiatives."

"It would be a win-win situation for both employers and employees as it will help to raise productivity and make the organisations more competitive."

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