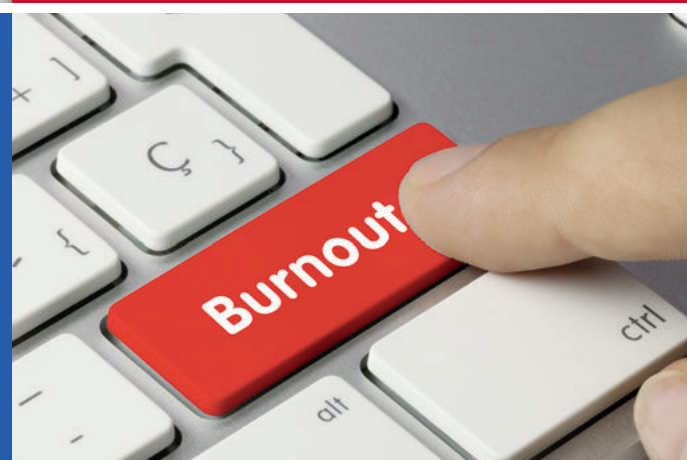


Time2Grow (Poland)

A guide for employees

**How to cope with
occupational burnout?**





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How to cope with
occupational burnout?



HEALTH
CARE



EDUCATION



HIGHER
EDUCATION

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Wrocław, July 2019

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project title and number:

„Time2Grow (Poland)” Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 04.03.00–00–W300/16.
Project co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund.

The main project objective: to develop, test and implement new solutions in the field of occupational burnout prevention. Created as a result of work on the Time2Grow Model, the project uses the idea of lifelong learning to prevent occupational burnout syndrome, mainly by strengthening the so-called soft skills.

Executors:

Leader: Dobre Kadry Research and Training Centre (Poland)
Partners: Trendhuis CVBA (Belgium)
South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences – Xamk (Finlandia)

Source of funding: European Social Fund, Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development, action 4.3
Implementation period: April 2017 – December 2019

PARTS OF THE TIME2GROW MODEL:

Part 1

The concept of a comprehensive model for preventing burnout

Part 2

Guide for employers on the prevention and counteracting of occupational burnout

Part 3

Guide for employees on the prevention of occupational burnout

Part 4

Training program for employees and employers

Part 5

Set of implementation procedures for employers

Industries and professional groups which the project concerns:

	HEALTH CARE	EDUCATION	HIGHER EDUCATION
EMPLOYEES	nurses and midwives, carers for disabled people	teachers	academics
EMPLOYERS	directors of hospitals and care facilities / heads of hospital departments, head nurses	school principles	university rectors, deans of faculties, directors of institutes / departments

1.

OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT – WHAT IT IS AND WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT

The guide which you are just starting to browse or read has an informative character. The aim of the study is to reach a wide audience – employees who are particularly susceptible to experience and face occupational burnout syndrome, and those who notice this phenomenon in their immediate work environment, often asking themselves what it really is and how to cope with it. If, however, after reading this guide you decide to change anything in your work, it will have an educational value which everyone involved in the Time2Grow project think and care about.

What should be mentioned at the very beginning is the fact that occupational burnout is a phenomenon neither new nor particularly complicated or mysterious for specialists in the field of so-called psychological help – that is, psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, and within scientific psychology. Many research results and studies on occupational burnout have already been published in Poland and worldwide, which is not surprising as discussion on that topic began in the 70s in the USA. Since then, scientists have been striving to define conditions of occupational burnout, especially among representatives of so-called assistance professions, meaning sectors in which their work involves constant and direct contact with other people. And this, as we know, can be very exhausting and burning out!

The issue of occupational burnout is real, quite common and, unfortunately, often belittled by employers, work environment, our loved ones and even by ourselves.



What occupational burnout really is? How to diagnose it? When should we seek help and support? Where to find them? Can we cope with that on our own? You will find answers to those questions in the next chapters of the Guide.

The most popular definition of occupational burnout was developed by Ch. Maslach and S. Jackson on the basis of many years of exploratory research involving interviews, surveys and observations of employees reporting disturbing symptoms. According to the first scientific concept, occupational burnout is a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment that can occur in employees having contact with other people. Authors recognised occupational burnout as a set of three different psychological phenomena. It is psychophysical and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization which express themselves in impersonal interaction with recipients of professional services (in the latest organisational approach this attitude is referred to as cynicism) and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, defined as dissatisfaction with one's achievements and lower satisfaction with professional achievements (see fig. 1).

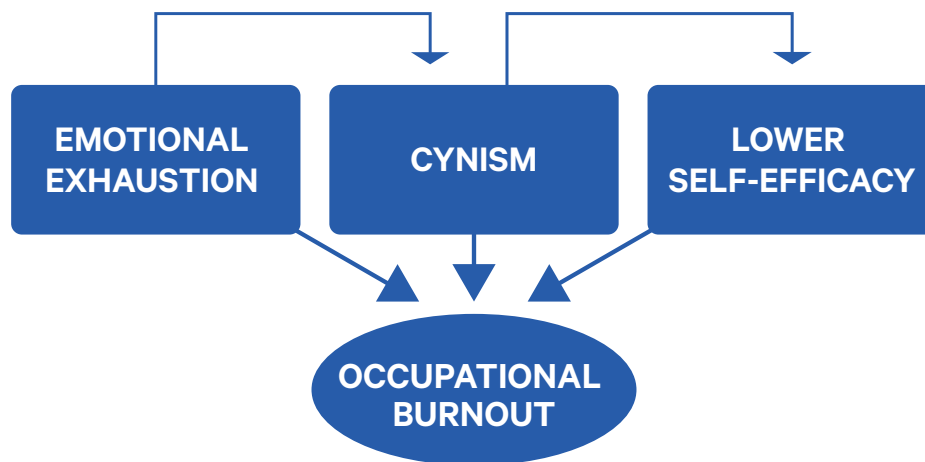
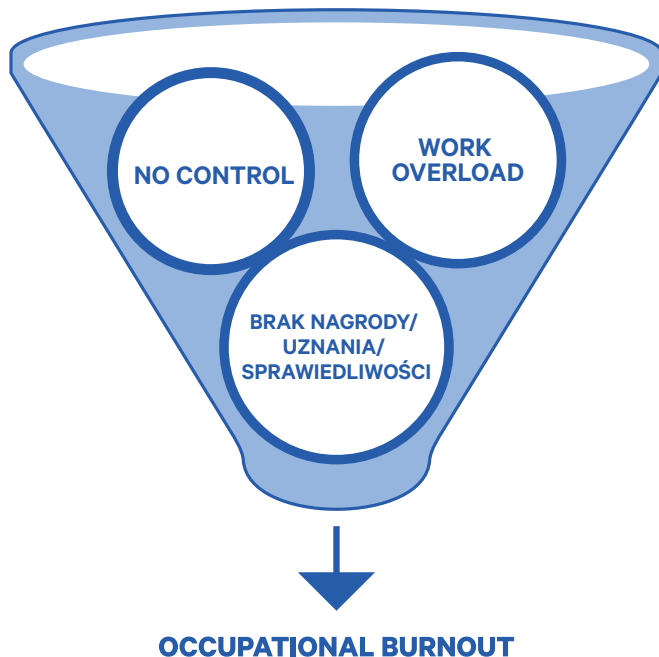


Fig. 1. A model of occupational burnout
Source: own study based on Maslach, Leiter, 2011

After many years of research and scientific discussion, the main theoretical assumptions and foundations of occupational burnout have been finally reformulated. The most recent and currently the most popular approach to burnout according to Ch. Maslach and M. Leiter focuses on matching occupations to people. According to the authors, occupational burnout affects not only employees who help others or who work in direct contact with people. It also occurs in various occupations, as a result of **a mismatch between the employee and his or her workplace**. Factors affecting burnout symptoms are presented in the figure below.



Burnout symptoms have been grouped into main categories, such as symptoms related to the emotional or health functioning of the individual. The key symptoms are:

- **affective** (dejectedness, tearfulness, exhaustion, emotional lability, anxiety, reduced inner control, increased anxiety),
- **cognitive** (helplessness, powerlessness, a sense of being trapped, a sense of failure, low self-esteem, a sense of guilt, suicidal thoughts, memory impairment, attention deficit disorder, rigid thinking, difficulty in making decisions),
- **Somatic** (malaise, headache, muscle pain, sleep disorders, body weight change, fatigue, menstrual cycle disorders, gastric disorders, ulceration, cardiac disorders, hypertension, frequent colds),
- **behavioural** (impetuosity, change of appetite, inability to rest, frequent accidents, postponing different matters, self-pitying, increased consumption of stimulants and medicines),
- **motivational** (loss of idealism, loss of zeal, a sense of disillusion, a sense of disappointment).

What makes occupational burnout, so frequently underestimated and overlooked in the work environment, dangerous for employees, their environment, service recipients and organizations?

It can continuously lower and disturb the quality of a person's health and life, as well as their effectiveness in professional functioning, the level of relations with the social environment, and eventually ... the feeling of their professional satisfaction and a sense of any professional activity!

Fig.2. Conditioning of occupational burnout
Source: own study based on Maslach, Leiter, 2010, 2011

2.

**HOW TO PREVENT
OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT?****WORKLIFEBALANCE****WORK – LIFE BALANCE (WLB)**

Work-life balance is a concept of self-management of time, referring to the worldview aiming to develop an adequate balance between the professional and private life of the individual in their everyday life. The WLB trend appeared for the first time in the 70s and 80s in the USA as a response to growing social problems of workaholism and occupational burnout, promoting attitudes such as taking care of the quality of one's life and health. Paying attention to the proper balance between professional activity and free time, regeneration, family and private matters, is a solution recommended by psychologists for occupational burnout prevention. This is also a kind of philosophy which is popular nowadays in the area of human resources management and creating an employment policy. In the set of the so-called Good WLB Practices, human resources specialists created a list of 10 commandments related to the observance of work-life balance¹.



1. <http://www.hrnews.pl/topnews,3614,10-przykazan-work-life-balance.aspx>

10 WORK-LIFE BALANCE COMMANDMENTS

1. Be moderate and reasonable in everything you do.
2. Respect and listen to the feelings of your loved ones.
3. Talk about work at home in the context of sharing your impressions, feelings, and difficulties.
4. Keep promises made to your loved ones.
5. Your home and loved ones should also be important during business hours.
6. Devote as much time to your work as our loved ones accept.
7. Treat business trips as part of work, but make sure that they do not disturb the rhythm of your family life.
8. Talk about work at home only when it is worth it.
9. Have private conversations at work with moderation.
10. On days off, devote your time to work only if necessary, and do not let it get out of control!

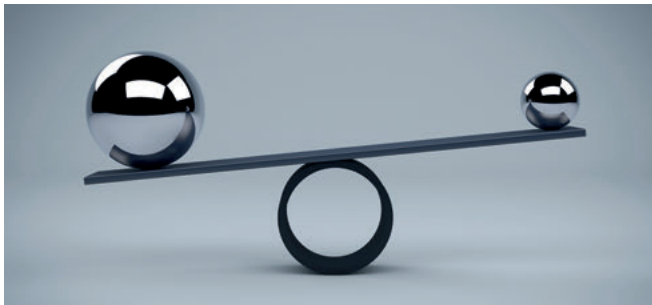
A human being is not only psyche but also soma, **and for his or her well-being they cannot miss a balanced diet, proper amount of sleep, physical activity, preventive healthcare and taking care of their body on a regular basis.** The idea of slow-life and slow-food, which assumes slowing down the pace of life, stopping, enjoying the moment and eating a meal in peace and quiet, is becoming more and more popular today. Of course, slow-life is not a philosophy of living one's life at a pace of a snail. This is not what this approach is about. It rather focuses on noticing the immediate environment, greater attention to important life details, greater alertness and mindfulness².

MENTAL HYGIENE: RELAXATION AND DEALING WITH STRESS

Chronic stress, living under time pressure, strain, a sense of powerlessness and helplessness – a media and social message that requires people to have a perfect life, family, work, and what is more – an inspirational hobby and a perfect look. Nowadays we are in a hurry and under constant pressure. In the long-term, such social and professional expectations can cause emotional and psychophysical exhaustion.

And if you just stopped for a moment, looked at yourself and thought what you, not other people, could do for yourself? How would you like to take care of yourself?

It is enough to find some time, calm your breathing and heartbeat, stop the wave of thoughts flooding your mind massively, and concentrate on your breathing for a few



2. www.slowlajf.org.pl – celem fundacji jest promowanie równowagi praca-życie i przeciwdziałanie występowaniu zjawiska wypalenia zawodowego



short moments. You can count your breaths, from 1 to 10, and then from 10 to 1, visualizing numbers so that your mind stays focused only on this activity. Will it work? For the first time it will probably be difficult. The second and the third time will not be much easier, but as in any case, practice makes perfect. If you can practice meditation at home in peace and quiet, it is great, but if not, it is worth introducing even its small elements into your life. It is always better than doing nothing.

RELAXATION

The best method eliminating the effects of stress on a daily basis is regular relaxation, whose basic principle and goal is to release your body and muscles from tension and achieve the state of calmness, in which your body relaxes, harmonizes, recharges its energy and returns to normal functioning. Achieving such a state is not easy and usually requires systematic exercise. This is because most people who remain in the state of constant tension are hardly aware of that. After a period of doing such exercises on a regular basis, they are able to notice those tensions and slowly eliminate them. That is why regularity and persistency are necessary at this point.

Exercises can be performed at any time of the day and in all conditions, except for periods when you are under the influence of strong emotions or intoxicants, immediately after a meal, when you are sick or exhausted. It is best to exercise regularly at certain times of the day. The most important exercises are those performed in the evening, just before going to bed. Measurements of tension during sleep prove that if you go to sleep in a state of tension, it decreases at night but only slightly. As a result, sleep does not ensure proper rest and does not allow you to fully regenerate. If you do some exercises before going to bed, while falling asleep you may achieve deeper relaxation, and the quality of your sleep allows your body to regenerate.

One of the very well-known relaxation techniques is **Jacobson's training**, which allows you to achieve the effect of calm body and mental silence quickly and effectively. According to this technique, muscle tension may cause emotional tension and the other way round – mental and emotional tension is often accompanied by muscle tension and stiffness. You can control your psyche by controlling your body. During Jacobson's training session, one strives to relax the muscles of limbs and torso, and ultimately to achieve emotional relaxation. This is done by tightening and loosening individual muscle parts alternately.

Another relaxation **technique autogenic training by Schultz** – an advanced and at the same time one of the most effective methods. Like Jacobson's training, it requires regular exercise. During the training, one strives to relax the muscles of limbs and torso, which allows them to achieve emotional relaxation. This is done by passing on self-suggestions connected with the feeling of warmth and heaviness in one's body. Autogenic training, according to its creator, helps to achieve a more balanced attitude towards life, which translates into better coping with problems. The technique improves work efficiency, ability to concentrate and memory, while allowing you to achieve a state of short relaxation (as upon request). Self-suggestions depend on the circumstances. A person who adheres to the rules of creating verbal formulae will always find a phrase corresponding to their problem. Even basic exercises contribute to easier and more effective coping with difficult individual situations. The basic AT consists of six exercises. Beginners should do them three times a day (or at least two), preferably in the morning, immediately after waking up, in the evening before going to sleep, and also during the day, for example, after work. Exercise-related verbal formulae are usually repeated only mentally, without saying them out loud. Only in the absence of a sufficient result can one try to whisper them quietly or record and play them so that they are barely audible. Like any other form of relaxation, its effects become particularly visible after regular and persistent use.

MINDFULNESS TRAINING

The main purpose of mindfulness training, derived from Eastern philosophy, **is to accept all experiences, including those that are unpleasant and painful**. Techniques which teach and develop mindfulness include meditations,

gentle physical exercises (mindful yoga), visualizations, body awareness, the so-called body scanning, breathing exercises and methods showing how to observe your own thoughts, emotions and feelings. As the precursor of the mindfulness trend writes: "Scientific research and clinical practice show that practicing mindfulness helps treat most mental problems, including stress experienced at work. Mindfulness helps maintain calmness and composure, take a look at work and related problems from a different perspective, increase one's efficiency, effectiveness, satisfaction and joy of work. Mindfulness is the ability to direct one's attention, directly in a spirit of openness, to what you are doing at the moment. It is the ability to attune to what happens in your mind, body and the external world..."³.

Numerous studies in the field of health and clinical psychology prove that regular mindfulness practice and therapeutic program "Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction" lead to a reduction of depression and anxiety symptoms and also significantly decrease the level of stress, which seems to be particularly important in the prevention of occupational burnout. Today exercise programs based on MBSR are particularly popular in schools, hospitals (treatment of chronic pain), in centres for war veterans and in the context of rehabilitation activities. Mindfulness exercises free people from two basic processes that occur among many emotional problems:

- tendency to think, worry or discuss certain matters too much,
- tendency to avoid, suppress and move away from others.

3. Teadsdale J., Williams M., Segal Z., (2014). Praktyka uważności. Ośmiotygodniowy program ćwiczeń pozwalający uwolnić się od depresji i napięcia emocjonalnego. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, p. 17.



Being mindful means that we are always aware of the mental mode we are in at a particular moment. It also means that we might be aware of being caught in a trap of living life on autopilot. In such moments, mindfulness is the way to affirm everyday experiences and to switch to a more conscious and authentic “track”. Focusing one’s attention on “experiencing” things really changes the process of experiencing them. It makes it richer, more interesting or even completely new. Mindfulness shows us how unconscious we are when performing typical and everyday activities.

The beginning of training assumes working on focusing one’s attention on routine activities, body scan and careful eating. Through such practice, one can train three basic skills: directing attention, maintaining attention and changing the subject of attention.

If you are interested in mindfulness exercises and the way they work, start with body scan⁴. Practitioners recommend finding a place where you can lie down comfortably for 45 minutes and where no one will disturb you. Follow the instructions below:

MEDITATION TECHNIQUE: BODY SCAN

- Lie down comfortably on your back – on the floor, mat, rug, bed, in a place where you will be warm and nobody will disturb you. Close your eyes.
- For a moment, focus on your breathing and physical sensations in your body. When you are ready, focus on sensations flowing from the body, especially on touch and pressure in places where your body touches the floor or bed. With each breath, relax and sink a little deeper into the mat or bed.
- Remember about the purpose of this exercise. Its aim is not to make you feel different – relaxed or calm, as it may not happen at all – but to let you focus as much as you can on any sensation you feel when you direct your attention to each part of your body.
- Now focus on the physical sensations in the lower abdomen, realising the changing patterns of sensation in the muscles of the abdominal wall when breathing in and out. Feel into these sensations for a while as you breathe.
- Once you have focused on the sensations in your abdomen, move the focus of your attention down your left leg, to your left foot and its toes. Focus on each toe of your left foot individually, exploring the features of the sensations you will discover there in the spirit of mild curiosity. Probably you will feel the sensation of contact between your toes, a tingling sensation, warmth or a lack of clear sensations.

4. Kabat – Zinn J. (2009). *Życie – piękna katastrofa. Mądrością ciała i umysłu możesz pokonać stres, choroby i ból*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Instytut Psychoimmunologii.

- When you are ready, breathe in and feel or imagine how the air enters your lungs and moves down to your abdomen, to your left leg, to your left foot and its toes. Next, breathe out and feel or imagine how the air travels all the way back – from your foot and leg, up your abdomen, through your chest and out through your nose. Repeat this exercise the best you can, for several more breaths, breathing to the tips of your toes and back. It can be difficult to understand how to do it, but just practice breathing the best you can, treating it as good fun.
- When you are ready, breathe out and focus on the sensations which you can feel on the bottom of your left foot, including its sole and heel (e.g. sensations in the place where your heel touches the mat or bed). Try to breathe together with those sensations, be aware of your breathing while exploring the sensations in your left foot.
- Next, focus your attention on the remaining parts of your foot – ankle, dorsum of foot, bones and joints. After that, take a deeper breath, directing it inside the whole left foot and when breathing out, move your attention from the foot to the lower part of your leg – calf, shin, knee and so on.
- In the spirit of mild curiosity, continue focusing on physical sensations in each of the other parts of your body – to the upper part of your leg, toes of your right foot, your right foot, right leg, pelvis, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, hands, arms, neck, head and face. In each place, as best you can, focus equally carefully, in the spirit of mild curiosity, on the physical sensations you feel. When you move your attention away from each place, first take a breath and then breathe out.
- When you become aware of tension or other intense sensations in any part of your body, you can breathe to them – use a mild breath to concentrate on the sensations and remember to leave them slowly, when breathing out.
- Your mind will certainly drift away from your body and breathing from time to time, which is completely normal since this is the way our mind usually behaves. When you observe something like this, simply accept it and see where your mind has directed you. Next, direct your attention gently to the body part which you were supposed to focus on.
- After you have scanned your whole body in this way, for a moment think of the body as a whole and imagine how your breathing goes through it.
- If it turns out that you fall asleep, you can try to support your head with a pillow, open your eyes or do an exercise in a sitting position. You can try doing it in many ways and at different times of the day.



HINTS:

- **Every day write down a few words about what you were the most aware of while scanning your body.**
- **What did you think of?**
- **What sensations did you notice in your body?**
- **What feelings or emotions did you experience?**

AWARENESS OF ONE'S OWN EMOTIONAL STATES – TRAINING INSIGHT INTO ONE'S OWN EMOTIONS

The ability to be aware of the feelings and emotions which we experience is key to the development of self-awareness and emotional maturity. Thanks to the fact that we know how we feel and react in a given situation, we are able to do that in a more conscious way, and also influence the course of events in order to feel the way we want to – without the feeling of guilt, shame or insecurity. Our body usually gives us clear signals in connection with the stimuli that reach us. However, we often tend to consider our somatic or first emotional responses as infantile and ridiculous.

A British psychologist, Pip Wilson (an expert in working with people with behavioural disorders and supporting and developing emotional intelligence), for the needs of research in education, designed a simple projective test, which was to assess the emotional state of younger school students and thus diagnose their skills and qualifications. After some time, it appeared that this simple exercise could be an interesting research tool useful in working with adults.

Read the material below if you are interested in your result:

How to do the test⁵:

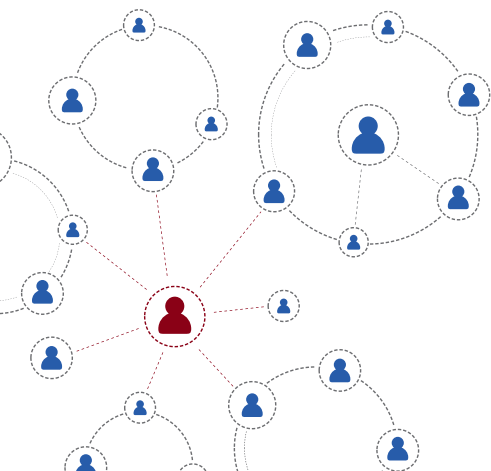
Each of these little figures on the tree has a different emotional state and a different position on the tree.

First identify the figure that resembles you the most and/or best reflects how you feel now.

Then think about the one you would like to become.

Finally, think about and write down at least 3 ways on how you could get to the desired emotional state from the current one:

- 1
- 2
- 3



5. Wilson P., Long I. (2017). *Blob tress*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group

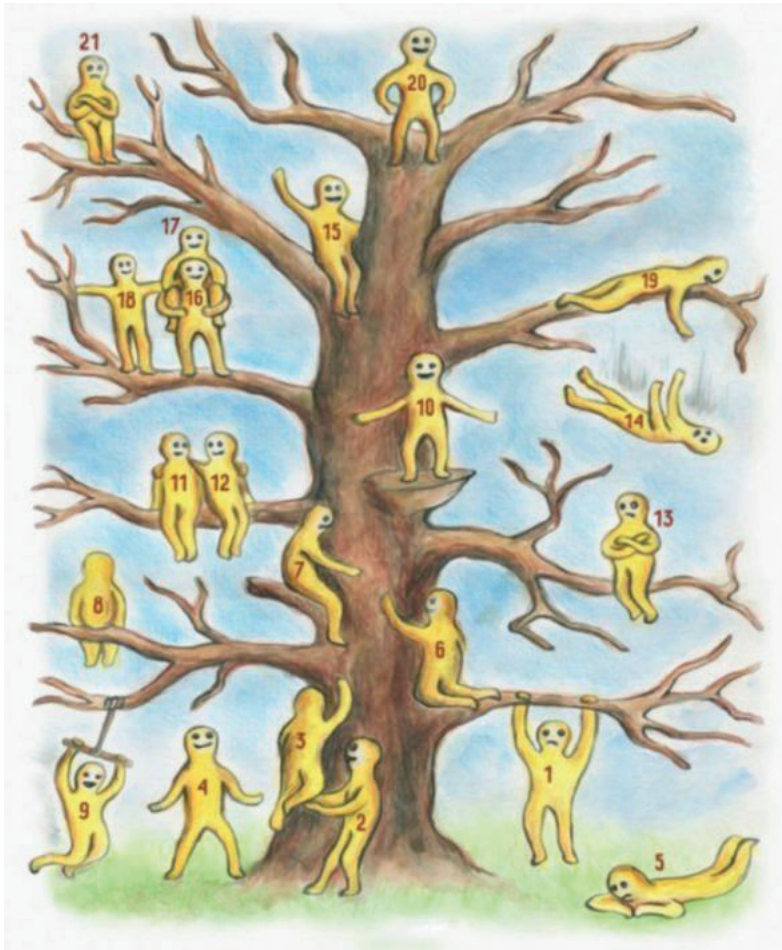


Fig. 3. Blob tree.
Source: <https://glennlimthots.wordpress.com/2016/03/11/the-blob-tree-psycho-emotional-test/>,
access: 11.07.2019

If you chose figure 1, 3, 6 or 7:

Bear in mind that figures 1, 3, 6 and 7 are climbing the tree. This may mean that you are a person who tries to overcome obstacles in their life. Undoubtedly, courage is your strength. There is no doubt that you are the type of persistent warrior. However, it is worth considering what motivates you to this effort!

If you chose figure 2, 11, 12, 18 or 19:

You are a very sociable person who always tries to help others. Wherever you appear, you evoke respect in people around you. Cooperation with others is a very important element of your everyday life. However, when you find yourself in need, you have no difficulty asking others for help. You know how to do it!

If you chose figure 4:

Figure 4 represents a happy and peaceful person. It looks up with hope and confidence! Carpe diem seems to be its motto. This figure is convinced that its happiness and future lie only in its own hands!

If you chose figure 5:

You might be going through a difficult time at work/home/in your family. Perhaps you are tired, without energy, and worse – you feel that you have too little power to change this situation. Perhaps your current experience and well-being suggest that you spend more time reflecting on your own situation or looking for something or someone who will motivate you again and help you get out of this crisis!

If you chose figure 8:

If you chose figure 8, you probably prefer to live in your own world, away from others. Perhaps you feel well in such seclusion. You value your time and space, and do not feel too much need to share them with the rest of the world. Maybe you have turned your back for some specific reasons only known to you, but maybe now you have the opportunity to try to change your situation. Turning your back again may surprise you! Also in a positive way!

If you chose figure 9:

This figure is full of energy and power. Entertainment is your middle name. Many people see you as a very cheerful and energetic person. You are the life and soul of the party, and you do not avoid adventures, even the risky ones. If you are happy with all this, get the most out of life!

If you chose figure 10 or 15:

These figures have an unusual gift of adaptation. They can easily adapt to others. They can efficiently and effectively exist between people and with each other. Whatever happens, they try to remain calm. They gladly accept the various surprises that life brings.

If you chose figure 13 or 21:

Perhaps something or someone makes you feel depressed and lonely. Perhaps your daily tasks and duties cost you a lot. Maybe even talking to other people. Sometimes you experience periods of isolation and depression. Maybe you should think about visiting a specialist to deal with those issues.

If you chose figure 14:

This figure is going through very difficult moments, which can even pose a threat to its life and health. If you feel

like this little guy, do not wait – ask for help your friends or a specialist. Do not ignore this situation, act!

If you chose figure 16 or 17:

If you paid attention to this figure, you probably feel very loved by someone. You are very close to that person and you cannot imagine life without him or her. Relationships with other people are extremely important to you. Take care of them and let them be your source of energy!

If you chose figure 20:

If you are interested in this figure, you may feel proud of yourself! You are a successful person thanks to your own efforts. You have managed to achieve a certain balance in your life and are an example to others. There is no doubt that you have achieved a lot and now you benefit from your work!

Although the above presented figures are appealing and can be a positive element opening a group/workshop meeting or certain projective self-observation, they are only a funny form of self-assessment.



**INSIGHT AND SELF-REFLECTION CONCERNING
THE LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE
AND CAREER PATH PLANNING**

Personal competence, extremely useful in planning one’s own development, but also in actions aimed at preventing burnout symptoms, assumes taking a look into one’s strengths and weaknesses. People who have adequate insight into their own resources are more aware of their advantages and disadvantages, and also see the need

**RESOURCE ANALYSIS: STRENGTHENING
THE AWARENESS OF THE POSSIBILITIES
OF OBTAINING SUPPORT**

A very important element of taking care of our psychological well-being is the awareness of our resources (see

Table 3). Not only in the context of our own advantages – strengths or aptitudes which can help us function in an organisational environment – but also finding out what social, family and professional resources we possess. Who can we rely on? Where can we find support in difficult situations? Who or what could be a buffer protecting us against excessive emotional burden? The following table may be useful for self-reflection in this regard. Maybe it is worth stopping for a moment, taking a look at yourself and your environment, and trying to answer these questions?

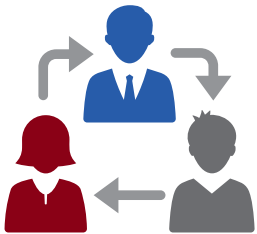


Table 1. Resource analysis

INTERNAL RESOURCES	EXTERNAL RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are my skills? What can I do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which aspects and elements of my private environment can I treat as a resource(a)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What makes me different from others? What is my special feature that makes me different from other employees?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which aspects and elements of my professional environment can I treat as a resource(s)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What can I still improve and develop in myself?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My current professional situation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are my important values which I follow in my personal and professional life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My current financial situation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What helps me in moments of doubt? How do I cope with difficult situations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support from others – who can I rely on?

Source: own study

It is important to deepen our self-reflection regarding the state of our external and internal resources, and to know when we can launch and use them. Insight into this aspect can strengthen our sense of confidence and security which we can obtain from the external environment. In the context of individual resources, we should remember that our own experiences – also those difficult or emotionally burdensome – can be a valuable and irreplaceable source of resources. It is because we keep learning from our mistakes and the willingness to draw conclusions and confront any difficulties or failures requires from us a lot of courage and maturity.

Personal resources identified by psychologists as “buffers” against excessive labour costs are: a sense of coherence, a sense of personal control, a sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, the ability to find sense in the experiences we encounter in life, perceived social support, a sense of humour, emotional intelligence and assertiveness. Personal resources are relatively permanent dispositions which affect the selectivity of the cognitive assessment process, shaped on the basis of temper and personality, strengthened by human life experiences. It is possible to develop them through long-term work on one’s own personality, often with the help of development activities (training, coaching, mentoring) or therapy. Some of them, such as assertiveness or self-efficacy, can be developed and shaped more easily than others, e.g. by choosing the right tasks in the occupational environment.

SUPERVISION

An activity which is also of great value in the context of personal investment in one’s own professional and personal development is **supervision**. Especially in social

occupations which can burden employees emotionally, the regular use of supervision contact is highly recommended. It can take the form of vocational counselling for individuals, groups and teams, resulting in the improvement of professional and personal competences and quality of work satisfaction, or in the form of training aimed at strengthening professional advantages, by focusing not only on the individual, but on integration in the group as a basic determinant in any professional work. The essence of supervision is the consistent application of principles in which the following conditions are included: the development of knowledge and skills in a given issue, constant contact between institutional employees and organisation of regular meetings to discuss customer progress. Supervision is mainly based on the possibility of solving problems in such a way that the customer has an objective insight into the whole matter regarding emotional aspects. It is about discussing, talking, analysing and working out best solutions to the situations which we experience at work. Supervision is a well-known tool for improving work among psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, coaches, social workers and carers of people with disabilities. If your workplace does not offer support in the form of supervision or mentoring with an experienced and qualified employee, think if and where you can find a person with whom you could talk or ask about advice at least from time to time.





3.

THE VALUE OF LIFE LIES NOT IN THE LENGTH OF DAYS, BUT IN THE USE WE MAKE OF THEM...

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU NOTICE THE FIRST SYMPTOMS OF OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT?

REGULAR REST, HOLIDAYS OR SICK LEAVE

If you ever feel that the problem of occupational burnout is getting closer and you no longer cope with the work environment, and if you recognise some symptoms of this phenomenon, you should start by taking care of somatic health and your own physiology. The first stages of burnout have a strong impact on body reactions, and result mainly in psychophysical symptoms. If you experience a significant decrease in immunity, deregulation of your endocrine system, frequent diseases, cardiological, gastrological or dermatological problems, think about whether they may have any connection with your occupational situation. Perhaps, these are the first signs of the process this guide is devoted to. For this reason, it is strictly recommended by mental health specialists that you contact a GP or specialist outpatient clinic for appropriate examinations and consultations. In extreme situations, a sick leave is often necessary to regenerate the body. However, bear in mind that the sick leave alone is not an effective solution, and certainly not a remedial action minimizing the state of being occupationally burnt-out. Absence from work may be a chance to improve your physical health, but it will not solve issues connected with disturbed occupational relationships and difficulties in the work environment which will definitely go back to you like a boomerang after returning to work. Preventing occupational burnout or reducing its

symptoms requires a confrontation with the cause of the symptoms. For this reason, a sick leave, a convalescent leave, an unpaid leave or a leave at request are the first suggestions addressed to employees so that they take a breather, rest physically, get some sleep and recharge their energy. However, one should not delude oneself into thinking that 2 or 3-week holiday or 3-month sick leave will solve the problem of experiencing occupational burnout. Regular rest, that is, making sure that in a shift, project or field work system physiological needs are met, is the absolute basis for any work-life balance activities. As one can read in the literature on the subject, the point is to focus on regenerating physical resources. Surely, fatigue, lack of vitality and overworking are not enough to determine the state of burnout. However, if we work in a profession which involves these types of burdens, we should particularly pay attention to offsetting energy and physiological expenses.

Holidays and leisure trips are an important element of WLB and occupational burnout prevention. Even though we do not experience any threat of burnout, or when we feel affected by its symptoms, it is worth starting with the simplest and common-sense actions whose basic advantage is the regeneration of the body and mind, a form of escape from everyday hardships and worries. However, in order for them to fulfil their function, one must remember about authentic “getting away” from work.

However, as in the case of sick leaves, one needs to bear in mind that holidays are not a sufficient remedy to overcome occupational burnout in a successful way.

WORKING ON A SYSTEM OF YOUR OWN BELIEFS – HOW TO CHANGE YOUR WAY OF THINKING?

“People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them”

(Epictetus)

According to Rational Behaviour Therapy by Maxie C. Maultsby, derived from the cognitive-behavioural trend, an individual is able to cope with difficulties and challenges of everyday life, as well as events that are extremely emotional, psychological or physical. This self-help method, through the use of appropriate reformulation of personal beliefs, leads to a change in the approach towards emotions and actions resulting from activating situations. The axis of this approach is the conviction that each person is able to help themselves and deal with even the most extreme situations with the help of healthy, rational and positive beliefs that will control emotions and encourage constructive and adequate reactions. In this model, a situation or an event (A) causes the appearance of a thought (B), which generates a given emotion (C), which, in turn, affects one’s behaviour (D).



Adverse actions and emotions do not result from facts, but from the way we interpret them. It means that our opinions and perceptions of the situation influence our feelings and behaviours. The concepts of influence and decision are of key importance. Each individual is able to make a decision about the way they feel in a given situation, and the way they are going to react. At this point, we are talking about responsibility for one's own psychophysical state, the ability to modify one's perception and self-awareness, which not only enables more effective functioning, but at the same time strengthens the sense of self-agency. Both Rational Behaviour Therapy and Albert Ellis's rational and emotive approach can be summarized by saying that we are responsible for what we think. Since our thinking shapes our behaviour, we can, and we even should, try to assess the situation as consciously and constructively as possible, to replace frustration, fear and irritation with a sense of calmness and strength. In the context of recognising the first symptoms of occupational burnout, it is necessary to make an effort to confront one's beliefs.

A cognitive approach does not suggest excessive optimism or falsification of reality just to repel anxiety and ensure well-being. It assumes contact with reality and its rational evaluation, free from pessimism and defeatism. And how to achieve such an effect? The first step assumes replacing opinions and ideas about the situation with facts. How to distinguish a fact from an opinion about an event? Maultsby suggested the so-called Camera Check of Perceptions, which means that everything what a camera records can be considered facts, without expressing any additional opinions or views which event participants had in mind, without interpretation and drawing any hasty conclusions. Only dry analysis which assumes recording and realising what has happened. Next, it is necessary to



analyse thoughts which appear in relation to the observed facts. Each of them must be confronted with the following questions:

1. **Is it based on facts? Does what I think relate only to what happened?** Is it enclosed with interpretations, additional information and assumptions which I cannot be sure about? The fact is that when I entered the room, the conversation stopped. It does not mean that I was talked about behind my back in a negative way.
2. **Does it protect my life and health?** Does it strengthen my self-esteem, positive thinking about myself, or does it allow me to feel calm and relaxed? Does a given thought make me experience moderate intensity emotions? The aim of RBT is not to eliminate negative emotions, but to equip each person with the ability to experience them in such a way that they do not lead to inadequate reactions, excessive stress and suffering. It is impossible to avoid them, but you can experience them constructively, ensuring protection of your mental health.



3. **Does it help me achieve my short and long-term goals?** Does a given thought make me motivated to act, ready for new challenges, or encourage me to control my fear? Does it increase anxiety, anger, a feeling of emptiness and hopelessness? Sometimes more important than long-term goals is helping oneself here and now, staying calm and resisting the feeling of discouragement.
4. **Does it help to avoid or solve conflicts?** How does a given thought affect my relationship with the external world? Doesn't it provoke resentment and aggression? Does it make me open to other people? Statement such as “nobody understands me (implicitly: and will not understand me)” or “there is no point in talking about it” do not encourage dialogue and sharing experiences. Do my thoughts lead to conflict resolution or escalation?
5. **Does it help me feel the way I want?** I decide how I want to feel, and I consistently strive for it. Fury, bitterness, powerlessness and other variations of negative emotional states are, as it was pointed out, states that we can change. If we experience exceptionally unpleasant or painful events which we are unable to rephrase positively, we can focus on reducing their unpleasantness and try to find meaning in them. “Healthy negative feelings trigger actions that are helpful to you or the community. **However, unhealthy negative feelings distort those actions, cause inactivity or destructive behaviour.**” (Ellis, Rational emotive behaviour therapy. Handbook, p. 27). We will not eliminate negative feelings, which can weaken our emotions and make us feel alienated in the work environment, but we can prevent their

overwhelming and destructive influence. We should know which feelings we would like to experience in a given situation and how we would like to behave. As a result, we should control our emotions. We should not get carried away, we should replace bursts of anger or bitterness with an assertive expression of what hurts us and what we need. The assumption of the impact of our beliefs on our acting and performance at work means that we are able to be efficient and responsible for how we feel and react in professional situations.

Viktor Frankl⁶, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, a prisoner of concentration camps e.g. Auschwitz, a representative of existential psychology, spoke about the perception of reality and relation to recorded events in the following way: **“Facts are not our fate; what counts above all is the attitude we have towards them.”** Again, even in the face of the facts, which according to all camera checks should be considered dramatic, painful and burdening, we do have an influence on how we behave and what attitudes we will adopt – whether we will be helpless, surrender and give up, or whether we will try to actively shape the reality in the best possible way. Will we fight for our own health and mental safety, or will we succumb to apathy and bitterness? In this context, our good and full life, giving a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment, will not be characterized by balance and harmony, lack of painful experiences or ups and downs. Frankl encourages us to seek meaning in all circumstances, focus on another person and free ourselves from self-punishment and mortification, because “accepting unnecessary suffering is masochism, not heroism.” He clearly tells us: take care

of yourself, do not suffer when it is not necessary, your fate is in your hands, take responsibility for it and live in a dignified and fulfilled way. It does not mean that we should eliminate problems and obstacles from our life. Only when confronting them and coming away unscathed will we strengthen our sense of power and agency.

Stopping here and now, and analysing our own stream of thoughts, will let us see how much irrationality and distortion it contains. Each of us experiences situations that more or less disturb our peace and emotional balance. However, the way we cope with these situations can be important in overcoming occupational stress in a successful way!



6. Frankl V. (2009). Człowiek w poszukiwaniu sensu. Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, p. 20.

Let's check that by taking a look at the opinion of a health care employee – a nurse:

Table 2.

EXAMPLE: BELIEFS AND OPINIONS OF A NURSE



PRZYKŁAD: PRZEKONANIA – OPINIE PIELĘGNIARKI	
<p>1. A ACTIVATING EVENT</p> <p>Patients spitefully and quite aggressively comment on waiting time for procedures and hospital conditions. They attack me and they are demanding..</p> <p>I had an argument with a colleague who wanted to switch her shift with me and it was the third time that month. At the briefing there was a huge row, and we let all our emotions and irritations out. As usual, I was the guilty one because I dared to say what I really had in mind.</p>	<p>1. CAMERA CHECK OF PERCEPTIONS</p> <p>Once, due to the breakdown of our equipment, a lot of examinations and procedures accumulated. This caused a lot of organisational difficulties, confusion and chaos.</p> <p>During the briefing one of my colleagues asked me to take her shift. In fact, it was not the first time that month. In the meantime, I heard that the reports and statements which each of us prepared were imprecise. This led to a heated exchange. The ward nurse said firmly what she expected from her team.</p>
<p>2. B THOUGHTS AND BELIEVES</p> <p>a) People are so cheeky and unfair. They have no idea what it is like to work here. They are so sick, but feel well enough to shout and make comments! Disaster! I'm sick of it.</p> <p>b) What Barbara asked for was definitely too much. What a woman! She has no shame. She's always up to no good. She wants to have my shifts. She thinks that I am so stupid...</p>	<p>2. NEW THOUGHTS – to each thought (a, b and c) one needs to ask 5 questions.</p> <p>a) Patients are demanding. YES, and they are also emotionally difficult. They overreact and exaggerate. They even provoke us. I know it. I've experienced that several times.</p> <p>b) That's not fair. It's not the first time someone asks me to take their shifts and I don't like it. I do understand someone may be in a difficult situation but this time I can't agree. For me, that would mean trouble.</p>

<p>c) Something wrong with the papers again? Oh, God ... Am I a nurse or a secretary? That's not my problem – I know how to count tools and equipment.</p>	<p>c) Such things will happen, especially when you take into account this number of medical procedures and staff available. We don't always have enough time to take care of paperwork. I know it's my duty but I want to take care of my priorities.</p>
<p>3. C EMOTIONS</p> <p>Irritation, anger, regret, insecurity and feeling of harm.</p>	<p>3. NEW EMOTIONS</p> <p>Self-composure, distance, confidence when expressing one's opinion in front of the group of people, self-assurance.</p>
<p>4. D ACTION</p> <p>Patients making comments and murmuring. Slamming the door when leaving the procedure room. A cutting remark from the first person who entered the room.</p> <p>A sharp comment from a colleague. A cutting remark given in front of the whole team "to pull myself together".</p> <p>Lack of reaction during the discussion about reports, sitting without saying anything.</p>	<p>4. NEW ACTION</p> <p>In the future, in such a situation I would prefer to answer the patient calmly, even if it meant commenting on a difficult situation. Greater distance to this situation.</p> <p>An assertive, but firm comment on changing shifts with colleagues. No need to attack a colleague.</p> <p>Cutting oneself off negative emotions. Joining a discussion with the team about reports. More courage in saying how I perceive this problem.</p>

Shoma Morita⁷ thinks **that it is not negative emotions that disturbs us in effective functioning, but excessive attention that we devote to them.** He recommends focusing on the undertaken activities, on things happening today, here and now. One of the mindfulness exercises that Morita suggested to his customers was cleaning the bathroom while focusing only on this activity. In fact, performing daily or even routine activities in a careful way helps to clear one's mind and keep appropriate distance. Excessive analysis of one's thoughts and feelings can, however, lead to even greater fixation about them. Therefore, one should stop and focus on things which they should be doing at the moment. Mindfulness and acceptance are key at this point: acceptance of everything that happens to us, one's own moods and emotions, other person's states, in order to respond flexibly and adequately. Mindfulness, in turn, refers to breaking with one's own fantasies, imaginations and interpretations, observing oneself as well as others, listening and responding in a proper way. In his approach, Morita calls for building a sense of self-awareness and establishing contact with oneself, with one's real needs and emotions. We can take care of ourselves only if we know ourselves well, and we can fulfil our needs only when we really know them.



SOCIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT: PEOPLE AND ME

A key element in the process of deepening occupational burnout is the decrease of quality of interpersonal relationships. Distance, a sense of cynicism, hostility and alienation make it much more difficult for us to get on with the social environment. We get irritated by both patients and our colleagues. We do not feel like doing our best for people who do not appreciate that – pupils are ungrateful, whereas university students – not worth our didactic effort. It is not about wiping or ignoring difficult situations, but rather about seeking support, especially in places where we feel good. However, it does not mean that each time such a reference point must or should be someone from our family or friends.

Occupational support groups are very popular with occupations connected with helping others on a daily basis, e.g. physicians, nurses, psychotherapists, social workers, teachers, career advisers and therapists. Such support groups can be **Balint Groups**⁸. They contain elements

7. za: Chang, SC. (2010). Psychotherapy and culture. Morita therapy: An illustration. World Cultural Psychiatry Research Review.

7. Balint.pl



of supervision of relationships and self-development, and in Poland they are even compulsory when training occupational therapists and in some therapeutic schools. Regular participation in BGs allows people to better use their competences and reduces the burden related to one's occupation, making it an important element of prevention, but also of coping with burnout symptoms. This method originated in the USA, where in 1950 M. Balint began conducting seminars for GPs, whose aim was to discuss more difficult emotions resulting from their relationships with patients. Such BG sessions can be group or individual. Participation in **crisis interventions (debriefing)**, especially in occupational industries vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder, e.g. health care. Of course, particularly traumatic situations can happen in every industry e.g. accidents, but they more frequently affect occupations where employees have daily contact with, e.g. suffering, dying patients, fighting for their lives and health. If such a service is not offered in your workplace, maybe it is worth asking about it your supervisor, human resources department, or people responsible for development programs in your organisation?

Debriefing is a method of supportive intervention. The purpose of such meetings conducted by psychologists is to exchange experiences related to unpleasant situations, normalise reactions to traumatic events, mobilise individual resources of each employee, cope with distress (the most unpleasant symptoms of stress) and provide information on available sources of support. The primary goal of debriefing is to “ventilate” emotions, identify the basic needs of participants in a situation known as “traumatic”, and plan support. In practice, there are two types of debriefings: **individual** (conducted after critical events in which one person participated, or as an additional type of support for people who did not participate in a group session, e.g. for superiors or other people who did not participate directly in the event) and **group** (conducted for a group of people directly or indirectly participating in a traumatic event; due to the dynamics of the group process, as well as the duration of the debriefing session, the group should consist of no more than 10 people). Meetings of this type are always voluntary.

SPECIALIST CONSULTATION, THERAPY AND COUNSELLING

Despite social and economic changes, and the growing awareness of the Polish society of services provided by psychologists and psychiatrists, consultations and visits paid to them are still perceived in a negative way. **If the occupational burnout syndrome is getting worse, if you feel you are unable to find a way out and if the problem becomes overwhelming, maybe it is high time you sought advice and support at professionals’.** Emotional and intrapersonal changes, crucial for occupational burnout, are very dangerous when it comes to our psychological well-being. Currently in Poland people can use psychological and psychiatric help free of charge under the National Healthcare Fund. In this case the most common solution is a visit to the Mental Health Outpatient Clinic (it will certainly be more than one meeting in the case of occupational burnout). It is also possible to obtain private consultation and therapy, which is very popular, too. However, we should take precautions and verify the outpatient clinic or specialist who we are going to visit. Our choice should be based on recommendations, education and experience of the person who is going to diagnose our problems and provide us with support in the process of coping with occupational burnout. **In the case of serious mental problems causing specific disorders, e.g. emotional or cognitive (e.g. thought disorders), psychiatric support combined with pharmacotherapy will be necessary. Decide right now and ask for professional consultation if you feel that your occupational work affects your mental health.**

4.

FINAL REMARKS

Occupational burnout is not a unique phenomenon related only to specific industries or representatives of specific occupations. What we know about it owing to extensive psychological research is that it is universal for representatives of all occupations, because it concerns the relationship between us and the work we do. And this can be a very complex issue. Characteristics of job positions, types of occupational situations we deal with and service recipients can be very different – from university students to patients who are terminally ill. Nevertheless, experiencing disappointment at work, a sense of emotional exhaustion, distance, coldness and indifference as well as diminishing efficiency in performed tasks, are increasingly frequent experiences. They can also evolve rapidly, become weaker or stronger, especially when we do not modify our behaviour with any preventive strategy.

If you are wondering what you can do when you experience occupational burnout, the simplest and most authentic answer would be “You can do a lot, but it’s all up to you”. No attempts to support made by your loved ones, colleagues or supervisors will be effective if you are not convinced about their sense and purpose. Occupational burnout is not a body condition but primarily a state of mind! That is, the way you perceive your work, the way you feel it and think about it.

The simplest advice concerning dealing with occupational burnout is to change your job. Is this an effective solution? Perhaps it is. In the context of a specific workplace or employer – definitely yes. But does it solve the occupational burnout problem in the long term? Perhaps the reason for this state is much deeper and more





serious than just lack of acceptance in the organisation you work for. Perhaps the change of the environment alone will not bring the expected result, because it will not take into account your needs, expectations and attitudes. Changing your job may but does not have to be a preventive measure.

Summing up the recommendations which are particularly suggested as individual actions – aimed at preventing occupational burnout – one should list:

- Self-awareness – recognising one's needs, emotions and experiences, and self-reflection in terms of their relationships with others.
- Skilful self-management – setting realistic goals, skilful energy management, assertiveness in interpersonal contacts.
- Taking rest, recharging (relaxation, hobby, taking care of one's work-life balance, compliance with the rules of mental hygiene – e.g. not working on days off).
- Good supervision, raising professional qualifications and lifelong learning.

- Readiness for lifelong learning.
- Developing one's interests, passions, "living" after work.
- Appropriate mental attitude and approach towards work: treating occupational matters less personally, allowing everyone to make mistakes, and being aware of the fact that one cannot always do everything.
- Taking care of social relations, relationships in the group and building a cooperation network.

The final remarks of this guide and reflection on occupational activity of people should be treated as an idea and, at the same time a warning expressed by an outstanding Polish psychiatrist, humanist, philosopher and professor Antony Kępiński:

"People are in a hurry at work, therefore they perform it carelessly. They rush to use their lives, therefore they cannot fully taste them. They are in a hurry when they relax, therefore they can never fully relax".



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