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Gary Rees, Portsmouth University, United Kingdom

Stressful times!
Within the last two years, the global economic crisis has prompted unprecedented change, with organizations traditionally considered as "solid", crumbling and liquidating in front of incredulous stock brokers and global audiences (some examples include Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the Lehman Brother s Holding Inc.). Laffer (2010) predicts further economic gloom and organizational changes, even predicting the collapse of the US economy by 2011!

Financial institutions in Europe are now undergoing "stress tests" in order to establish which financial institutions are "dangerously vulnerable and need to be strengthened, or even taken over" (BBC website, 2010). The essence of these stress tests is to assess whether banks are able to survive future economic shocks.

There is no such equivalent "test" for organizations when it comes to organizational burnout. The concept of burnout may associate itself more readily with stressful occupations, such as nursing, fire and rescue, etc., and sometimes associated with individuals and personality types (e.g. Friedman's Type A and Type B personality).

This paper considers how continuous change impacts upon organizations and whether it ultimately leads to organizational burnout. Marks (2003)   argues that multiple waves of change   lead to a "saturation effect" within organizations, resulting in a deterioration of performance that emerges from dealing with stress and uncertainty. Abrahamson (2004) posits that there has been negative, not neutral impact upon employee spirit, work team performance and organizational effectiveness resulting from continuous changes and transitions in the workplace.
Marris (1986), quoted in French et.al. (2008:562) equates change with bereavement, hence employees need time to recover from changes, and a period of acceptance of the changes.

Whilst there are many contributory factors to burnout, the expectation may be that people will have to work longer, with a retirement age of 65, 70 or older if there is no statutory retirement age. Similarly, people may choose to have several career/occupational changes within their lifetime, and

operate in more than one job at a time. If individual employees are taking on more work, and more stressful work, the question arises as to how much an organization that is going through continuous change can take before it collectively burns out.

Organizational burnout
From an academic perspective, there is a raft of literature surrounding job burnout and individual burnout (Lee and Akhtar 2007, Sutherland and Cooper 1990) but very little on organizational burnout. Similarly, there are measurement tools surrounding job burnout and individual burnout (e.g. the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Utrecht Burnout Scale), but to what extent is there an "organizational thermometer" assessing the level of organizational heat and organizational burnout?

If we consider a definition of burnout hinging around emotional exhaustion resulting in the inability to carry out specific tasks or functions, then how can organizational burnout be defined? Perhaps the point at which an organization has reached saturation (Marks 2003), or at the point of inflection, and where performance, output, efficiency etc. plunges dramatically may equate with organizational exhaustion.

Pines (1993) argues that the root cause of burnout lie's in people's need to believe that their lives are meaningful, and what they do has importance and significance, all key aspects of employee engagement.

Another question that may arise is whether corporate decision-makers really care about employees and are content with pushing performance to its maximum point, to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of its workforce. Sims (2005) discusses the concept of the "Organizational Bastard" as someone who demonstrates indignation and simply does not care about fellow employees and any strife that they may be experiencing. If there is a lack of meaning to change, does this lead to something similar to Durkheim's concept of "anomie"?

Investigating organizational burnout
A random sample of 50 medium to large companies (100 plus employees) were chosen within a 50km radius of Portsmouth University in Hampshire, England to take part in a survey to assess a range of questions surrounding organizational responses to employee engagement and wellbeing. The research questions probed the following key areas:

- The extent to which the organization was aware of their level of organizational stress and potential burnout
- The extent to which they cared about the level of organizational stress and potential burnout
- To consider what actions they would take if they were concerned with the threat of organizational burnout
- To explore whether the "duty of care" considerations entered decisions on change

The survey questionnaire consisted of a combination of both closed and open questions which were sent to Human Resource Managers and Directors. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses will be included in the final paper. Justification for research methodology and approach is provided.

Conclusion
Conclusions emanating from the analysis and literature are provided. Some critical issues around what managerial interventions are required will also be provided.

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