Breaking the cycle: Addressing workplace burnout and promoting sustainable well-being in Malta

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Abstract

Global research shows an increase in burnout levels and a decrease in personal well-being, which can result in over €900 billion loss in global productivity if not addressed (IMF, 2021). The Maltese Government has prioritised promoting personal well-being as one of the main pillars of its National Economic Vision; however, there is a lack of published research specific to burnout in Malta. This study aims to measure the extent of workplace burnout among the working population in Malta and provide valuable insights into creating effective and sustainable policies. A cross-sectional quantitative research approach using an online survey found workplace burnout is prevalent in Malta, affecting 38% of workers with the most common dimension experienced being exhaustion. Workers aged 20-29 years of age face the highest risk of burnout (62%), with women slightly more affected than men by 4%. Strong organizational support and high engagement significantly reduce the incidence of burnout, with 85% of non-burnt-out individuals being highly engaged. This research underscores the critical importance of prioritising employee well-being to address workplace burnout and foster a balance between professional and personal life. By implementing strategies such as workload management, fair compensation, and flexible work arrangements, organizations can create sustainable environments that enhance productivity, resilience, and holistic fulfilment, redefining success for both individuals and businesses.

Keywords: workplace burnout, Malta, well-being, healthy workplaces, productivity, sustainability

About the authors

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enjoying nature, travel, literature and quality time with loved ones, all while pursuing a balanced and sustainable life journey.

Dr John Chan, PhD, the managing director of Infinite Potential, is an Industrial / Organizational Psychologist with over 20 years of global experience designing people strategies to transform work into a place that empowers individuals to realise their whole potential. John has worked in global internal roles as well as external consulting roles. His career has taken him from Silicon Valley start-ups to NYSE (New York Stock Exchange) and ASX100 (Australian stock market index companies). John publishes in academic and media publications and regularly speaks at national and international conferences. John is a leading voice in workplace burnout and sustainability. He also specialises in leadership identification and development programmes, succession management, HR technology and people analytics.

Introduction

Since 2008, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified a direct relationship between work-related stressors and mental health (Leka & Jain, 2016). Building upon these data, in 2016, the European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Well-being observed an increased frequency of mental illness in most European countries, resulting in an increase in days off work because of sickness and early retirement due to work-related mental conditions (Leka & Jain, 2016). To address the underlying causes, Leka and Jain (2016) suggested placing greater emphasis on sub-threshold psychological conditions, such as stress, mild depression, burnout, and low-level anxiety, as well as personal well-being, as precursors to mental ill-health. In 2017, Weil observed that while considerable evidence demonstrates the direct effect of psychological workplace hazards on a person's health, these are not reflected in current workplace regulations as much as physical hazards are (Weil, 2017).

A three-year longitudinal study from Infinite Potential, a not-for-profit think tank, has shown a steady rise in the levels of burnout and a decrease in personal well-being from data collected in over 40 countries, with over 10,000 respondents (Chan, Clarke & Freedman, 2023). The authors observed that this negative impact gradually increases, with 2022 showing a staggering 8.5% increase in burnout from 2020. Interestingly, they also found the causes of employee burnout are mainly extrinsic to the individual and related to the organization. Similarly, Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey, conducted

between 2021 and 2022, collecting data from 23,220 individuals across 46 countries, found that work-related burnout was the main reason behind job resignations in this age group (Deloitte, 2022). This survey highlighted that Gen Zs and Millennials (ages between 20 to 40 years at the time of study) are becoming increasingly aware of their well-being and the environment and are decreasingly willing to accept situations that negatively impact them. Though separate, both studies indicate a shift in employee mentality and an increased awareness of the effect of work on their well-being. This growing body of evidence emphasises the need to explore further workplace burnout, its underlying causes, and the broader organizational and societal frameworks contributing to this phenomenon, providing the foundation for this study's investigation into burnout within the working population in Malta.

Defining work, labour and free time - Where do we cross the line?

Tilly and Tilly (1998) define work as any human effort that adds value to goods and services, encompassing both paid and unpaid activities like domestic errands or voluntary work. They emphasise the need to distinguish between work, free time, and personal care, though Lucassen (2012) notes that in modern Western cultures, these boundaries are often blurred. Lucassen also points out that labour relations can extend beyond the traditional employer-employee dynamic to include household duties and family-run businesses.

Stokes (2009) argues that work fulfils more than just financial needs; it also provides self-esteem, purpose, and social identity. People work not only for sustenance but to address what Stokes calls a "void" by solving problems or unleashing creativity. At a societal level, work addresses broader needs, with essential jobs like healthcare, policing and teaching directly supporting society's well-being. Work also fosters economic growth, safety and social cohesion.

There is no denying that the world is changing, and governmental institutions and businesses need to embrace the changing environment. The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created economic challenges for industries in the EU, including those in Malta. With the post-pandemic landscape expected to present continued financial difficulties, local businesses must adapt to these changing circumstances. Companies worldwide are re-evaluating their policies and operations subsequent to the pandemic, resulting in significant transformations in the workplace (IMF, 2021). A McKinsey

report published in the WEF (2021) highlights strong relationships between employee productivity, well-being and economic growth. Therefore managing and preventing employee burnout has become one of the current critical factors influencing political and organizational decision-making. The report anticipates that failure to address work-related mental health issues can result in a massive annual loss exceeding €900 billion in global productivity.

Personal well-being, work and burnout – defining the boundaries

As defined by the OECD (2014), personal well-being encompasses 11 dimensions, including income, health, social connections, and a sense of purpose, offering a comprehensive view of life satisfaction. Within the workplace, well-being correlates with improved performance, creativity and resilience against illness (Litchfield et al., 2016). However, the intricate relationship between work and well-being can enhance and undermine personal health, depending on the particular workplace dynamics.

The concept of psychological harm in the workplace gained prominence in the 1970s, culminating in the WHO's formal recognition of burnout as a workplace issue in 2019. Burnout, characterised by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy, arises from chronic, unaddressed workplace stress (WHO, 2019). This perspective aligns with Maslach (2017) and recent studies by Chan and Clarke (2021; 2023) highlighting organizational cultures rather than individual failings as primary contributors to burnout.

Burnout's negative implications extend to physical health, causing cardiovascular issues, weakened immunity, and chronic pain (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Its psychological impacts include stress, unhealthy habits and depressive symptoms, underscoring its distinction from clinical depression. Research by Moss (2021) further links overwork to severe health risks, including heart disease, while Garcia and Miralles (2016) emphasise the benefits of a balanced life rooted in purpose and meaningful relationships.

Addressing burnout requires systemic organizational strategies. Embedding well-being into corporate frameworks fosters sustainable work environments, as advocated by Chan and Clarke (2021). Collectively, this research underscores the need to approach work life as an integrated continuum, where managing work demands in harmony with personal life helps prevent burnout and supports overall well-being.

Does hard work lead to a successful and happy life?

The relationship between hard work and achieving success and happiness is a contentious topic. In his book Economic Facts and Fallacies, Sowell (2011) urges a critical examination of commonly held economic beliefs, including the notion that hard work leads to happiness. Psychologist Shawn Achor, in his 2011 TED talk, challenges this notion, suggesting that prioritising well-being fosters greater success and productivity and not vice versa. Timothy Ferriss (2011), in The 4-Hour Workweek, shares his transformation from an overworked employee to a member of what he calls the "New Rich," emphasising that a fulfilling lifestyle is defined by free time and mobility rather than just financial wealth. He advocates for effective productivity strategies, such as focusing on important tasks and avoiding multitasking.

Furthermore, Patel et al. (2016) argues that graduating from university and working hard does not guarantee professional success, especially in today's technological and globalised environment. They emphasise the importance of breaking established habits, leveraging unique talents and cultivating resilience to navigate the complexities of modern careers. Moss (2021) also critiques society's glorification of hard work, asserting that this perspective often leads to burnout and dissatisfaction, creating a lose-lose situation for individuals and organizations alike.

Relationship between individual well-being, productivity and economy

Obeng (2020) challenges notions of productivity. He highlights that, while in the past, productivity was initially regarded as the measure of value per (human) effort, modern workers may be thinking of a creative solution to a work problem while they are cooking in their home kitchen or stuck in traffic. Obeng (2020, p.2) defines productivity, or value, as; *"Value (defined by the person delivered to) is the Benefits they get minus the Costs (financial and non-financial). Being more productive leads to an increase in the Benefits or a reduction in the Costs."*

The WEF (2021) emphasise that the correlation between employee productivity and economic growth is undoubtedly significant. Labour productivity is critical in driving economic growth and improving living standards. When productivity increases, organizations can produce more goods and services, boosting economic growth (WEF, 2021). Marsden and Moriconi (2009) mention four intertwining factors for enhancing workplace performance: physical productivity, efficiency, service quality and profitability.

A 25-year longitudinal study by Gallup (2016), where more than one million employees and over 80,000 managers were interviewed, identifies that high-performing teams need great managers. Interestingly, Gallup found that no specific trait, style or standard defines a great manager; instead, it is their uniqueness and authenticity that truly set them apart. Great managers are revolutionary and authentic and, to a certain extent, rebellious against conventional management norms. Great managers focus on the natural talent of their team members, turning it into performance through their approach, which is tailor-made to the individual. They prove that workplace performance highly depends on the environment the organization creates, where people can use their talents at their best. This concept is also highlighted by Moss (2021), who explains that competitive advantage is achieved by companies that manage to cultivate a positive culture by onboarding the right people, creating adequate policies, promoting well-being and leading effectively. Moss looks at these three factors as ingredients in a recipe; it is more about how things are done than what one has that counts.

An article by McKinsey on the WEF (2021) states that acknowledging the undeniable link between employee well-being, productivity and economic growth is an imperative requirement for the advancement and prosperity of any nation. Neglecting or undervaluing this crucial association is unequivocally unacceptable. This study will seek to evaluate the relationship between general well-being and productivity as applicable to the working population in Malta.

Where do productivity and well-being intersect?

The healthier and more motivated citizens are, the more society benefits (OECD, 2014). This is further explained by Litchfield, Cooper, Hancock and Wat (2016) who state that these citizens support their communities and are less likely to deplete state resources. Poor well-being of the citizens within the society has a substantial economic cost, with depression alone estimated to absorb 1% of Europe's GDP (OECD, 2014). Workplace well-being is a crucial influencer of increased productivity and the retention of key irreplaceable employees within a company. According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2016), employee absenteeism due to mental health issues incurs an average direct cost of €1,190 per annum for each employee. Although frequently cited, indirect business operational costs such as low productivity and performance, management time, reduced quality of service and substitution costs are less often quantified by organizations worldwide (Litchfield et al., 2016).

In a study by Harvard Business School (2015) it was estimated that workplace stress contributed to 8% of the national yearly spending on healthcare and a staggering 120,000 deaths per year in the US. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2015) concluded that employees suffering from burnout are 63% likelier to take sick days and 23% more likely to visit the hospital. They also found out that burnt-out employees are 2.6 times more prone to resign from their jobs. Burnout-related employee sickness, turnover and lost productivity are estimated to cost the US economy $350 million (approximately €297.50 annually, Chan & Clarke, 2021).

A recent report by the WEF (2021) cites research from Arizona State University and the Rockefeller Foundation emphasising that placing a high priority on the welfare of employees is crucial. As previously noted, neglecting workplace mental health issues significantly undermines global productivity and adversely affects the economy as a whole. These findings encourage leaders to develop strategies to protect their most valuable asset – their workforce.

A significant global wave of voluntary job resignations began in early 2021 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, marking a notable event in recent labour history. This trend was driven by accumulated dissatisfaction, challenges associated with remote work, and employees' re-evaluation of their priorities, with burnout identified as a critical factor behind the "Great Resignation" (Miller, 2021). Mayer (2021) corroborated this, finding that burnout contributed to 40% of job switches in 2021. The movement underscored broader societal issues, such as mental health, job satisfaction, and the changing dynamics between workers and employers in a post-pandemic context. According to Chan and Clarke (2021) companies that disregard burnout will constrain their agility in a competitive landscape. Anthony Klotz, a professor of management at Texas A&M University, coined the term "Great Resignation" in May 2021 to describe this phenomenon (Klotz, 2021).

The future of technology and work

Litchfield et al. (2016) state that technological advances happen faster than attitudes and behaviours can adjust to. The way developed countries view work remains primarily based on the past 200 years. As highlighted by Litchfield et al. (2016), *"the Industrialised World"* is the term frequently used to describe advanced countries, proving that we have not yet embraced the reality that we live in a post-industrial world. Millions of jobs have

been created within the last 30 years, which did not even exist back then; however, the same management structures and styles still thrive; and another revolution is on the way (Litchfield et al., 2016).

The European Commission in 2021 formally termed *the fifth industrial revolution*, or Industry 5.0. This differs from Industry 4.0 in focusing on boundaries amongst industry, well-being and the natural environment, focusing more on sustainability and resilience; all revolving around the value of human life (Xu & Lu, 2021). Industry 5.0 is a value-driven initiative that transforms technology into a tool intended to serve humans to live better and healthier.

In Malta's approach to Industry 5.0, human well-being is integral, aligning with the European Union's vision of sustainable, human-centred progress in industrial sectors. The Maltese Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 includes initiatives for enhancing job quality, promoting social equity, and supporting health within workplaces, aiming to reduce worker stress and address the evolving skills needed in a digital economy. Environmental sustainability is also prioritised, acknowledging its impact on public health and quality of life. This is reflected in Malta's "green" and "blue" economic strategies, which aim to reduce pollution, conserve resources and create a healthier environment (Malta Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning, 2021; European Commission, 2021). The Maltese Government has recognised promoting personal well-being as one of the main pillars in its National Economic Vision 2021–2031. To achieve this, the government has initiated a consultation process to explore integrating environmental and non-financial aspects such as quality of life, quality of work, well-being and protection of natural heritage into economic policy. The focus is identifying more effective ways to achieve this goal (The Government of Malta, 2021).

Workplace burnout research in Malta

Occupational burnout has been studied since the 1970s, but it was not until 2019 that WHO officially recognised it. With the Covid-19 pandemic having a profound impact on workplaces across the globe, there has been a significant increase in attention given to workplace burnout. Recent studies in Malta seem to have been triggered by the pandemic's effects.

The first local publication on burnout was conducted on Maltese nurses. In his study, Galea (2014) investigates the impact of burnout on the mental and spiritual health of nurses working in three hospitals in Malta. The study included 241 nurses who completed a self-report questionnaire that explored their burnout levels, well-being, personality, affection and spirituality. Analyses revealed Maltese nurses experience high burnout levels, adversely affecting their well-being. The study also found that burnout has a direct impact on personality and affection but not on spirituality. Furthermore, spirituality may indirectly influence well-being through positive affect and cognitive evaluation of life. Galea emphasises the importance of providing psychological support and assistance to individuals who experience burnout but does not touch upon organizational measures. The study recommends further research into coping skills and supportive programmes.

In 2019, Barbara and Camilleri conducted a study in Malta that was the first to explore burnout since this was officially recognised by the WHO. The study highlighted the significance of good mental health among service providers, enabling them to provide better care to those in need. The research included 230 participants from various mental health professionals, among whom 14% scored high on all three dimensions of burnout. However, it was observed that all participants reported high levels of burnout in at least one of the identified dimensions. The study identified various factors that can cause burnout, including time pressures, emotional intensity, role conflict, and challenging relationships between employees and management. To prevent or address burnout the authors recommend that individuals need to have a sense of control, be treated fairly and feel part of a community that shares their values. Other helpful practices include practising mindfulness, establishing boundaries and maintaining a work-life balance. The authors recommend that organizations adopt a sound, constructive approach by prioritising employee well-being and involving them in decision-making, and effectively reducing the risk of burnout.

Grech and Grech (2021) conducted a study using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory to assess burnout levels among postgraduate medical trainees in Malta's Foundation Programme. They identified burnout prevalence across all stages of training, peaking midway through the two-year programme, with rates ranging from 51% to 66%. Male trainees reported higher work and client-related burnout than females. These findings emphasise burnout's significant impact on trainees' physical and mental health and its implications for patient care quality.

This study highlights the need for organizational-level interventions alongside promoting work-life balance. However, limitations include a low response rate (26.5%) and the additional stress of the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, no comparative data for the Maltese population was available at the time, underscoring the need for further research to identify burnout risk factors in medical training and develop targeted interventions. This research contributes to the understanding of burnout and emphasises the importance of addressing it within medical education and practice.

The 2021 Misco "Employee Well-being at the Workplace" survey examined mental health and well-being among employees in Malta, comparing data from 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic. Among the 353 participants, 63% reported work-related mental health issues, such as stress and anxiety, primarily caused by heavy workloads, lack of support, tight deadlines and job insecurity. Despite these challenges, 69% rated their mental wellness positively, and 53% believed their organization valued employee mental health, revealing a paradox in perceptions of workplace well-being.

This study highlighted a significant gap, with one-third of businesses avoiding investments in mental health initiatives. Work-life balance emerged as the most preferred support initiative among 46% of participants. Notably, many employees experiencing mental health challenges chose not to disclose them to their employers, underscoring the need for greater awareness and proactive engagement in workplace mental health.

Research conducted by Esprimi (2022) on work attitudes is a valuable addition to the local research landscape, particularly in light of the Misco 2021 study. Although burnout is not addressed directly, the data on the preferences of the working population can be helpful for comparing insights on work-related stressors from the same population that is targeted in the current study. Esprimi (2022) surveyed a random sample of 277 of the Maltese working population across all work sectors, highlighting work preferences and workload. Notably, over half (53%) of the respondents acknowledged the need to prioritise their well-being post-pandemic due to working too much. Half of the respondents (50%) reported feeling happier and more productive working remotely, while a majority (63%) indicated they would only consider a job offering flexible work arrangements. Salary and flexible work arrangements emerged as the top criteria for deciding between staying or switching jobs. Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of the evolving attitudes and preferences of the Maltese workforce.

In summary work is essential to our existence, shaping our identity and purpose. However, the rapid evolution of technology often outpaces our ability to keep up, and many developed nations still use working frameworks over two centuries old. The link between well-being, productivity and a country's success has been emphasised throughout the research. While excessive work can lead to burnout and other health issues, a balanced life filled with purpose and meaningful relationships can lead to well-being and longevity, ultimately benefiting society as a whole. Despite the societal glorification of hard work, the reality is that it often results in overwork and burnout, causing harm to both individuals and organizations. Unfortunately, the rate of burnout is on the rise globally each year.

The Malta Workplace Burnout Study

Building on prior discussions of well-being and burnout, there is a clear shortage of published research on burnout in Malta, even as its prevalence continues to rise globally. As discussed in the introduction, the literature on burnout in Malta has predominantly focused on healthcare workers, with a significant lack of attention directed towards the phenomenon across other industries and professions. While other national studies have examined the impact of the pandemic on the working population in Malta, a specific emphasis on burnout appears to be lacking in the current discourse. This underscores the need for further research to investigate the prevalence and impact of burnout in the broader workplace context, providing valuable insights into this critical issue and guiding potential interventions.

This study aims to make a significant contribution to the literature on workplace burnout in Malta by investigating the extent to which burnout prevalence in the Maltese workforce aligns with recent international findings. Specifically, the research addresses the question: *Does the prevalence of workplace burnout among Malta's working population match the latest global findings?* Through a comprehensive analysis and comparison with prominent international research, the study seeks to draw informed conclusions on the prevalence and impact of burnout within the Maltese context.

A quantitative research approach is used to investigate workplace burnout in the Maltese working population. A quantitative approach was adopted to ensure a methodological fit between the research objectives, the data collected, and the analyses methods to effectively address the research question, thus ensuring coherence and synergy in the

research process. This was also the method of choice for large-scale global studies on the topic. The quantitative methodology involved collecting and analysing structured data to measure the prevalence and explore critical factors associated with burnout.

The research philosophy of positivism prioritises the collection of empirically verifiable data. This approach views social research as a scientific endeavour. It suggests that the best way to achieve this is by collecting quantitative data with minimal influence from the researcher's perspectives and assumptions, thus reducing bias. Statistical analysis can be used to interpret data, which produces objective and rational results that can be applied more broadly. This method enabled a structured investigation of workplace burnout.

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the research process, particularly due to the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study involving adult participants. Ethical approval was secured from the Central Mediterranean Business School (CMBS) Ethics Committee on January 27, 2023, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they began the questionnaire, reinforcing their voluntary participation. To safeguard participants' privacy, the researcher downloaded only aggregated data after the questionnaire period concluded, preventing any deductive conclusions that could compromise anonymity.

A cross-sectional research design was used to investigate workplace burnout. The data for the study was collected through an online survey (using SurveyMonkey). Surveys are preferred for consistency and convenience, as they allow participants to respond at their own pace and can be completed online without additional costs and input from the researcher. This web-based survey platform facilitated the efficient and secure collection of responses from a diverse sample of participants.
However, it is worth noting that surveys may fall short regarding the depth of responses, and non-response can pose a challenge.

Sampling strategy

The target population for this study includes all employed individuals in Malta, whether in full-time or part-time roles. Based on the most recent Labour Force Survey (NSO, 2023), Malta's working population is estimated at 291,756. Assuming a population proportion of 38% (Chan et al., 2023) and applying a 95% confidence level with a

5% margin of error, a sample size of 362 participants was determined as sufficient (Calculator.net., 2023). A voluntary response sampling method was implemented, using social media (LinkedIn, Facebook) and physical locations (pharmacies, bus stops) to minimise selection bias and ensure diversity. Participants were further encouraged to share the survey link within their networks to enhance representativeness. A QR–code poster for the online survey was distributed in various public areas across Malta. The survey content is explained in Table 1.

Table 1
The survey design and rationale

Questions	Origin	Dimensions targeted	Rationale
1 to 12	Infinite Potential Burnout Scale (IPBS)	Burnout dimensions • Emotional exhaustion, • Alienation/Cynicism, • Reduced personal accomplishment.	IPBS assesses for the presence of burnout. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally drained by work, Alienation/-Cynicism involves negative and detached attitudes towards colleagues/clients, and Reduced personal accomplishment relates to a decreased sense of competence and achievement. Burnout is present if scores are elevated in each of the three dimensions.
13 to 18	IPBS	Engagement within the workplace	This section considers the respondent's connection with the organization.
19 to 24	Areas of Worklife (AW)	Burnout Model • Workload, • Control, • Reward, • Community, • Fairness, • Values.	AW focuses on the different domains within an individual's work life and how they can impact well-being, job satisfaction, and burnout. As developed by Maslach and Leiter (2004), this model identifies six key areas which influence an employee's experience in the workplace. This is a reduced tool used to classify the main reason responsible for burnout within the sample of respondents classified to be burnt out by the IPBS.
25 to 29	WHO-5	Well-being index • Mood, • Energy, • General mental well-being.	The WHO-5 is a short, self-administered questionnaire designed to measure psychological well-being and overall mental health. Participants rate the extent to which they have experienced these feelings or states during the specified period using a Likert scale.
32	IPBS	Degree of well-being.	A 0-to-100 scale is intended to assess the degree of well-being; and is an internal validation tool to determine the reliability of the responder's response.
30, 31 and 33	IPBS	Organisational support.	These questions assess organizational support for internal consistency and insight into the relationship between the dimensions. Respondents were asked to specify whether they were expected to work outside regular work hours or to indicate how well supported they have felt in the last 6 months by their organisation.

34 and 35	IPBS	Personal accomplishment/ Productivity.	These questions further analyse the responder's performance level; for internal consistency and insight into the relationship between dimensions. Respondents rate their personal performance and quality of work.
36 to 51	National Statistics Office (NSO)	Demographics	Demographical split of the responders (such as age, gender, and work arrangements) to identify trends and differences and can be compared to national statistics and other studies.

Data analyses

The survey tool was validated using Cronbach Alpha. Correlation analysis was used to explore the relationships between constructs and assess causation. Demographic characteristics were summarised using descriptive statistics (such as percentages and pie charts). The prevalence rates of burnout were graphically displayed. Microsoft Excel and Wessa.Net Free Statistics Software (Wessa, 2023) facilitated data management and analyses.

This framework was chosen because it offers a comprehensive perspective to analyse the factors contributing to burnout in the Maltese working population. It aligns with established theories, recognised definitions, and empirical assessment tools. It allows for evaluating burnout from multiple dimensions and to gain a holistic understanding of this critical topic in the Maltese context. By incorporating the IPBS, MBI, AW Model, and the WHO-5, a sound and professional assessment of burnout can be achieved.

Validity and reliability

The study employed a validated instrument, the Malta Workplace Burnout Survey, to assess burnout. A structured protocol was implemented to evaluate construct validity, reliability and content validity to ensure high measurement quality. Content validity was confirmed through expert panel reviews with five specialists in mental health, occupational psychology, and burnout research, yielding Scale-level Content Validity Index (S-CVI/UA) scores of 0.9 for relevance and 0.8 for clarity. The questionnaire was adjusted and re-evaluated after expert feedback.
Further, retrospective reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, producing an overall reliability score of 0.9324 across 33 items, well above the acceptance threshold of ≥0.70 α, with scores of ≥0.90 α indicating excellent internal consistency. As a result, the survey instrument was validated as a reliable and robust tool for researching workplace burnout. Data collection occurred in late 2023, and the subsequent section presents the findings.

Findings

This study assesses the prevalence of workplace burnout in Malta's workforce, benchmarking findings against the Infinite Potential longitudinal study (Chan et al., 2023) and contextualised with global data from the Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey and McKinsey's post–pandemic employee requirements report.

Participants

A total of 263 comprehensive surveys were obtained. The sample was subsequently reduced to 258 respondents, eliminating those not presently employed in Malta. Thus 94% were Maltese nationals, mainly residing in central and southern Malta (see Figure 1).

The distribution of gender representation was nearly equally divided between the female and male populations, comprising 51% and 49%, respectively. However, conclusions associated with individuals identifying as 3rd gender cannot be considered statistically valid, as the representation was less than 1%.

Figure 1
Primary residence of respondents
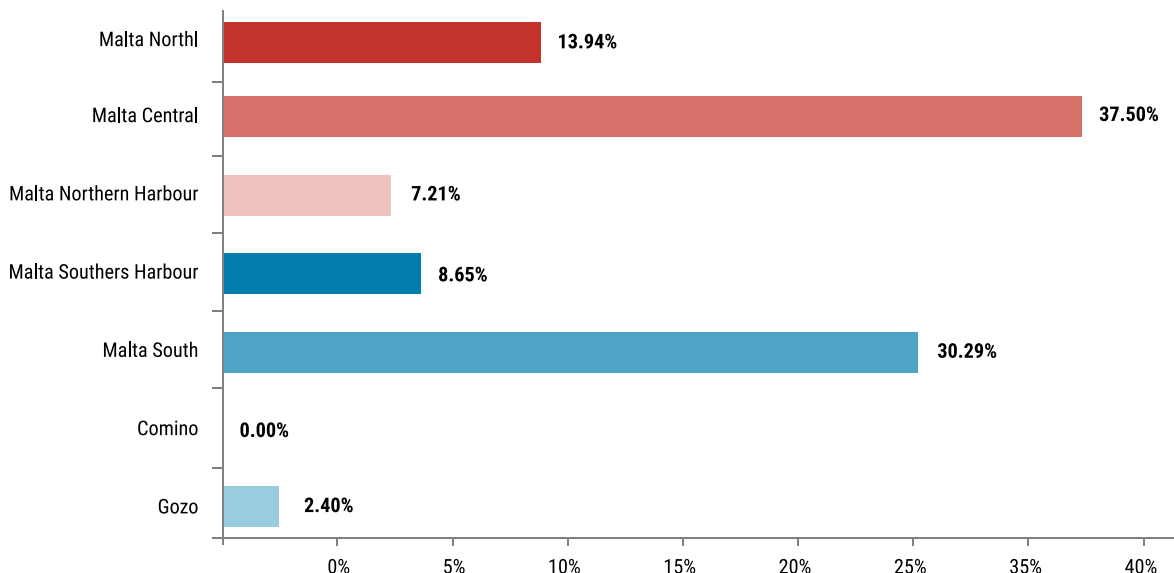
The study population's age distribution showed a quasi–normal pattern, with the highest number of respondents aged between 30 and 39 years (see Figure 2). No participants below the age of 20 years were present. All educational levels were represented, with the majority being Levels 6 and 7.

Figure 2
Age of respondents
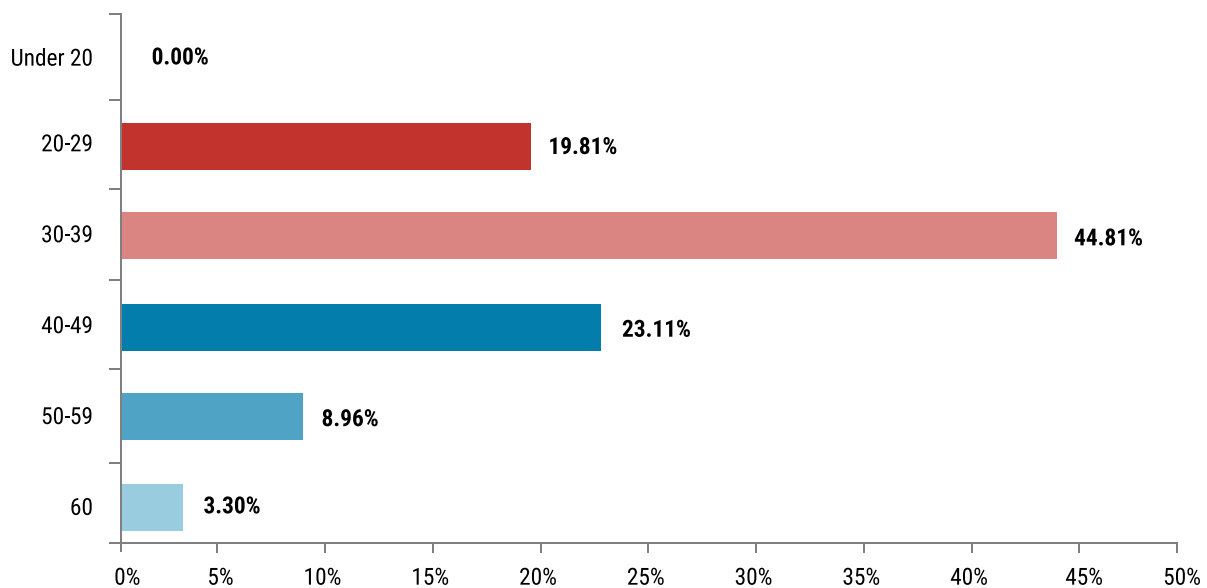
The respondent pool of the survey was mainly composed of individuals who work full-time, whereas the participation rate of part-time workers and those with other work-time arrangements was below 5%. The study presented a range of different working arrangements, spanning from entirely remote work to exclusively working on-site. A quasi-normal distribution was observed for all salary ranges.

The study found representation from most industries, but Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Construction, Real Estate, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation had limited participation. The public sector accounted for 56%, whereas the private sector accounted for 44%. The study showed a balanced distribution of participants across various occupational levels, except for those who were self-employed. Nonetheless, there was no representation of individuals engaged in family or voluntary work.

Burnout analyses and comparisons with previous research

The Burnout Scale as created and used by IP in their global survey was used. The degree of Alienation/Cynicism, Exhaustion, and Reduced Professional Efficacy/Performance are measured. For an individual to be identified with burnout, there must be elevated levels in all three dimensions (Chan et al., 2023).

38% of the study population was classified within the burnout range for all three dimensions. This agrees with the 38% global value reported in "The State of Workplace

Burnout 2023" (Chan et al., 2023). With a sample size ensuring a 95% confidence interval, the true prevalence of workplace burnout in Malta likely falls within ±5.86% of the observed rate, approximating an actual prevalence around 37.6%. **Exhaustion** emerges as the most common burnout dimension (54%) among Maltese workers, followed by Alienation/Cynicism (40%), with a notable 14% difference, indicating a stronger prevalence in Malta compared to global trends observed in Chan et al.'s 2023 study across 40+ countries.

Burnout and age

The IP global study (Chan et al., 2023) indicates burnout affects 47% of individuals aged 18–24 years, 43% of those aged 25–34 years, and 42% of those aged 35–44 years paralleling findings from Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey (where burnout rates reach 46% in those 20–28 years and 45% in those 29–40 years, Deloitte, 2022). In Malta, burnout prevalence is notably high, with 62% of individuals aged 20–29 years and 29% of those aged 30–39 years reporting burnout (see Figure 3). Despite differences in age group definitions, these studies collectively suggest a **heightened burnout vulnerability among younger generations,** especially Gen Z.

Figure 3
Burnout by age group
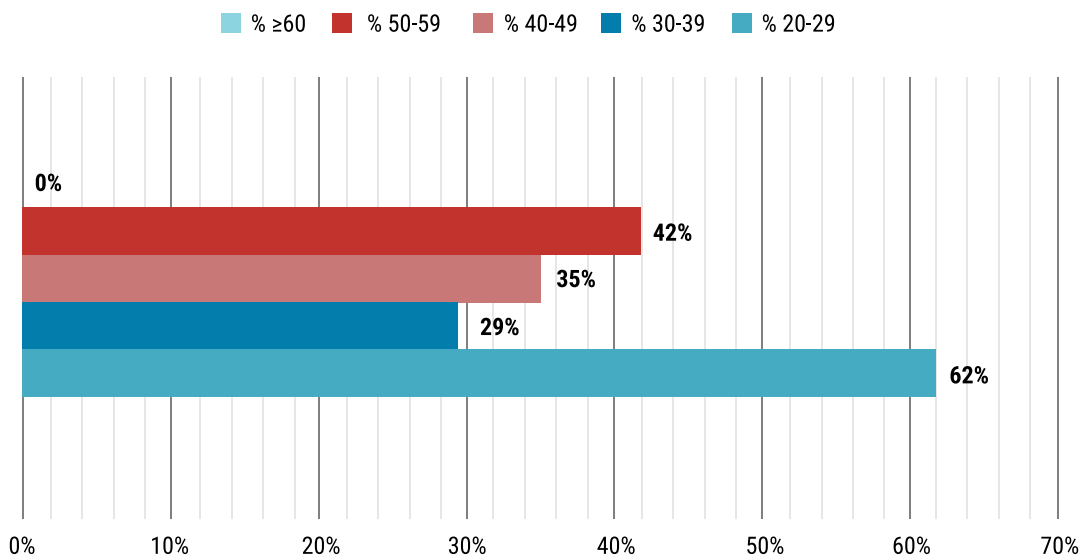
Burnout and gender

Analysis reveals a 4% higher prevalence among females compared to males. This aligns with the global IP survey of 2022, which indicated a 5% gender difference in burnout rates.

Burnout, work arrangement and role

The IP report indicates that remote work contributes significantly to burnout, with 47% of remote workers affected. In comparison, those who work at the workplace report a lower burnout rate of 35%, and a mixed work arrangement emerges as the preferred model for respondents (Chan et al., 2023). In Malta, however, contrary to global findings, the mixed model shows higher burnout susceptibility. Detailed analysis shows comparable burnout rates for those working fully at the workplace and those on hybrid schedules, while full-time remote workers show lower burnout levels (20%). Interestingly, **the highest burnout risk appears for those working 60–80% remotely**, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Burnout by work arrangement
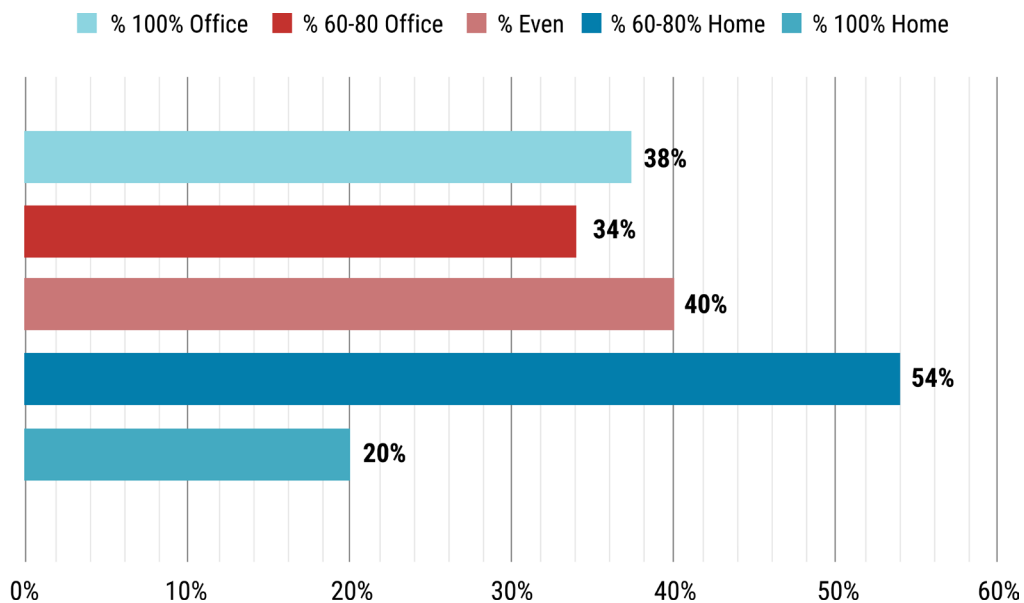
The 2022 global IP survey found entry-level workers to be most vulnerable to burnout (45%), while first-line managers showed the lowest rates (30%). In Malta, however, **burnout rates were highest among first-line managers/professionals** (44%), followed by entry-level employees (39%). Notably, IP's earlier 2019 study similarly identified first-line managers as particularly susceptible, with burnout at 48% (Chan et al., 2023). To discern whether the supervisory role itself or the level within an organization contributes more to the likelihood of experiencing burnout, the participants were questioned regarding their subordinates. The data analysis revealed little variation between the two subgroups, suggesting that the presence of subordinates does not significantly elevate the risk of burnout.

Relationship between burnout and general well-being

The survey specifically measured well-being. There was a high internal correlation (0.7) between the overall well-being result of the WHO-5 well-being index and respondents own rating of well-being. The WHO-5 values are quoted for this section.

Individuals with average well-being scores below 52% are considered at risk for depression (Psychiatric Research Unit, 1998). The study found that an alarming 54% of participants fell into this category. This percentage is similar to the findings of the 2021 workplace well-being survey conducted in Malta after the COVID-19 pandemic (Misco, 2021). The 2022 IP study reported a median well-being score of 42% for the general population. Our study found a median score of 44%, indicating a close alignment with the aforementioned study's findings (Chan et al., 2023).

The study results show a positive correlation of 0.44 between burnout and lack of well-being. It is imperative to acknowledge that the connection between burnout and an individual's overall well-being is not direct, as several other aspects can influence their overall well-being apart from their work. As a result, a positive correlation of 0.44 indicates that workplace burnout is a key factor contributing to an individual's general lack of well-being. The aforementioned correlation is further corroborated by the median well-being score of the individuals identified as suffering from burnout and those who are not, which stands at 28% and 56%, respectively.

Notably, the focus on the lack of well-being has been identified as a priority for over 75% of the survey participants in McKinsey's global study. The findings indicate that, following the pandemic, employees are becoming more aware of their well-being in perspective of life as a whole (World Economic Forum, 2021). In Malta, the emphasis on prioritising the general well-being of healthcare employees was highlighted by Galea (2014), Barbara and Camilleri (2019) and Grech & Grech (2021). Moreover, in a more general study by Esprimi in 2022, a significant proportion of respondents (53%) acknowledged that they had been dedicating excessive time to work and expressed a desire to prioritise their well-being. This finding underscores the growing recognition of the importance of work-life balance and the need to ensure that work demands do not come at the expense of personal health and well-being.

Burnout, organizational support and engagement

Burnout, identified as primarily an organizational issue, highlights the importance of including employee well-being in business strategy to build sustainable work environments. In this study, **a correlation of 0.42 between perceived organizational support and IP Burnout Scale performance scores** reinforces the impact of supportive organizational culture on enhancing performance and reducing burnout.

Workplace burnout correlates strongly with levels of organizational support. The survey results indicate that respondents who rated organizational support as low were twice as likely to experience burnout compared to those who did not. In contrast, respondents reporting high levels of support showed a significantly reduced burnout rate, with 50% not experiencing burnout and only 27% affected. The middle-range organizational support scores presented a balanced distribution between burnt-out and non-burnt-out respondents (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Relationship between burnout and level of organizational support
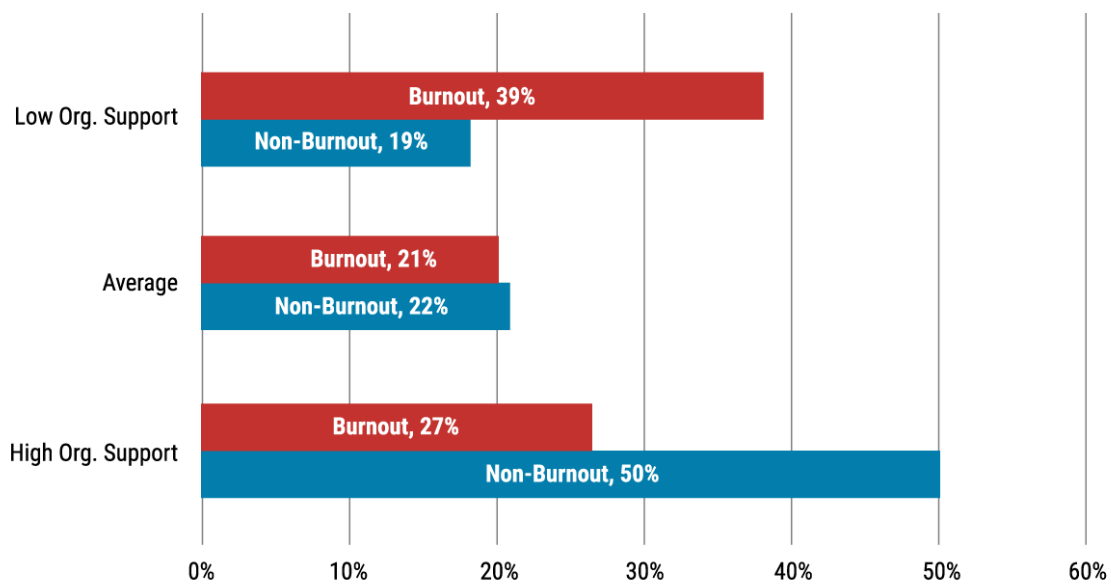
These findings align with the global IP survey, which emphasises the role of psychological safety, engagement and belonging in mitigating burnout risk (Chan et al., 2023). Consistent with previous local studies post-2019, this study reinforces the inverse relationship between organizational support and burnout, highlighting the importance of organizational backing for employee well-being.

Data shows that, from an organizational perspective, strategic initiatives to prevent burnout enhance productivity and sustainability, directing efforts toward achieving optimal performance. Correlation analysis demonstrates a positive relationship (r = 0.53) between employee engagement and work performance, underscoring the importance of fostering engagement as part of burnout prevention strategies.

These findings demonstrate a significant proportion (85%) of individuals who do not experience burnout exhibit high levels of engagement in their respective organizations. Moreover, the population that is not experiencing burnout shows 45% more engagement when compared to their burnt-out counterparts. These results align with the latest study conducted by IP, which underscores a 49% increase in engagement for the non-burnout population. These findings emphasise the crucial role of avoiding burnout to promote employee engagement, which is closely linked with productivity, retention and sustainability (Chan et al., 2023).

Major sources of burnout

Maslach's 2017 research has shown that burnout is a complex issue that can arise from various dimensions, namely workload, control, reward, community, values, and fairness. In light of the Maltese Government's National Economic Vision 2021–2031, which prioritises improving work quality and well-being, a comprehensive analysis of the survey data was conducted to understand better the underlying causes of burnout for the Maltese working population.

Data were analysed using the Maslach dimensions to explore the primary sources. While a fair representation of all six dimensions was present, the results revealed that the most common contributors to burnout in Malta are workload and reward, with almost twice the frequency of the other dimensions (see Figure 6).

Figure 6
Occurrence of the six Areas of Worklife
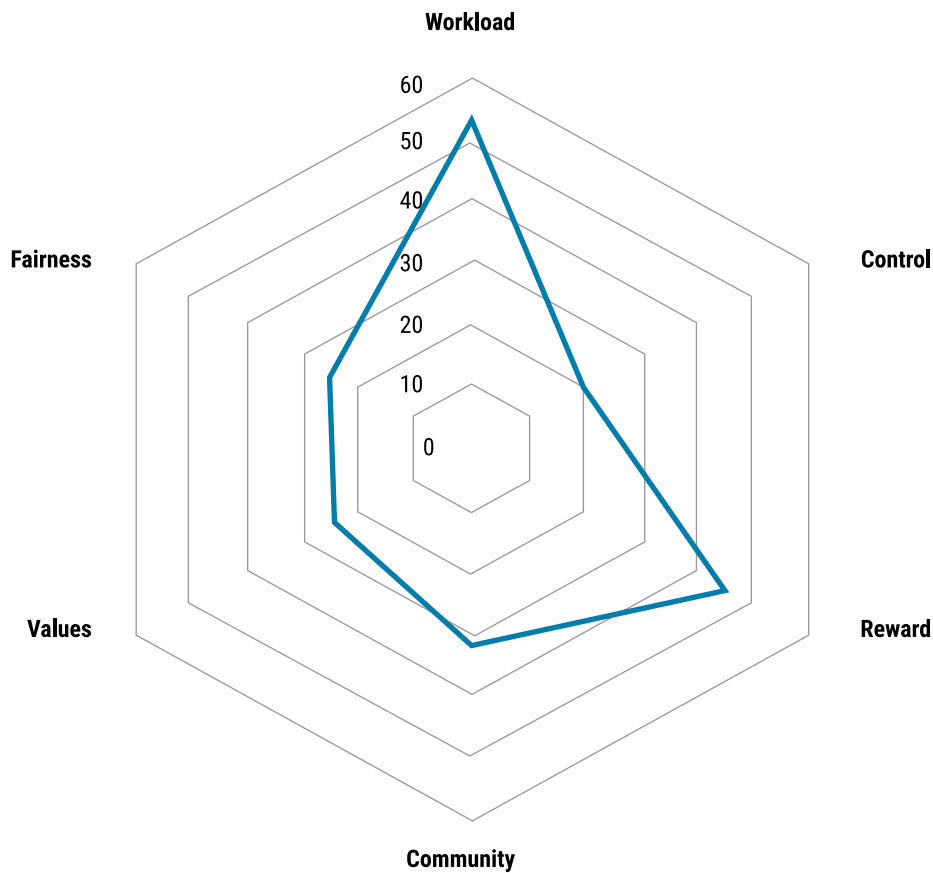
According to the 2022 national survey by Esprimi, a significant majority of respondents (63%) cited workload and rewards as the primary factors influencing their decision to either remain in or switch jobs. This finding underscores the importance of these two factors in the contemporary working population and highlights a potential area of national focus.

As burnout affects distinct subsets of the workforce in different ways we analysed the prevalence of each of the six dimensions by gender, age, organizational position and sector. Specifically, women tend to experience burnout due to inadequate rewards, while men often cite an excessive workload as a primary cause. Additionally, individuals under 30 years of age and those over 50 years are more likely to suffer from burnout due to insufficient compensation. At the same time, those between the ages of 30 and 49 years of age tend to struggle with an excessive workload. Further, the lowest positions tend to be affected by an inadequate reward system, while the higher positions are more susceptible to excessive workload.

This study also examined whether the responsibility of caring for children increases the likelihood of burnout. Surprisingly, the results indicated the opposite, with individuals who do not have children under their direct care being 18% more vulnerable to burnout than those who do. Additionally, gender-based analysis revealed minimal differences.

Summary of research findings

The primary objective of this research was to understand the extent of burnout experienced by the working population in Malta and to compare these findings with the most recent global research (Chan et al., 2023). Table 2 tabulates these research findings. Both studies align closely in their findings, with the primary difference being the categorisation of preferred work arrangements. The global study employed a broader range (>80% on-site and >80% remote), while this study we adopted a more granular approach by isolating and analysing the extremes (100% on-site and 100% remote work). Based on this observation the prevalence of workplace burnout in the working population in Malta at the time of study aligns with data from the latest international findings.

Table 2

Study findings compared to the global burnout research by Chan et al. (2023)

Topic	Findings from Global Research (Chan et al., 2023)	Findings from Malta	Comments
Overall burnout rate	38.1%	37.6%	Comparable results
Prevalent burnout dimension	Exhaustion	Exhaustion	Comparable results
Gender most susceptible	Female	Female	Comparable results
Age most susceptible	Younger age groups (<35 years)	Younger age groups (<30 years)	Comparable results
General well-being score	42%	44%	Comparable results
Preferred work arrangement	Hybrid work (even split)	100% remote work	Different inferences
Employee engagement	Non-burnt out population 49% are more engaged	Non-burnt out population 45% are more engaged	Comparable results
Organizational support	Non-burnt-out population is 217% more supported than the burnout population, showing a strong inverse relationship between burnout and organizational support.	Non-burnt-out population is 85% more supported than the burnout population, showing a strong inverse relationship between burnout and organizational support.	Comparable inferences
Burnout and productivity	Individuals experiencing burnout tend to exhibit reduced levels of productivity and work quality compared to those who are not.	85% of individuals who do not experience burnout show high levels of engagement. Robust positive correlation between performance and engagement.	Comparable inferences

Discussion - What does this mean for practice in Malta

The current state of affairs is deeply concerning, as unsustainable work practices continue to erode individuals' well-being and productivity, fuelling a rise in mental health problems and placing a significant burden on the economy. This cycle not only exacerbates distress for employees but also creates broader societal and economic challenges, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change.

This study highlights the strong connection between personal well-being and productivity, emphasising the widespread impact of burnout in Malta, where nearly 40% of the working population is affected. Exhaustion is identified as the leading cause, with women experiencing slightly higher rates, suggesting possible gender disparities in workplace stressors. Importantly, the study reveals that flexible work arrangements and a positive work culture significantly reduce burnout, while lower burnout rates are associated with higher employee engagement.

Aligned with existing research on burnout, these findings highlight workplace burnout as a pressing concern for Malta, akin to trends seen in other industrialised nations. This is particularly significant for the younger workforce, who will play a pivotal role in driving the nation's economic growth. The insights provided by this study offer a roadmap for organizations to re-evaluate traditional work practices, focusing on sustainable strategies that prioritise employee well-being.

The study's contribution to the national dialogue on well-being and workplace sustainability is both timely and critical. By presenting robust empirical evidence, it equips policymakers and employers with actionable insights to address burnout. Drawing from global best practices while tailoring solutions to the local context, Malta has the opportunity to foster healthier, more productive work environments that can sustain both individual and national prosperity.

Sally Clarke, a well-being and burnout expert, and John Chan, an organizational psychologist and researcher, argue that reducing burnout requires a holistic re-evaluation of work (2023). This involves critically examining the purpose of work and embracing new perspectives on the balance between work and free time. They highlight the inherent tension between the necessity of work and the human desire for freedom and self-expression, often resulting in an unsustainable relationship with work. If this

tension remains unaddressed, it will continue to fuel the stress and pressures that lead to burnout, underscoring the urgent need for systemic change in how work is approached and structured.

Chan and Clarke (2023) agree that burnout prevention needs to occur at societal, organizational and personal levels. Therefore, different approaches are required at each level. At the societal level, regulations at national and international levels should be established to steer organizations into preventing psychosocial health hazards at work. For example, employers can improve working conditions by implementing organizational interventions, such as flexible work arrangements, manageable workloads and frameworks to address harassment and discrimination. The implementation of meaningful and enforced penalties for non-compliance is also necessary. At the organizational level, companies need to put into action the ample data showing that treating people fairly is a win for the triple bottom line. This includes creating better work processes and healthier cultures, such as shifting to reduced working hours. At the individual level, people should recognise toxic work environments' extractive and exploitative nature and demand change from their organizations and societies. They should also take radical responsibility for their own well-being (Clarke & Chan, 2023).

The discussion of sustainability would be incomplete without referencing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN), (UN, 2015). The SDGs present a comprehensive framework that aims to address global challenges through seventeen distinct pillars to be achieved by 2030. With ten of these pillars impacting the world of work directly or indirectly, employers have a crucial role in shaping a sustainable future of work. Particularly concerning burnout and its prevention, SDGs 3 and 8 are closely connected. These two pillars advocate the promotion of well-being and economic advancement for everyone by providing complete and productive employment opportunities and promoting decent work conditions for all.

Regarding the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, organizations are responsible for proactively and responsibly acting to put people's needs at the forefront and recognise the impact of businesses on human rights and the corresponding responsibility to respect them (UN, 2011). The discussion topic is directly linked to various human rights, such as the right to just and favourable conditions at work, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health and the right to a safe and healthy working environment (UN, 1996; International Labour Organization, 1998).

Given that the Government of Malta has identified the promotion of personal well-being as a critical component of its National Economic Vision 2021–2031 and that mitigating burnout aligns with the UN SDGs for 2030, Maltese policymakers can leverage the findings of this study as a foundation for tackling this urgent matter. With its small size, Malta has the potential to make significant strides towards enhancing overall quality of life, promoting a thriving community, and establishing a more sustainable economy faster than larger nations. As a result, Malta can serve as a driving force for larger nations that seek to achieve similar objectives.

Key problems and plausible solutions

It is essential to avoid the misconception that it is the fact that we work that is affecting our well-being negatively. As well described in the latest Gallup at Work summit, "It's not the work, it's the workplace" or rather how we do and measure work, that is misaligned (Gallup, 2024). Work is integral to an individual's sense of purpose and personal fulfilment; and beyond its importance on an individual level, work serves as the backbone of society, fuelling progress and development. Work has been the driving force behind civilisation since the dawn of humanity and remains critical in driving economic growth and promoting prosperity in the developed world.

According to the research of Garcia and Miralles (2016) in their book "Ikigai", specific criteria can contribute to a long and healthy life. These include maintaining an active lifestyle, embracing a slower pace, rekindling our relationship with nature, living mindfully and pursuing our passions. Rather than the act of working itself, our well-being is negatively impacted by doing work we do not feel connected with, constantly in a rush, failing to live in the present, being disconnected from nature and being sedentary for long periods. A similar perspective is also highlighted by Leiter and Maslach (1999) and reiterated by Moss (2021), where connecting to a purpose (doing what we love) and an unmanageable workload (always in a hurry) are two key factors directly linked to burnout.

Upon analysing the evolution of labour, which is currently experiencing Industry 3.0, 4.0, and 5.0 simultaneously, it becomes apparent that we are struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of technological advancements (Chan et al., 2023). The evolution of work has created a misalignment between the nature of work in the modern world and our expectations and measures based on the traditional notions we were taught.

In the industrial world, productivity was once measured by the amount of time and effort put in. However, with the latest technological advancements, this concept is becoming obsolete. The value of modern work is no longer based on time and effort but instead on the elevated value of human critical thinking, creativity and innovation.

With over a decade of experience in various leadership roles, the first author has observed that individuals possess an innate desire to perform their best and contribute value to their organizations and society. Often, there exists a misalignment between what is expected from employees in their work and the actual work setup, which can hinder their performance and create conflicting priorities. At their 2024 summit, Gallup reported that over half of the global workforce lacks clarity regarding their role expectations at work (Gallup, 2024). This misalignment is often a significant cause of chronic stress that can ultimately lead to burnout.

In their publication "First Things First", Covey, Merrill and Merrill (1994) assert that prioritising our values, morality, direction, and mission is essential, superseding the prioritisation of our commitments, schedules, goals and activities. The authors stress the need for time management that prioritises importance and quality of life rather than urgency and efficiency. They highlight urgency addiction as a genuine problem that can lead to unfulfillment and a lack of peace. Covey et al. suggest that to achieve peace and productivity in our lives, we must align our lives with our values and purpose, using our four human endowments: self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. Covey's more recent work emphasises the significance of taking care of one's physical, spiritual, mental and emotional development to achieve effectiveness (Covey, 2004).

Covey's claims are echoed in Loehr and Schwartz's 2003 book "The Power of Full Engagement". They emphasise that effectively managing our energy, rather than our time, is the key to achieving high performance and personal renewal. They argue that energy, not time, is the fundamental currency that drives high performance. To attain full engagement we can draw on four distinct but interconnected energy sources: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. It's just as important to renew our energy as it is to expend it, and practising positive energy rituals is essential for sustained high performance. The authors suggest a three-step process of defining our purpose, recognising and accepting reality, and taking action to achieve transformation.
In a nutshell, it is essential to prioritise our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual

health and to live mindfully and purposefully in line with our values and integrity. Taking control of our lives and making time for the things that matter to us is synonymous with energy, productivity and personal fulfilment. These themes are consistently highlighted in the aforementioned works, written in different contexts, but all pointing towards the same direction. These works reinforce the foundation of the Areas of Worklife Model (AW) established by Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (2004). As mentioned previously, this model offers a structured framework for examining six aspects of work life: Workload, Control, Reward, Community, Fairness, and Values. According to the model, burnout arises from prolonged inconsistencies between individuals and their work environment in terms of one or more of these six areas.

A transformative shift in how we approach work is undeniably essential to effectively combat burnout and break the cycle. Research has shown that by doing so, we can benefit not only ourselves as individuals but also organizations and society at large. Worldwide burnout prevention experts (Chan & Clarke, 2024; Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, Maslach, 2017; Moss, 2021) are stressing the importance of taking proactive steps to address burnout, which was once seen as an individual problem but is now recognised as a responsibility of organizations and society. Organizations and economies prioritising addressing burnout are more likely to thrive and grow sustainably.

Loehr and Schwartz (2003) emphasise that achieving full engagement and sustained high performance requires a holistic approach to managing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy. Physical energy can be enhanced through adequate sleep, regular exercise, balanced nutrition and short recovery breaks; collectively supporting stamina and resilience. Emotional energy is fostered by cultivating positive relationships, practising gratitude, and employing stress management techniques such as deep breathing and mindfulness. Mental energy is optimised by setting clear priorities, minimising distractions, engaging in continuous learning and adhering to structured routines that promote focus and cognitive efficiency. Spiritual energy, often the foundation of purpose and meaning, is renewed by aligning actions with core values, contributing to a greater cause and engaging in reflective practices such as meditation or journaling. Together, these strategies create a comprehensive framework for addressing the interconnected energy domains necessary for individuals and organizations to thrive in demanding environments.

Maslach (2017) highlights the critical role of preventive strategies in addressing burnout by fostering healthy workplace cultures that integrate the six areas of work life (AWs). Central to these strategies is the promotion of employee engagement and well-being, which Maslach identifies as essential components of burnout prevention. A key aspect of creating a healthy workplace is achieving an optimal fit between the individual and their job, ensuring alignment with personal capabilities and organizational demands. This concept is consistent with Covey et al.'s (1994) findings, which emphasise the importance of fulfilling core psychological needs such as autonomy, belongingness, competence, psychological safety, fairness, positive emotions and meaning. These fundamental needs have been empirically linked to increased intrinsic motivation and enhanced overall well-being; further underscoring their relevance in building resilient and engaged workforces.

Cultivating a healthy workplace is a multifaceted endeavour influenced by various interdependent factors, including organizational structure, company culture, leadership styles, team dynamics and individual behaviours (Chan & Clarke, 2024). According to Chan and Clarke (2024) organizational structure plays a critical role by shaping communication pathways, decision-making processes and role clarity; all of which can impact employee engagement and well-being. Company culture further defines the shared values, norms and practices that influence employee experiences and the overall work environment. Additionally, individual contributions, such as adaptability, resilience and collaboration, serve as vital components in fostering a supportive and productive atmosphere.

Chan and Clarke (2024) emphasise that while there is no universal blueprint for creating a healthy workplace, fostering key leadership traits can significantly influence outcomes. Effective leaders who demonstrate empathy, transparency, and accountability are better equipped to build trust, provide meaningful support, and address the needs of their teams. They also highlight the importance of leaders promoting psychological safety, encouraging open communication and addressing burnout risk factors proactively. By focusing on these variables, organizations can create environments that, not only prevent burnout but also enhance employee satisfaction and productivity; paving the way for long-term success.

According to Moss (2021), developing emotional intelligence and prioritising empathy and authenticity are crucial leadership skills organizations must possess to foster a healthy and productive work environment. A thriving workforce relies on managers with

strong leadership skills and emotional intelligence, capable of fostering motivation and engagement. Managers must understand each team member individually and set fair and clear, holistic goals and priorities (Gallup, 2024). It is recommended that this strategy be integrated into the organization's values and conveyed authentically in the workplace. To guarantee alignment to and sustainability of the organizational culture, efforts and resources should be dedicated to the hiring process, emphasising cultural and values compatibility (Wickman, 2012).

By embracing these skills, leaders can effectively connect with their team members, build trust and create a culture of psychological safety. As a result, employees feel valued, supported and empowered to bring their best selves to work. Investing in these skills can lead to improved employee engagement, retention, and overall organizational success. Ultimately, this will result in a more sustainable economy, a healthier society and a win-win situation for all.

Limitations

Although this study achieved statistical significance it should be noted that a broader sample size would yield more accurate conclusions, especially among specific underrepresented segments of the population. These segments include the 3rd gender, workers under 20 years of age, foreign workers in Malta, individuals working in particular industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, real estate, arts, entertainment and recreation, repair of household goods and other services) and minimum-wage workers. Moreover, the fact that the questionnaire was only available online and in English may have contributed to the limited responses from specific population segments.

Suggested further research

Based on this study's limitations and findings, conducting a more extensive investigation on a sub-population level is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of the situation. While this study contributes to the general awareness of the issue, it is essential to take a holistic approach and examine practical solutions for addressing burnout. A study on organizations and cultures with low or no burnout rates and the key traits of individuals who claim to have exceptional well-being are recommended. Such studies will provide deeper insights into comprehensive understandings and ways of implementing strategies to attain workplace well-being and sustainability.

Concluding remarks

Findings from this and various large-scale studies, including those conducted by the WEF (2021), Deloitte (2022), and IP (2023), as well as national studies conducted by MISCO (2021) and Esprimi (2022) all converge on a similar set of recommendations. These studies highlight the critical importance of prioritising employee well-being by addressing key factors such as workload management, fair and adequate compensation and flexible work arrangements. By implementing these measures, organizations can create a supportive environment that fosters healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life; ultimately enhancing overall satisfaction and productivity.

As highlighted in the introduction, the evolution of labour demands a fundamental shift in how we approach work. In an ever-changing world, the rise of digitalisation has fostered an always-on culture, blurring the boundaries between professional and personal life. However, as Moss (2021) underscores, relentless hard work does not inherently guarantee success or happiness. Instead, prioritising well-being is a more reliable pathway to achieving both productivity and fulfilment. Similarly, Chan and Clarke (2021) emphasise that burnout is not an individual failing but a consequence of organizational cultures and societal expectations. Only organizations that embed well-being into their core strategies can create sustainable work environments capable of enduring over time.

From both societal and economic perspectives, prioritising employees' mental and physical well-being is essential. It enhances performance, fosters motivation, and boosts productivity, creating a win-win scenario for individuals and organizations alike. Proactive measures to promote personal well-being and prevent burnout are now imperative. The WEF (2021) highlights that poor well-being exerts significant economic pressures, a challenge that becomes even more pressing amid the current global fight against recession. By embracing a culture of care and accountability, organizations can position themselves not just for resilience but for long-term success.

This research aims to ignite a deeper understanding of workplace burnout, encouraging both individuals and organizations to reflect on the critical interplay between work, purpose, values and meaning. By applying the insights gained, we can envision a future

where work and life are seamlessly integrated, fostering environments where personal well-being is not just prioritised but sustained. Such a shift holds the promise of redefining success, not by productivity alone, but by the holistic fulfilment and resilience of those who contribute to it.

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