

PSYCHOLOGY IN WORK AND ORGANIZATIONS

SUFFERING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Psychology of work and organization

Organizational suffering

Suffering linked to the institutional fact itself: Institutional life is based on mutual pacts and agreements—both conscious and unconscious—that bind individuals to one another (psychological contract). These agreements require personal sacrifices and impose demands, but they should also provide benefits and make the institution's primary task possible.

The institution may generate suffering in two opposite ways:

- **Excess of institution**: institutional demands, constraints and sacrifices become too heavy for the subject

- **Deficiency of institution**: the institution fails to honour its pacts and contracts, to protect the conditions of the relationship, or to make its primary task possible.

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Organizational suffering

Suffering linked to a particular institution: suffering may arise from the specific institution in which a person is situated, not only from institutional life in general or from the individual's personal history.

It may be connected to:

- **The institution's social structure**: the specific way that institution is organized as a collective reality and structures relationships among its members

- **The institution's unconscious structure**: the shared, often unrecognized agreements, meanings and psychic dynamics that shape the relationships within that institution.

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Organizational suffering

Suffering linked to the individual subject's psychic configuration: the subject's psychic configuration refers to the individual way in which a person is psychically organized and experiences institutional relationships.

This configuration may influence how the subject responds to the institutional bond and may therefore contribute to suffering.

However, institutional suffering cannot be explained solely through the subject's personal history. It is also rooted in the network of relationships and unconscious processes that connect the subject to the institution.

The subjects may contribute to institutional suffering through their specific psychic configuration, but suffering results from the interaction between the subject and the institutional bond.

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Organizational suffering

Suffering becomes pathological when anxiety can no longer be thought about, contained or transformed. Instead of being processed through reflection, dialogue and shared meaning-making, anxiety becomes overwhelming and begins to paralyze the individual, the group and the institution

Disintegration anxiety
Persecutory anxiety
Depressive anxiety
Separation and loss anxiety
Task-related anxiety'

FATIGUE **SUFFERING**

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Organizational suffering

Disturbance of the Founding and Instituting Function → institutional illusion

Obstacles to the Fulfilment of the Primary Task



Difficulties in Establishing and Maintaining Psychic Space

SYMPTOMS

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Organizational suffering

Symptoms are the most visible way in which organizational suffering becomes manifest.

Level	Symptoms / Problems
Individual symptoms	Stress; anxiety; exhaustion; burnout; depressive symptoms; sleep disturbances; psychosomatic problems; helplessness; alienation; reduced self-esteem; withdrawal and disengagement.
Relational symptoms	Aggression; incivility; repeated conflicts; exclusion; ostracism; rumor-spreading; humiliation; harassment; mobbing; bullying; the formation of coalitions.
Organizational symptoms	Absenteeism; employee turnover; reduced productivity; declining quality of work; loss of information; sabotage; increased errors; deterioration of the organizational climate; loss of meaning at work.

FOCUS

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Stress and Burnout

STRESS: stress is a non-specific response of the organism to every request of the environment made on it (Selye, 1957)

✓ **Eustress** --> Positive stress triggers adaptive behaviors in response to environmental demands

✗ **Distress** --> Negative stress triggers maladaptive responses. The overwhelming stimuli and associated feelings that come with stress are detrimental. Stressful situations surpass an individual's ability to cope

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Stress and Burnout

Distress

- A person experiences distress when the **demands of the organization exceed** their capabilities, or when their **needs are not met by the opportunities** the organization provides;
- Work-related stress can be seen as a "**perceived imbalance**" between environmental demands and the resources available to individuals;
- Stress can occur in situations of **dissatisfaction**, where individuals feel unable to fully realize their potential within the organization;
- A person may also feel stress even in a state of '**perceived passivity**,' when their available personal and contextual resources significantly surpass the demands of their work

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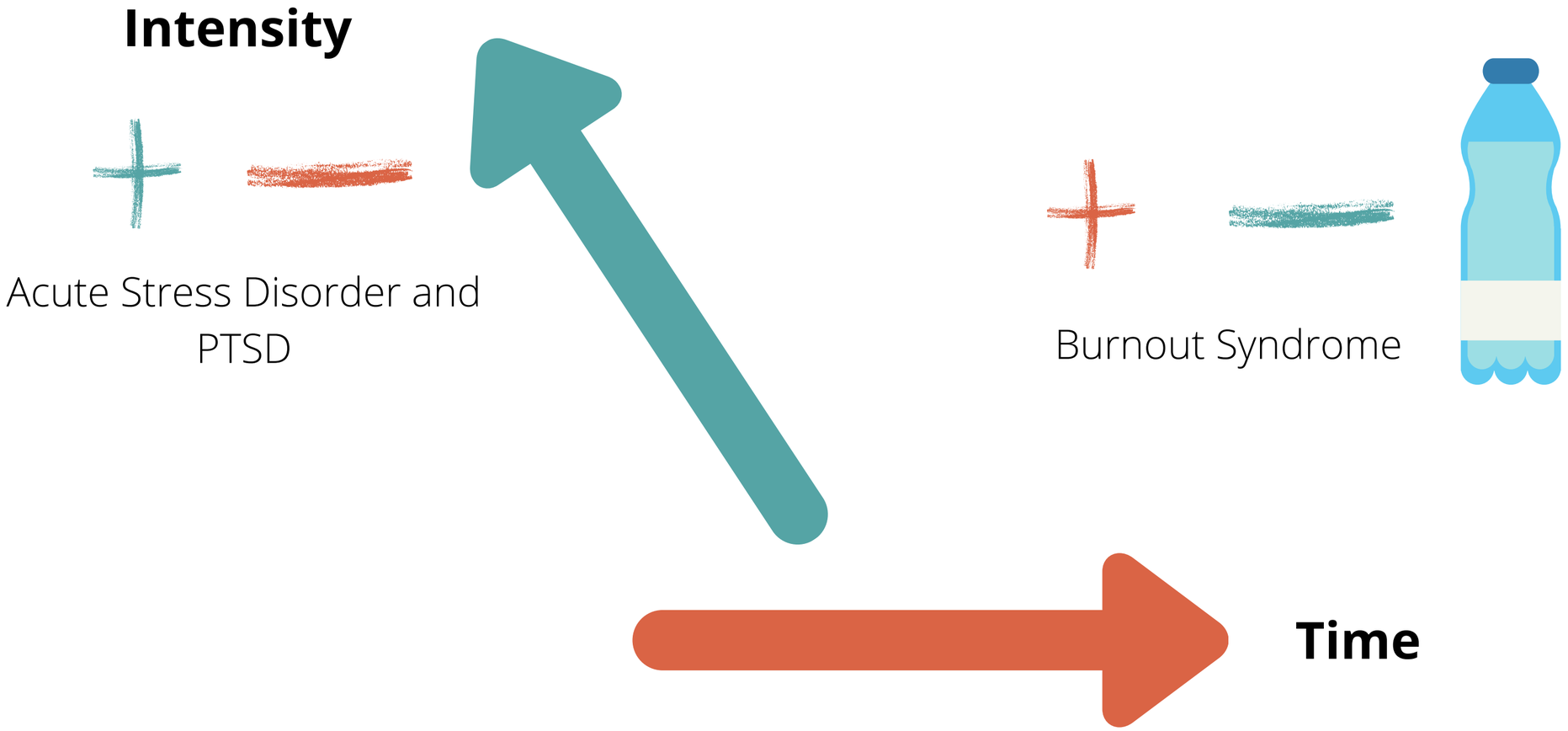
Stress and Burnout



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Stress and Burnout

Maslach (1976) describes burnout by distinguishing **three dimensions**:

Emotional exhaustion: refers to the fatigue and distress experienced by workers as a result of a stressful work environment

Depersonalization: Indicates a tendency to stop perceiving users as subjects, leading to treatment characterized by coldness, apathy, or aggression

Personal gratification: refers to the satisfaction associated with the professional success experienced by the individual

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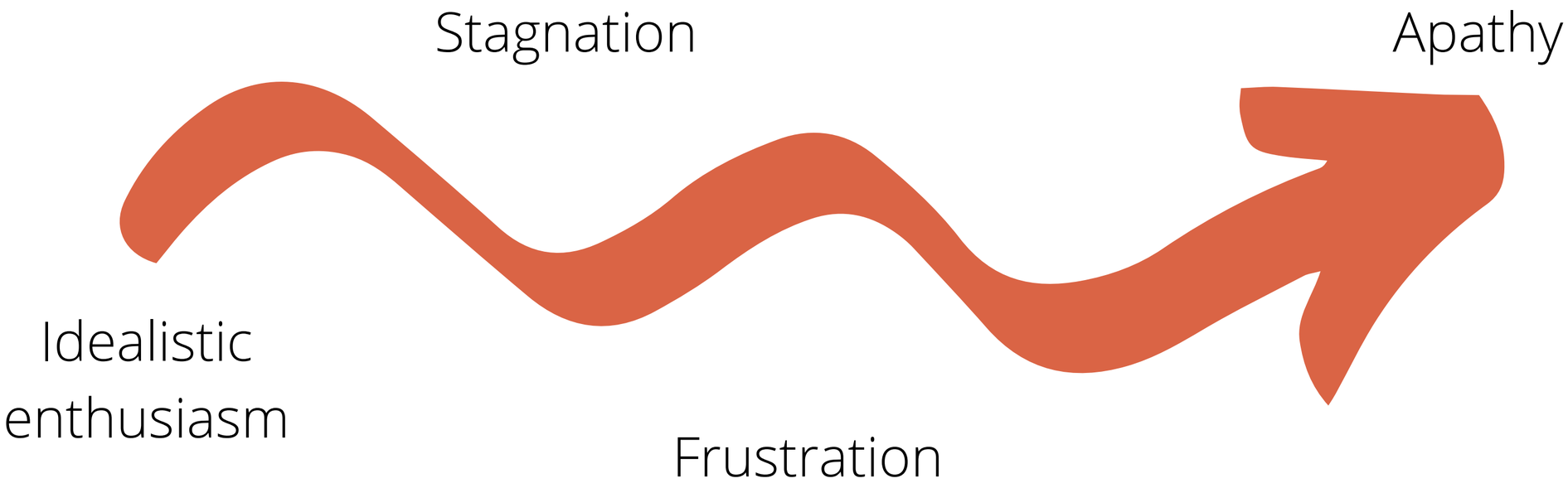
Stress and Burnout



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Stress and Burnout

I. *Emotional Exhaustion*

I feel emotionally drained from my work
I feel used up at the end of the workday
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job
Working with people all day is really a strain for me
I feel burned out from my work
I feel frustrated by my job
I feel I'm working too hard on my job
Working with people directly puts too much stress on me
I feel like I'm at the end of my rope

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Stress and Burnout

Depersonalization

I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal "objects"

I've become more callous toward people since I took this job

I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally

I don't really care what happens to some recipients

I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems

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Stress and Burnout

. *Personal Accomplishment*

I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things

I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients

I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work

I feel very energetic

I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients

I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients

I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job

In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly