



Chartered Institute of
Information Security

Pulse:

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CIISec Live 2023

This year's flagship
event will be held in
Manchester.

IT Burnout

The Cost of
constantly feeling
swamped.

Educating the next generation

Organisations are struggling to
recruit the necessary expertise to
protect and defend themselves.



IT BURNOUT

THE COST OF CONSTANTLY FEELING SWAMPED

The constant need to adapt and perform at a high level, under tight deadlines, can lead to executive burnout, a form of trauma caused by the unrelenting feeling of being swamped and unable to cope.

Patrick Rea

Campaign Director of charity PTSD Resolution



Over half (51%) of cybersecurity professionals are kept up at night by the stress of the job and work challenges, according to CIISec's 2020/21 State of the Profession report.

Burnout is a syndrome characterised by emotional exhaustion, depression, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. It is particularly prevalent among individuals in high-stress occupations, such as IT homeworkers. Burnout can manifest in various ways, in mental and physical symptoms, including substance abuse.

Causes of Executive Burnout in the sector include:

- 1 Excessive workload:** As IT sector workers are often expected to manage an ever-growing list of project responsibilities. The constant pressure to meet deadlines and stay ahead of the competition and criminal adversaries can lead to excessive work hours, ultimately resulting in burnout.
- 2 High expectations and performance pressures:** cyber security work can directly impact the public profile and success of major organisations. This heightened level of scrutiny can create immense pressure on security IT to consistently perform at an optimal level.

- 3 Lack of work-life balance:** the work demands long hours and constant availability, making it difficult for executives. Over time, the inability to disconnect from work can lead to chronic stress.
- 4 Rapid technological advancements:** staff must stay updated with the latest advances and trends. This constant need for learning and adapting can be both mentally and physically draining.

The Human Givens Approach to Understanding and Treating Burnout

PTSD Resolution is a charity that has helped UK armed forces' veterans to resolve military trauma, with some 3,600 referrals to date, with a 78% success rate.

The charity uses Human Givens (HG) therapy exclusively as the best method to resolve trauma, through a network of 200 therapists nationwide. Chairman Tony Gauvain says:

"Many of the veterans we help work in the IT sector. HG is the best and most consistent method of resolving trauma, however it is caused. As a charity we treat all armed forces' veterans free of charge, other people can access the HG Institute's network of members for paid treatment."

"Executive burnout and military trauma are not dissimilar in their symptoms: depression, anger and insomnia for example. Basically, it's about feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, exacerbated by bad memories - whether it was a military incident or stressful encounters with your office manager."

HG is centred on the idea that humans have innate emotional and physical needs, which must be met in order to maintain optimal mental health. When these needs are unmet, psychological distress can occur, potentially leading to burnout.



Therapy with a Human Givens therapist would start with an initial assessment:

- 1 Identifying unmet emotional needs:** Working with the client to explore which emotional needs are not being met, such as the need for security, autonomy, connection, achievement, and meaning. By pinpointing these unmet needs, the therapist can gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the client's burnout.
- 2 Evaluating the client's resources and coping strategies:** The therapy approach acknowledges that individuals possess innate resources for meeting their emotional needs. A therapist would assess the client's current resources and coping strategies to determine if they are effectively addressing their needs.
- 3 Exploring the client's patterns of thinking and behaviour:** The way individuals think and behave can directly impact their ability to meet their emotional needs. The therapist would work with the client to identify any maladaptive thought patterns or behaviours that may be hindering their well-being and contributing to burnout.

Identify methods for organisations to create an environment that enables staff to build resilience and flourish, even during challenging times.

Treating Executive Burnout

Once the assessment process has uncovered the unmet emotional needs and contributing factors, a Human Givens therapist would employ various techniques to help the client address and overcome their burnout. These interventions include:

- 1 Developing a tailored action plan:** This involves setting achievable goals, exploring new coping strategies, or identifying ways to create a healthier work-life balance.
- 2 Utilising therapeutic techniques:** Including guided imagery, relaxation exercises, and cognitive restructuring, which can help clients reduce stress, reframe negative thoughts, and develop more adaptive coping mechanisms.
- 3 Enhancing emotional regulation:** Teaching the client techniques for managing their emotions more effectively, such as mindfulness exercises or breathing techniques.
- 4 Strengthening social support:** Working with the client to identify ways to strengthen their social connections and access additional resources, such as support groups or professional networks.

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After undergoing HG therapy, a client's professional life can significantly improve, leading to increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and enhanced emotional well-being.

This therapy helps develop better time management, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, resulting in higher productivity and performance.

Employers benefit directly, as employees become more engaged, motivated, and committed to their work. This contributes to a positive work culture, better teamwork, and lower healthcare costs. In essence, both the IT worker and their employer gain, fostering a more satisfying and balanced professional life and a healthier work environment.

An Employers' Framework for Staff Mental Health

All organisations, in the IT and other sectors, should have an agreed framework in place to avoid and resolve the problem of burnout, whether for employed IT staff or contractors, especially when they are homeworking, in isolation. HR managers, line managers and others who manage IT staff can take positive steps:

- 1 Foster a positive work environment:** One that values collaboration, open communication, and employee well-being can help mitigate the risks of staff burnout. Encouraging teamwork and recognising individual contributions can go a long way in creating a supportive atmosphere.
- 2 Encourage a healthy work-life balance:** This may include encouraging employees to join regular social or sporting meetups and to take vacations.
- 3 Provide support and resources:** Such as through access to mental health professionals or stress management workshops. Additionally, providing opportunities for professional development and growth can help alleviate the pressure to constantly perform at a high level.
- 4 Prioritise self-care:** Encouraging staff to prioritise self-care to prevent burnout. This includes setting boundaries, encouraging regular physical activity, perhaps with free sports memberships, practising mindfulness, and seeking support when needed.

Employer Training: TATE

Trauma Awareness Training for Everyone (TATE) is a customised training program using the Human Givens approach, created and delivered by the charity PTSD Resolution. This program is designed for organisations aiming to ensure that managers can help staff to effectively manage challenges, recognise emerging mental health issues, and, crucially, know how to direct staff towards professional help.

The training is offered both in-person and online. The sessions are conducted live, fostering group discussions and providing opportunities for attendees to ask questions directly to the HG trainer.

TATE sessions range from a two-hour interactive presentation to a full day of instruction and activities. The program aims to familiarise HR staff, line managers, and senior management with essential concepts related to trauma.

By participating in the course, attendees will be able to:

- Recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma or burnout
- Understand the reasons behind these symptoms and the mechanisms of trauma (confusion and fear often contribute to individuals not seeking help)
- Develop coping and self-help strategies that can both prevent difficulties and foster recovery from symptoms
- Identify methods for organisations to create an environment that enables staff to build resilience and flourish, even during challenging times.

For further information on TATE and mental health support for forces' veterans and other staff, visit www.PTSDresolution.org