BOREOUT SYNDROME: A HIDDEN THREAT TO EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING, ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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SUMMARY

This paper explores boreout syndrome—an under-researched and often overlooked phenomenon in the modern workplace—and its broader implications for organizational health and climate. Boreout arises when employees experience chronic boredom, under-stimulation, a lack of meaningful work, and a persistent mismatch between job demands and individual capabilities. Unlike burnout, which results from excessive workload, boreout stems from insufficient challenges and engagement, often leading to reduced motivation, disengagement, and emotional fatigue. The paper argues that boreout should not be seen merely as an individual psychological issue but rather as a systemic organizational problem, reflecting deeper dysfunctions in structure, leadership, job design, and culture. It negatively affects organizational climate by fostering passivity, low morale, and emotional detachment among employees. At the same time, it compromises organizational health, weakening the organization's capacity to align its strategy, people, and processes in a cohesive and sustainable manner. By highlighting the organizational dimensions of boreout, the paper contributes to a more holistic understanding of employee well-being and underscores the need for proactive management approaches to foster healthier workplace.

KEY WORDS: *boreout syndrome, organizational health, organizational climate, employee well-being*

BOREOUT SINDROM: SKRIVENA PRETNJA DOBROBITI ZAPOSLENIH, ORGANIZACIONOM ZDRAVLJU I KLIMI U DIGITALNOM DOBU

SAŽETAK

Rad prikazuje još uvek nedovoljno istražen i često zanemaren boreout sindrom u savremenom radnom okruženju i njegove šire implikacije na organizaciono zdravlje i klimu. Boreout nastaje kada zaposleni na poslu osećaju hroničnu dosadu, nedovoljnu stimulaciju, nedostatak smisla tokom rada i kontinuirano neslaganje između zahteva posla i individualnih sposobnosti. Za

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razliku od burnout-a, koji je rezultat preopterećenosti zaposlenih, boreout proizilazi iz nedostatka izazova i angažovanosti, što često vodi ka smanjenoj motivaciji, emocionalnoj iscrpljenosti i distanciranosti. U radu je ukazano da boreout ne treba posmatrati samo kao individualni psihološki problem, već kao sistemski organizacioni problem koji odražava dublje disfunkcije u strukturi, liderstvu, dizajnu posla i organizacionoj kulturi. Boreout negativno utiče na organizacionu klimu podstičući pasivnost, nizak moral i emocionalno otuđenje među zaposlenima. Istovremeno, narušava organizaciono zdravlje slabeći sposobnost organizacije da uskladi svoju strategiju, ljude i procese na kohezivan i održiv način. Ukazivanjem na organizacione dimenzije boreout-a, ovaj rad doprinosi sveobuhvatnijem razumevanju dobrobiti zaposlenih i naglašava potrebu za proaktivnim menadžerskim pristupima u cilju izgradnje zdravijeg radnog okruženja.

KLJUČNE REČI: *boreout sindrom, organizaciono zdravlje, organizaciona klima, dobrobit zaposlenih*

INTRODUCTION

The world of work is affected by numerous changes due to digital technologies, automation, and changed employee expectations (Lukić Nikolić & Labus, 2024). Some employees are exposed to burnout, while others are "dying of boredom at work" (Chtioui et al., 2022). The awareness of boreout was raised in 2007 when Rothlin and Werder (2008) noticed that employees who are suffering from this syndrome are not able to function normally and conduct their work tasks. The phenomenon of boreout has been widely examined in management studies, particularly through the research conducted by Maria Ruth Stock (2015a; 2015b; 2016). In comparison to some other constructs such as burnout, job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, boreout and boredom is still not thoroughly researched and analysed and there is no availability of information on the prevalence of these organizational forms of employee behavior (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014).

Like burnout, boreout causes numerous syndromes to employees in the cognitive, emotional, psychological and behavioral sense (Čopkova, 2021). The main negative consequences of boreout syndrome are anxiety, depression, stress symptoms, counterproductive behaviours, absenteeism, job change and turnover which consequently lead to reduced organisational performance (Poirier et al., 2021; Toscanelli et al., 2022). For that reason, it is important for organisations, employers, leaders, and managers to understand and acknowledge boreout syndrome in order to eliminate it or at least avoid it as much as possible (Al-Mashadani, 2022). Furthermore, boreout syndrome represents a hidden but significant threat to organizational health and climate. The aim of this paper is to explore boreout syndrome and its broader implications for organizational health and climate in the digital age.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE

Organizational health is a multi-dimensional concept that reflects an organization's ability to function effectively, adapt to change, and sustain long-term performance. It encompasses alignment around a shared vision and strategy, the capacity for effective execution, and the ability to innovate and renew over time (McKinsey & Company, 2017). A healthy organization demonstrates strong internal functioning, including clear communication, engaged leadership, high employee morale, and cultural cohesion. More than just operational efficiency, organizational health also involves the alignment of values, motivation, and strategic direction, enabling the organization to respond resiliently to chal-

lenges while fostering a productive and psychologically safe work environment (Xenidis & Theocharous, 2014).

Organizational health can be conceptualized through three core dimensions: the degree to which employees are aligned around a shared vision and strategic direction; the effectiveness with which the organization implements its strategy; and its capacity for continuous innovation and renewal over time (Camp et al., 2024).

The health of each organizational component should be assessed using a comprehensive, integrated approach. Rather than evaluating parts in isolation, it is crucial to consider all relevant factors that influence a specific area of functioning. This reflects a holistic perspective, recognizing that every part of the organization is interconnected and contributes to the overall performance of the larger system (Rosene et al., 2021).

Organizations that actively invest in improving their health tend to perform significantly better. When organizations take deliberate steps to enhance areas such as strategic clarity, innovation, and internal alignment, they not only strengthen their internal culture but also see meaningful improvements in overall effectiveness. Even those starting from a weaker position can achieve substantial progress, particularly in defining direction and fostering a culture of learning. These improvements in organizational health often go hand in hand with stronger business performance and long-term growth (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Organizational climate can be understood as the collective perception employees have of their work environment, shaped by the organization's structures, practices, and interpersonal dynamics (Toyata et al., 2024). It comprises various elements—such as leadership approach, communication style, trust, fairness, role clarity, and performance expectations—that define how employees experience their daily work and interact within the organization. These shared perceptions not only distinguish one organization from another but also significantly influence employee attitudes, motivation, behavior, norms, values and assumptions (Janiukštis et al., 2024). Organizational climate serves as a key indicator of an organization's internal functioning and has a critical impact on its capacity to achieve strategic goals and maintain a healthy, productive work environment (Hussainy, 2022).

BOREOUT SYNDROME: KEY DEFINITIONS

Boreout syndrome is defined as a psychological disorder that occurs as a result of a cognitive comparison process in which expected demands at work exceed perceived demands (Stock, 2015a). This syndrome represents a crisis of meaning and purpose at work due to monotonous, repetitive, and highly standardised tasks and activities that lead to a lack of mental stimuli and loss of interest (Stock, 2015b; Abubakar et al., 2022). The three main components of boreout are boredom, a lack of professional interest, and a lack of challenge (Rothlin & Werder 2008). Boredom, as a negative affective state, is the result of a situation in which employees have nothing to do or their tasks and activities are meaningless, repetitive, and monotonous. It is an unpleasant state in which employees feel a lack of interest in work and have difficulties concentrating (Fisher, 1993). A lack of professional interest occurs when employees lose interest in their job or/and entire organisation and career. Consequently, a lack of challenge is experienced by those employees who perceive their working tasks as below their capabilities and competencies (Cabrera Noriega, 2014). According to

Stock (2015b, p. 574) boreout is "a negative psychological state of low work-related arousal manifested in three forms: a job boredom, crisis of meaning and crisis of growth".

Poirier et al. (2021) encompassed insufficient workload, under-stimulation, work-related guilt, and incompatibility of personal work values as key factors of boreout. The first factor – insufficient workload refers to the lack of work as the first signal of boredom. It happens in all situations in which employees do not have enough tasks and activities, have a lot of free time, or if they complete some other personal obligations during working hours. The second factor – under-stimulation refers to tasks which are boring, monotonous, repetitive, routine, and meaningless which may cause the feeling of underused employee potential – not showing their full knowledge and skills (Cabrera Noriega, 2014). The third factor – work-related guilt refers to employees feeling ashamed of their workflow or guilty for not working enough (Poirier et al., 2021). The fourth factor – incompatibility of personal work values refers to the employees' feeling that their values are not aligned with work reality and that when an employee has worked less than they expected, or when tasks are not suitable to their knowledge and skills. Employees may be overqualified – with higher skills, education, and experience than required in a given job (Khan & Morrow, 1991; Maynard et al., 2006; Westgate & Wilson, 2018).

A basic professional need of every employee is to believe that his/her job is important, significant, and valuable to overall organisational goals (Kompanje, 2018). Consequently, the underuse of physical or cognitive capacities at work leads to an unpleasant affective state –boredom (Heijden et al., 2012). In any situation in which employees are faced with reduced or completely blocked access to job resources, inadequate technological infrastructure, and limited and rare interactions with colleagues they may experience a lack of excitement, challenge, and team spirit which consequently leads to boreout (Starchos & Schüll, 2021).

Boreout syndrome may affect employees in any period of their career regardless of their position, education, and profession (Rothlin & Werder, 2008; Čopkova, 2021). It is widespread in the workplace, and it is quite likely that it will become more severe in the future (Schott & Fischer, 2023).

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF BOREOUT SYNDROME: EMPLOYEE AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Boreout has numerous effects—not only on individual employees, but also on the overall functioning and health of the organization.

Over time, boreout leads to demotivation, dissatisfaction, a lack of coherence, and a sense of lost purpose and meaning. Employees may also experience a lack of excitement, a crisis of personal growth (Stock, 2015b), and reduced work performance. Research indicates that boreout can cause uselessness, frustration, mental stagnation, sadness, and shame (Chtioui et al., 2022). Employees often feel guilty or ashamed of their boredom and may choose not to speak about it openly (Poirier et al., 2021). Persistent mismatch between an employee's potential and assigned tasks can erode their morale, sense of purpose, professional commitment, self-confidence and enthusiasm. This can lead to non-productive and non-innovative behavior (Stock, 2016; Özsungur, 2020a), as well as difficulty focusing on tasks (Shen, 2022). If ignored, boreout can significantly harm the mental and emotional

well-being of employees (Macklem, 2015; Özsungur, 2020b), and may result in high absenteeism and turnover (Cabrera Noriega, 2014; Toscanelli et al., 2022). Interestingly, at low levels, boreout can sometimes act as a motivator—prompting employees to seek new activities or propose new ideas in an effort to overcome their discomfort (Jessurun et al., 2020).

From an organizational standpoint, boreout contributes to the deterioration of internal cohesion and cultural vitality. Unengaged employees are less likely to contribute ideas or embrace change, which diminishes the organization's capacity for innovation and renewal. Over time, this reduces the organization's resilience, effectiveness, and adaptability (Cabrera Noriega, 2014). Furthermore, boreout leads to counterproductive work behavior (Merdan et al., 2022) and imposes significant costs on companies through reduced productivity, inefficiency, and lost potential (Cabrera Noriega, 2014). Therefore, recognizing and addressing boreout is essential for preserving a healthy organizational climate and sustaining long-term performance.

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT BOREOUT AND ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE

Table 1 presents four key strategies aimed at eliminating or minimizing boreout syndrome in the workplace and highlights their positive effects on organizational health and climate.

First, job enrichment and role redesign help align tasks with employee capabilities while introducing variety and complexity, which fosters engagement and cognitive stimulation, and reduces passivity. Second, enhancing autonomy and participation empowers employees by involving them in decision-making processes, thereby strengthening trust, morale, and a psychologically safe work environment. Third, strengthening meaning and purpose enables employees to connect their roles to broader organizational goals, reinforcing motivation, commitment, and a cohesive organizational culture. Fourth, offering opportunities for growth and challenge encourages continuous development, which supports innovation, adaptability, and retention of talent, all crucial for long-term organizational health.

Table 1: The four key strategies for eliminating/minimizing boreout syndrome in the workplace

Strategy	Description	Impact on organizational health and climate
1. Job enrichment and role redesign	Enhance job variety, complexity, and alignment with employee capabilities.	Increases engagement, job satisfaction, and cognitive stimulation; reduces passivity and promotes a dynamic and motivating organizational climate.
2. Enhance autonomy and participation	Increase employee control and involvement in decision-making in order to increase engagement.	Builds trust and empowerment; improves morale and ownership; fosters a culture of psychological safety and openness.
3. Strengthen meaning and purpose	Help employees see how their work contributes to broader organizational goals.	Reinforces value alignment and motivation; strengthens commitment and organizational identity; enhances cultural cohesion and shared purpose.

Strategy	Description	Impact on organizational health and climate
4. Offer opportunities for growth and challenge	Provide ongoing development and new challenges to prevent stagnation.	Promotes a culture of learning and innovation; boosts employee potential and adaptability; enhances organizational agility and talent retention.

Together, these strategies contribute to building a resilient and healthy organizational climate that supports both individual well-being and organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

In today's rapidly evolving work environment—driven by digitalization, automation, and changing employee expectations—organizations must pay attention not only to burnout but also to the less visible, yet equally detrimental, phenomenon of boreout. Despite receiving less attention in academic discourse compared to constructs such as job satisfaction, engagement, or burnout, boreout poses a significant threat to individual well-being and overall organizational health. Its consequences—including diminished motivation, psychological strain, absenteeism, and reduced performance—can severely undermine both the internal climate and the health of an organization.

This paper has emphasized the importance of recognizing boreout as a systemic organizational issue and presented four key strategies to mitigate its effects: job enrichment, increased autonomy, alignment of work with purpose, opportunities for growth, and optimized workload distribution. When thoughtfully implemented, these strategies not only help to reduce the risk of boreout but also foster employee engagement, strengthen organizational climate, and contribute to the long-term resilience, adaptability, and health of the organization.

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