



Cyber Secure

Module 7

Burnout

Author: George Nicholl

Student ID: 50095130

Burnout is an often-overlooked cybersecurity risk. While it is commonly viewed as a workplace wellness issue, its implications for security can be quite severe. Stressed, overworked and emotionally exhausted employees are more prone to making mistakes, disregarding security policies or failing to detect and respond to threats.

This module expands on the associated training video to explore how professional and personal burnout can affect cybersecurity awareness.

What is Burnout in Cybersecurity?

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. In the context of cybersecurity, it can result in decreased alertness, poor decision making and reduced compliance with established security practices. Burnout can stem from heavy workloads, being understaffed, a poor work-life balance or personal stress that are unrelated to the workplace.

A 2024 report by 1Password found that 84% of cybersecurity professionals experience burnout, and 65% admit that it negatively impacts their ability to perform critical tasks.

Common Causes of Burnout

A. Workplace-Induced Burnout

- Long hours, incident response fatigue and constant alertness
- Understaffed teams expected to manage increasing workloads
- Lack of recognition or mental health support

B. Personal and Emotional Stress

- Financial issues, caregiving responsibilities or chronic stress
- Mental health struggles that affect focus and energy
- Lack of separation between work and personal life – especially for the likes of remote work)

Security Consequences of Burnout

A. Increased Human Error

- Tired and distracted employees are more likely to click on phishing links, misconfigure systems, or overlook red flags

B. Poor Policy Compliance

- Burnt-Out individuals may bypass Multi-Factor Authentication, use weak passwords, or ignore updates due to fatigue or indifference

C. Slower Threat Detection and Response

- Stress and exhaustion delay response times and impair judgement during incidents

D. Higher Insider Threat Risk

- Negligent behaviour and unintentional security lapses become more likely

E. Staff Turnover and Knowledge Loss

- High attrition rates create knowledge gaps and weaken institutional memory

Real-World Impact of Burnout

- ISACA (2023) – 52% of cybersecurity teams are understaffed, increasing stress and mistakes
- Gartner (2024) – Burnout was found to be linked to a 30% rise in negligent insider security incidents
- Gallup (2024) – 44% of employees report feeling daily stress, much of it was found to be unrelated to work
- Mental Health Foundation (2024) – 61% of employees say that personal stress impairs decision-making at work

Strategies to Prevent Burnout-Driven Risk

A. Promote Work-life Balance

- Offer flexible schedules, remote work options and sufficient time off

B. Provide Mental Health Support

- Access to employee assistance programs, counselling and wellness tools
- Encourage open conversations about wellbeing

C. Encourage Recovery and Breaks

- ✓ Normalise taking breaks, especially after stressful incidents or audits

D. Distribute Cybersecurity Responsibilities

- ✓ Avoid overloading a small number of individuals with critical tasks

E. Foster Psychological Safety

- ✓ Allow for employees to raise concerns about workload or stress without fear of judgement

F. Monitor for Burnout Signs

- ✓ Use surveys, feedback tools and 1-1's to proactively detect burnout trends

Key Takeaway

Burnout increases the likelihood of human error, reduces threat awareness and undermines a strong security culture. Tackling burnout isn't just about supporting people, it is about protecting systems. Building a burnout-resilient organisation enhances the security posture and ensures teams stay focussed, engaged and alert.

Why This Matters for You

You don't have to be in cybersecurity to influence security. Burnout affects everyone's behaviour, attention, and decision-making. Whether you are in IT, admin, or operations, recognising and addressing burnout can help prevent costly mistakes and support a healthier safer workplace.

Quick Recap: Burnout Risk & Response

DO:

- ✓ Support mental health with open conversations and resources
- ✓ Encourage work-life balance through flexible policies
- ✓ Distribute cybersecurity responsibilities fairly
- ✓ Promote regular breaks and post-incident recovery
- ✓ Monitor for signs of stress or burnout proactively

DON'T

- X Don't ignore signs of disengagement or fatigue
- X Don't expect one team to handle all security responsibilities
- X Don't assume personal stress does not affect work security

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