

# Burnt-out workers more likely to make irrational decisions

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Employees who are suffering from burnout are more likely to make spontaneous and irrational decisions.

This is one of the findings of PhD student Miss Evie Michailidis and Dr Adrian Banks from the University of Surrey who will present their findings today, Thursday 8 January, at the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology annual conference in Glasgow.

A total of 262 employees (119 males, 143 females) completed online questionnaires regarding their decision making styles and rates of burnout. Close to half of the employees worked on average 40 hours per week and they came from a wide range of occupations including business and finance, education, social services and healthcare.

A further test set out different workplace scenarios where participants were asked to imagine themselves in situations and choose on a scale which of the two actions they would take; one option involved more risk and the other less risk. Participants were also asked to rate the likelihood as well as the seriousness of the consequences of the worst-case scenario.

An example scenario is below:

*Your colleague with whom you are sharing an office takes home confidential information without permission. You notice this couple of times and you are aware that this is a serious offence. If by any chance*

*your boss realizes that the information is missing there is a possibility that you might be blamed as well.*

What should you do?

1. You don't tell anything to your [boss](#) and hope that your colleague will not do that again
2. You tell your boss that your colleague is taking confidential information at home

Which option would you choose on a 0-10 scale (0=definitely A, 10=definitely B)? How likely is it that your boss notices that the confidential information is missing? (0=not likely at all, 10=extremely likely)

How serious would the consequences be for you if your boss notices that the [confidential information](#) is missing? (0= not serious at all, 10=extremely serious)

Analysis showed that participants who showed signs of burnout displayed more spontaneous and irrational decision-making. They were also more likely to avoid making decisions.

Further analysis also suggested that the participants who displayed signs of burnout took riskier decisions as they hadn't considered the seriousness of the consequences.

Miss Evie Michailidis said: "In addition to the existing characteristics of [burnout](#) this study suggests that burnt-out individuals may avoid taking decisions and are characterized by irrational and spontaneous decision making styles.

"As decision-making may lead to detrimental consequences both

for the employee and the organization it is important to encourage managers to design work environments that provide more suitable support to employees who are responsible for decision-making tasks."

Provided by British Psychological Society

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