

Frantic, forgetful, fragmented and flummoxed. Does this describe your workplace or someone you work with? If so, you're not alone. Many workplaces are driven by a frenetic, globalized, technology-driven, task focused climate.

Has your workplace developed a culture of activity, aided by technology, iPads, latest gadgets, and email 24/7? Are employees expected to work longer and be "on call" wherever and whenever? If this sounds like your workplace, then recognize that your leaders and employees "emotional and social pulse" is dealing with escalating demands often with conflicting life or work choices. The result is a workplace that zaps creativity, stalls innovation, minimizes social humanity, and decreases career engagement, laughter, and overall psychological well being.

## Do You Work in an ADT Workplace?

Since the mid-1990s, people have increasingly complained of being chronically inattentive, disorganized and overbooked. Most complaints originate from individuals who do not have clinical diagnoses of attention deficit disorder (ADD). Instead, they suffer from what ADD expert Dr. Edward M. Hallowell calls "severe cases of modern workplaces"—a condition he dubs Attention Deficit Traits (ADT). This is an emotional and social workplace condition that promotes over stimulation, multitasking, emotional distancing, and a socially disconnected environment.

ADT sufferers have an environmentally induced attention deficit, he asserts—a phenomenon he describes as the "F-state": frantic, frenzied, forgetful, flummoxed, frustrated and fragmented.

## Adrenaline Rush

For many people, working in the F-state is energizing. Using email, BlackBerries, social networks and other devices provides constant stimulation. Some people are addicted to the adrenaline surge: doing everything faster feels exciting—and pumps their energies – for a while.

However, working faster and acquiring and storing more data does not increase one's sense of career fulfillment. While these behaviors may temporarily charge your emotional battery, they won't deepen your emotional and social connections to what really matters. Just like when a computer takes in too much data, or has too many programs running at the same time, it will eventually shut down.

## Workplace Deficit Disorder

One side effect of a frenzied pace is emotional and cognitive disorganization. We cannot keep up with all of the data, emails and piles of paper we accumulate to stay informed. We become buried in clutter, and don't take the time to "pull the weeds". The result is that overloaded leaders, and the people they lead, can resort to making decisions from this "F" state, that often bring emotionally hijacked, short-term and often unhealthy or unproductive solutions.

Disorganization is a symptom—not the core problem. Getting organized may alleviate surface pain, but it doesn't address the root cause. Sure, we can all benefit from being more organized and getting a handle on time management, but the issues run deeper than simply clearing off our desk.

## Emotional and Social Deficit Disorder

Too much electronic time, coupled with a lack of human moments, leads to an *as-yet-unnamed* medical *and emotional* condition. Symptoms include loss of personal vitality, an inability to converse, a craving for a computer screen, social isolation, emotional outbursts, to low-grade depression.

What we know is that email or social networking communication is not a substitute for authentic human interaction. We may choose to send an email because a phone conversation requires too much time, emotional energy and social complexity. However, what we do know is that positive human-to-human contact increases creativity through social connectedness and reduces blood levels of the stress hormones epinephrine, nor epinephrine and cortisol.

While we may, indeed, produce more in less time, we are left with a gnawing feeling of emptiness and less career fulfillment. What resilient workplaces must realize is that human, emotional connections are critical to peak performance, especially in times of uncertainty.

## What Leaders Can Do

All too often, companies cause Attention Deficit Traits in their work groups by demanding fast, detached solutions, rather than taking time to feel, think and reflect before acting. Even worse, some workplaces reward those who say yes to overload and punish those say no to the constant “F” state. These workplaces are overly infatuated with fast-acting, non emotional individuals who multitask and work long hours, often to their personal well being —and the company's—detriment.

Workplaces that ignore ADT symptoms in their employees will suffer its unhealthy or unproductive effects: people underachieve, create clutter, cut corners, ignore ethics, make careless mistakes and squander their brainpower. As demands continue to mount, a toxic, high-pressure culture can produce a less civil and more toxic workplace, with higher turnover and a less resilient climate.

## Taming the Crazy Busy Workplace

Three important prerequisites for creating psychological healthy and resilient solutions are a positive emotional environment, intentional social connectivity and finding the right workplace rhythm.

Creating a positive emotional environment starts with emotional and social intelligence! Develop training, coaching or mentoring programs that teach the impact of emotions on workplace climate and motivation. For example, perform an

emotional positive action each day such as appreciating an employee's, customer's or boss' support. Intentional social connectivity can occur by scheduling a friendly, face-to-face talk with a person every four to six hours. And, finding the right workplace rhythm begins with a healthy lifestyle. Get adequate sleep. Monitor what and when you eat. Avoid simple, sugary carbohydrates as an energy boost. Stick to complex carbohydrates (vegetables, whole grains, and fruit) first, and add protein. Moderate your intake of alcohol and caffeine. Exercise until you sweat at least 30 minutes every other day. Move around every 2-3 hours - go up and down a flight of stairs.

Taming the overloaded workplace starts with creating and rewarding a leadership stance and policies to spark positive emotional moments (each day employee's are to reserve some "pause time" that's free from appointments, email and phone calls; or build social connectivity (share lunch each week with someone new), and finally, engage your best (before you leave work each day, create a list of three to five items that will engage your personal best the next day). Often, workplaces consult a resilience or healthy workplace coach to develop social and emotional intelligence, to tame the overloaded tiger and then create new workplace policies and reward processes.

Two additional resources to consult is the article written by Dr. Hallowell "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform" (*Harvard Business Review*, January 2005), or the research and chapter written by Cynthia Kivland, CPS and Dr. Peter Weil, American College of Healthcare Executives, *Work/Life Balance Practices in Healthcare Organizations – A 2003 Status Report; Supporting Women's Career Advancement: Challenges and Opportunities*, Ronald J. Burke, Human Resource Management International Digest, Vol. 14 Issue: 4, Emerald Group Publishing Limited.



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#### About Workplace Coach Institute

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