

Burnout Comes in Three Varieties

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As of this month, more than 10 million people in the United States are unemployed, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Given that there are so many people looking for jobs, it's curious that a large percentage of American workers want nothing more than to quit. As of this past December, 1.7% of all employed people left their jobs. That rate has been climbing — albeit slowly — since 2009.

“Burnout syndrome” — that is, the fatigue, cynicism, and professional inefficacy that comes with work-related stress — may play a significant role in this trend.

Some level of stress is an inevitable part of every work experience. But at what point do those stressors become overbearing? What combination of factors makes one individual quit and another endure?

New research suggests that there are at least three different subtypes of burnout, and they each relate to specific detrimental coping strategies. By administering a survey to 429 university workers of various occupations, researchers were able to gather data on the subtypes of burnout and correlate those with employees' coping strategies.

Overall, the results indicated that *overload burnout* — the frenetic employee who works toward success until exhaustion — is most closely related to emotional venting. These individuals might try to cope with their stress by complaining about the organizational hierarchy at work, feeling as though it imposes limits on their goals and ambitions. That coping strategy, unsurprisingly, seems to lead to a stress overload and a tendency to throw in the towel.

Burnout that stems from boredom and lack of personal development, on the other hand, is most closely associated with an avoidance coping strategy. These under-challenged workers tend to manage stress by distancing themselves from work, a strategy that leads to depersonalization and cynicism — a harbinger

for burning out and packing up shop.

The final type of burnout — the *worn-out* subtype — seems to stem from a coping strategy based on giving up in the face of stress. Even though these individuals *want* to achieve a certain goal, they lack the motivation to plow through barriers to get to it.

Because it's possible to identify the ineffective coping strategies associated with each type of burnout, it may also be possible to develop targeted and preventative therapies, according to the research article published in [PLOS ONE](#).

Treatments that include emotion regulation, increased cognitive flexibility, and mindfulness may help ward off burnout in susceptible individuals, suggests the research team led by Jesus Montero Marin of the University of Zaragoza in Spain. Organizations that want to keep their employees happy and productive may begin to invest in the fight against burnout by helping employees find accessible, affordable therapies for coping with stress. As some companies know all too well, high turnover can stall progress — especially if the burnout wildfire spreads.