



ANATOMY OF WORK SPECIAL REPORT:

Keeping employees engaged in a burned-out world

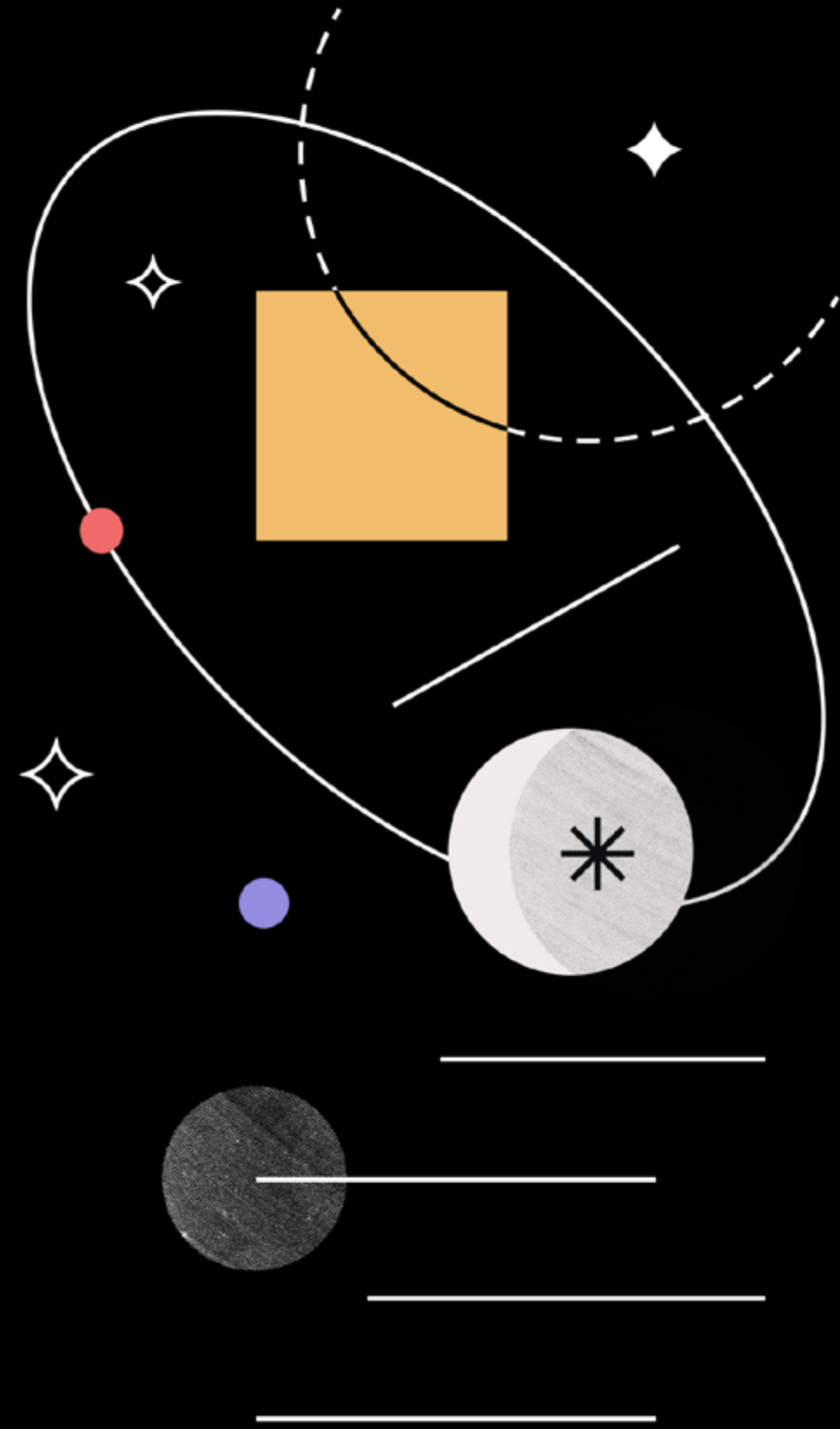
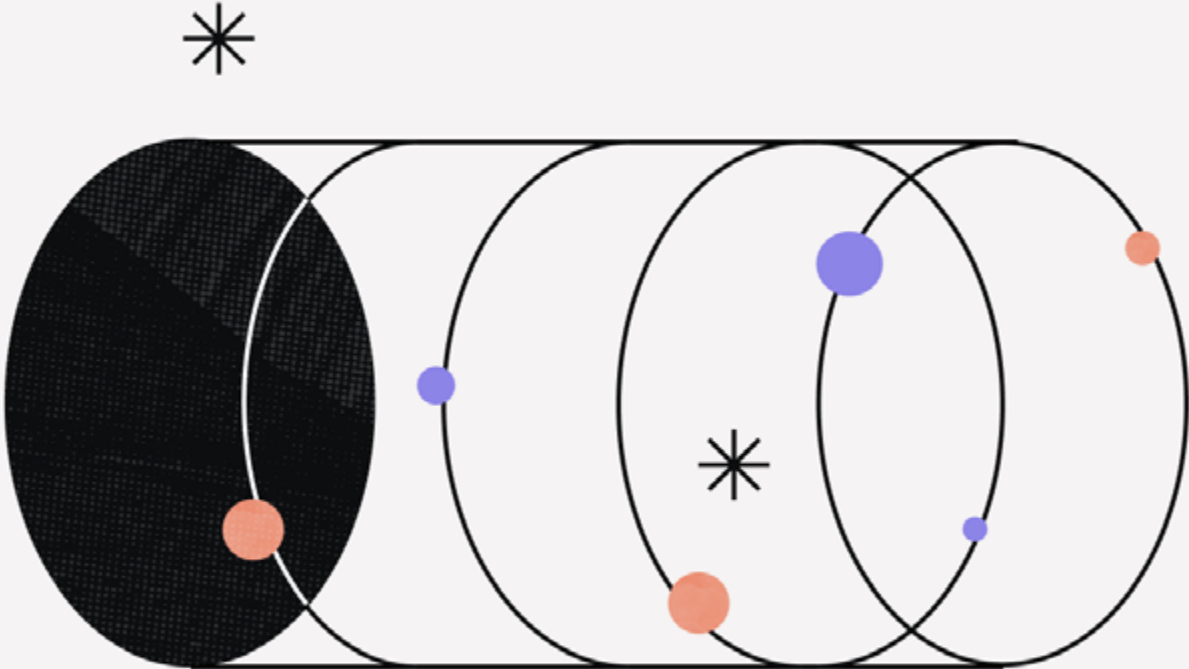


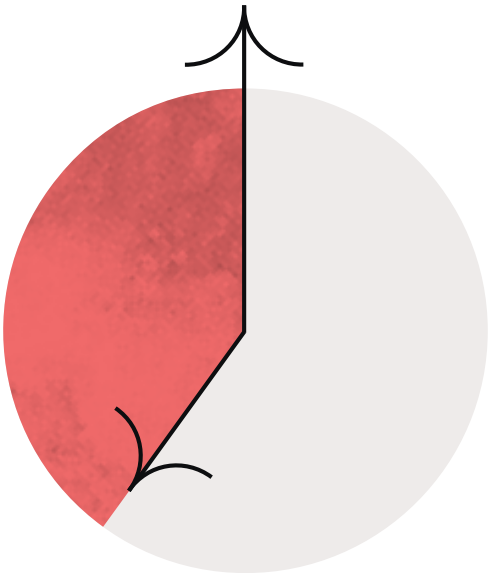
Table of contents

- An emerging link across conditions 05
- Who is at risk—and why? 08
- Prevention is a long-term play 11
- Creating resilient teams15



Burnout and imposter syndrome are major stumbling blocks for both employees and their organizations, threatening to slow teams down, reduce their impact, and make it harder to hit important goals.

Both are pervasive throughout the working world—Asana’s Anatomy of Work research found that seven in 10 knowledge workers experienced burnout or imposter syndrome in the last year, with 42% having experienced both.



40%
of all workers believe
burnout is an inevitable
part of success.

“Burnout is a long-term phenomenon that is much more than having a tough day or tough week. When we are burned out, we see measurable changes in both the brain and the body that are difficult to reverse. It’s a slow, cumulative process that can eventually debilitate us, making dedicated time off the only cure.”

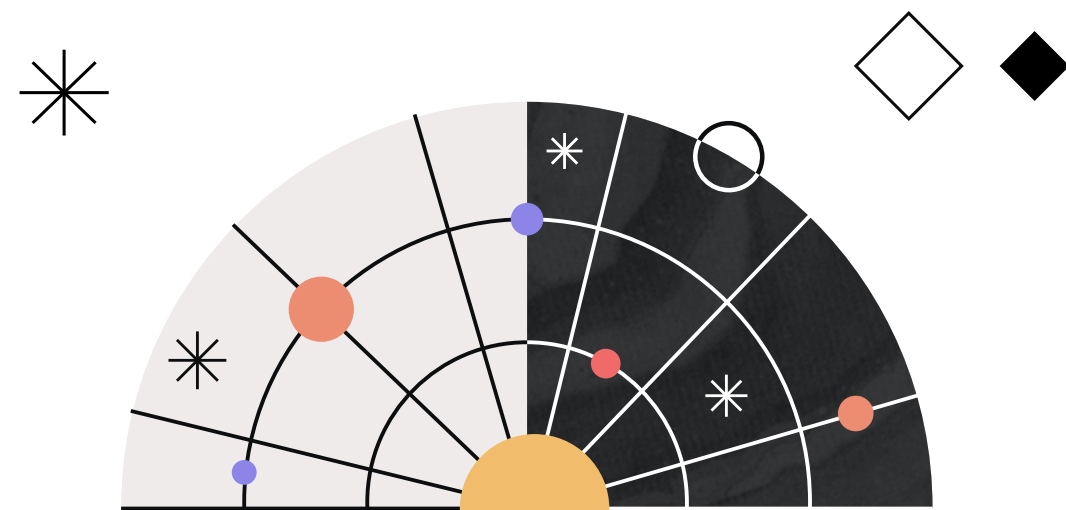
Dr. Sahar Yousef
Cognitive Neuroscientist, UC Berkeley



Why does this matter? In order to retain the best employees, leaders need to take a proactive approach to promote wellbeing and create a desirable work experience.

The cost of replacing employees can be enormous, ranging from one-half to two-times an employee's salary, according to [Gartner](#).

This Anatomy of Work Special Report looks at burnout and imposter syndrome in today's working world and explores the impact they have on individuals and organizations. We'll look at emerging links between the two to understand why they may be related, and we'll dive into who is more susceptible to each. Finally, we will finish by talking about why the onus for fixing burnout and imposter syndrome goes beyond employees themselves. By the end of this report, you'll understand why companies need to invest in prevention in order to retain their talent and stay on track—and we'll talk about ways to do just that.



An emerging link across conditions

Burnout and imposter syndrome have, historically, been studied as two completely separate phenomena. Although they both have negative impacts on mental health and performance, links between the two have rarely been made.

What is the difference between imposter syndrome and burnout?

→ IMPOSTER SYNDROME

A sense of self-doubt related to accomplishments.

→ BURNOUT

An occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress.

“Both burnout and imposter syndrome are very well studied and separate phenomena. However, we’re now seeing them start to speak to each other in ways that are both of concern, but also make sense.”

Dr. Sahar Yousef

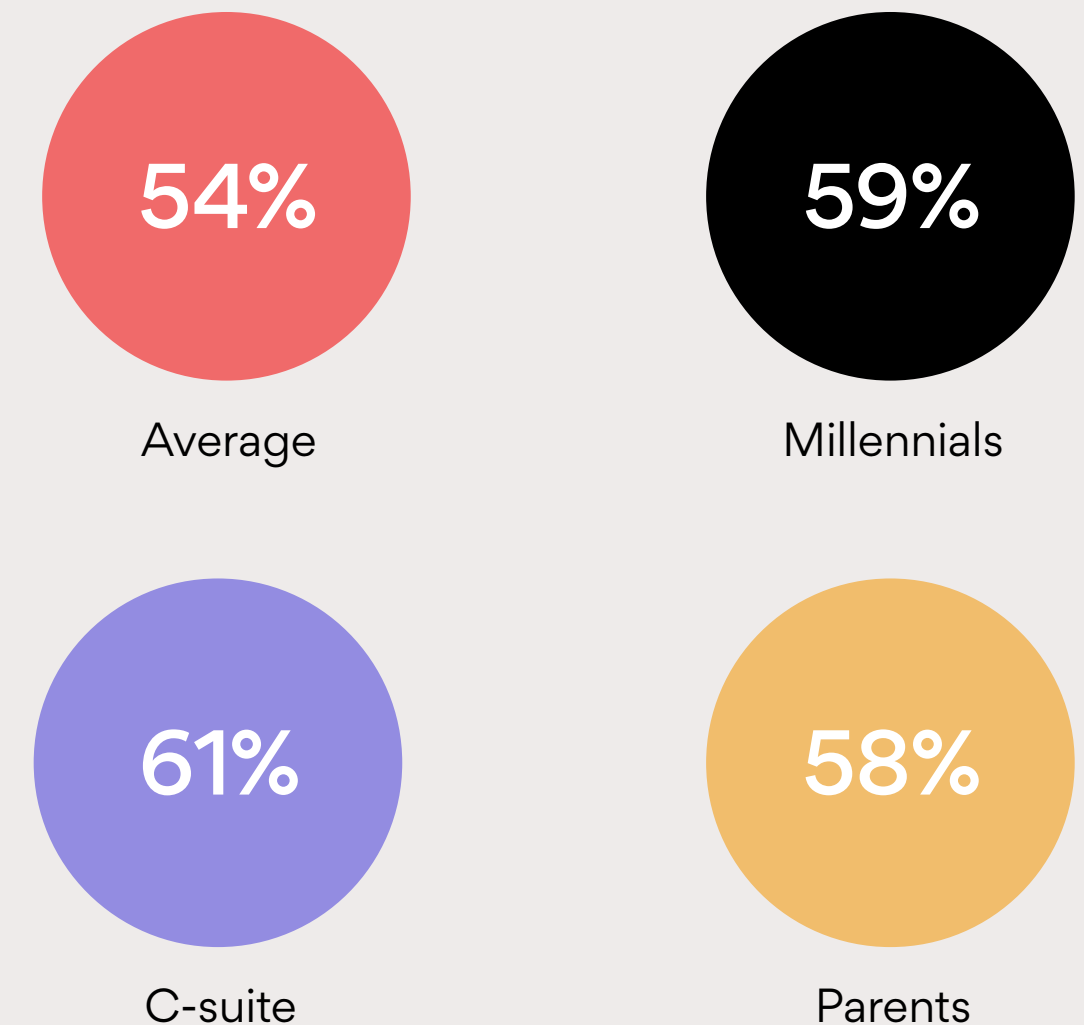
Cognitive Neuroscientist, UC Berkeley



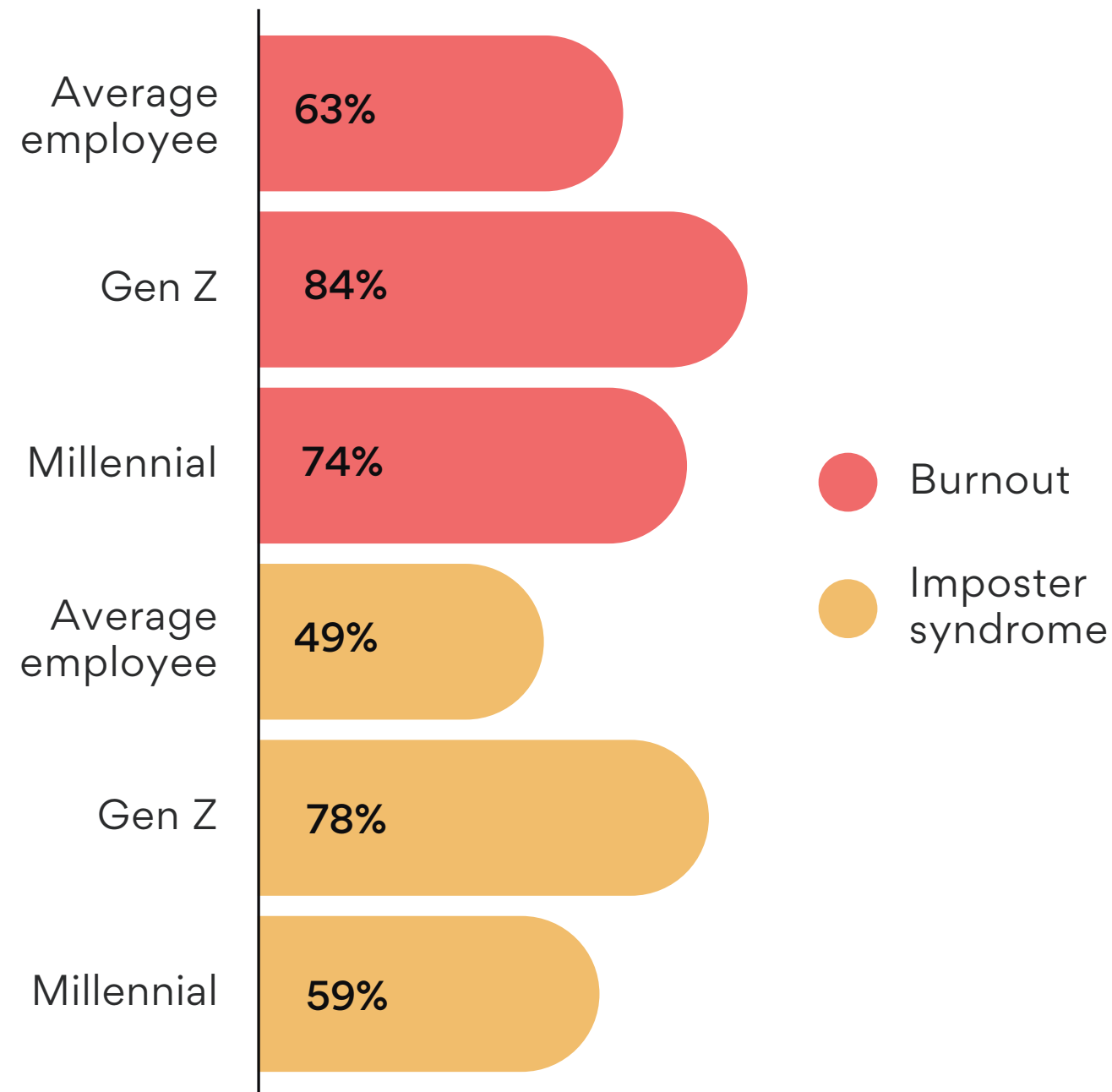
However, Asana’s research found unique overlap between the two. Since nearly half of knowledge workers experience both at once—with 70% of Gen Z in that category—it looks like the root causes of burnout and imposter syndrome may be related. If that’s the case, to help employees, organizations need to keep both in mind—and researchers need to continue studying their connections. Not everyone is equally susceptible, with different cohorts seeming to have different risk levels.

When burnout and imposter syndrome go hand in hand

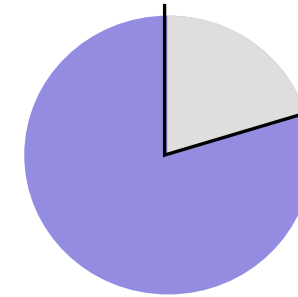
The percentage of individuals who reported symptoms of imposter syndrome as part of burnout:



Gen Z and Millennials are at above average risk for burnout and imposter syndrome



Even though some cohorts may be less prone to burnout, if they do experience one, they have a higher risk of experiencing the other one. For example, members of the C-suite are at an average risk for burnout (62%). But, for those who do experience burnout, 61% also experience imposter syndrome—7% above average. This can have a huge impact on an organization.



Nearly 70% of the C-suite said that burnout affects their ability to make decisions.

Knowing that burnout and imposter syndrome frequently accompany—and compound—each other is an important insight for leaders. Instead of playing whack-a-mole, by tackling both phenomena at once, organizations have a better chance at keeping their employees engaged.

Who is at risk—and why?

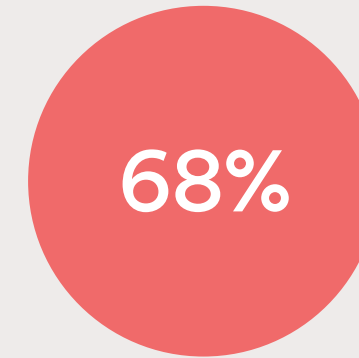
Organizations are often taken by surprise, only realizing they have a problem when it is too late and employees are disengaged or leaving. That means proactively measuring burnout risk and knowing who is most at risk isn't just a nice thing to do—it is a critical part of creating an effective organization.

The negative impacts of burnout are diverse and hugely consequential for organizations.

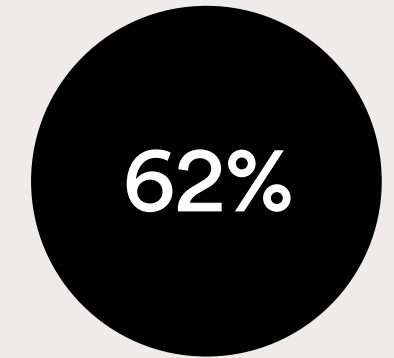
Being proactive, though, isn't straightforward, especially since not all employees who are experiencing burnout or imposter syndrome will come forward and tell their managers. Why?

Firstly, they may not know that their feelings are a sign of burnout or imposter syndrome. That means organizations need to educate employees about what they are and how they can affect people. Only then can employees begin to connect the dots themselves.

People who have experienced imposter syndrome in the past year are more likely to feel:

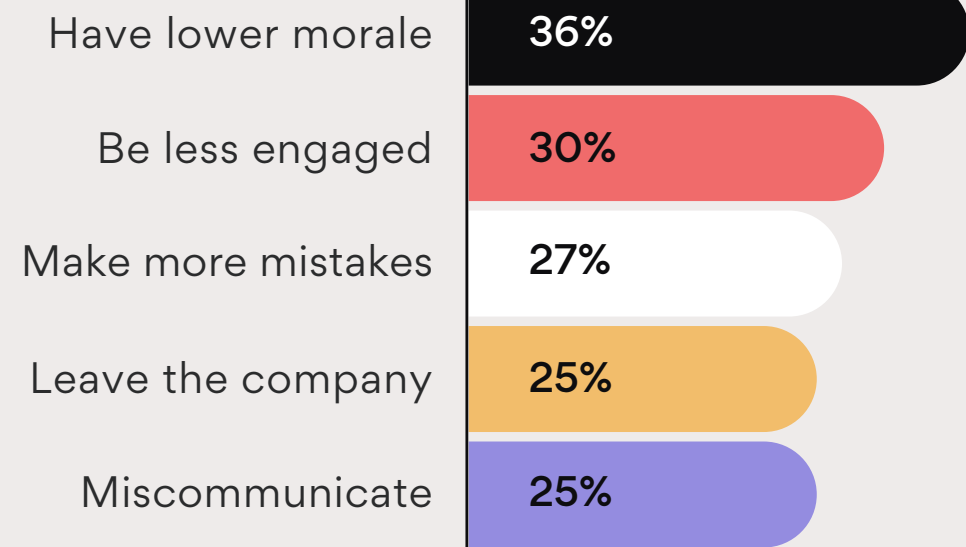


Worried about work



Worried outside of work

People who have experienced burnout in the past year are likely to:



“Terms like ‘burnout’ and ‘imposter syndrome’ didn’t exist 30, 40, or 50 years ago the way they do now. It’s not that folks weren’t burning out or that everyone was nailing work-life balance. We simply didn’t have the words to talk about these experiences.”

Dr. Sahar Yousef

Cognitive Neuroscientist, UC Berkeley



Secondly, Asana found that 51% of workers don’t feel comfortable talking to their manager about burnout. Beyond education, leaders need to highlight that experiencing burnout or imposter syndrome aren’t signs of weakness or laziness, but important issues to address. Even better would be if an organization has a set plan for addressing them.

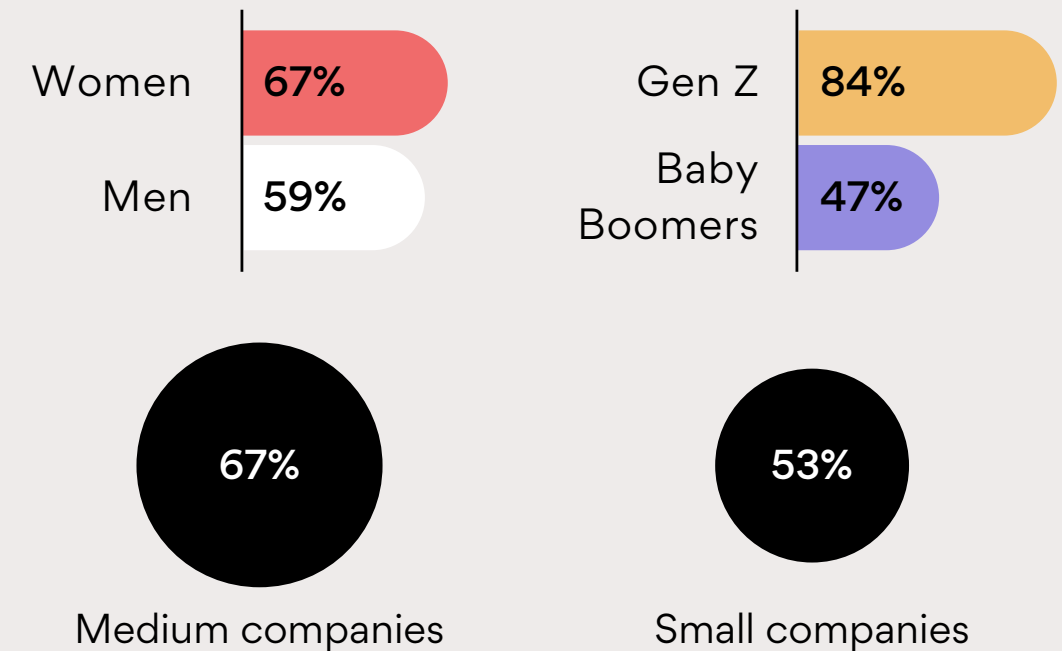
Although some employees will never feel comfortable opening up, it is worth noting that Gen Z tends to be more vocal about their mental health and well-being needs. This is an opportunity to talk with younger employees and begin combating burnout and imposter syndrome earlier in their careers to build resilience for both them and your organization.

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that there are three primary dimensions of burnout:

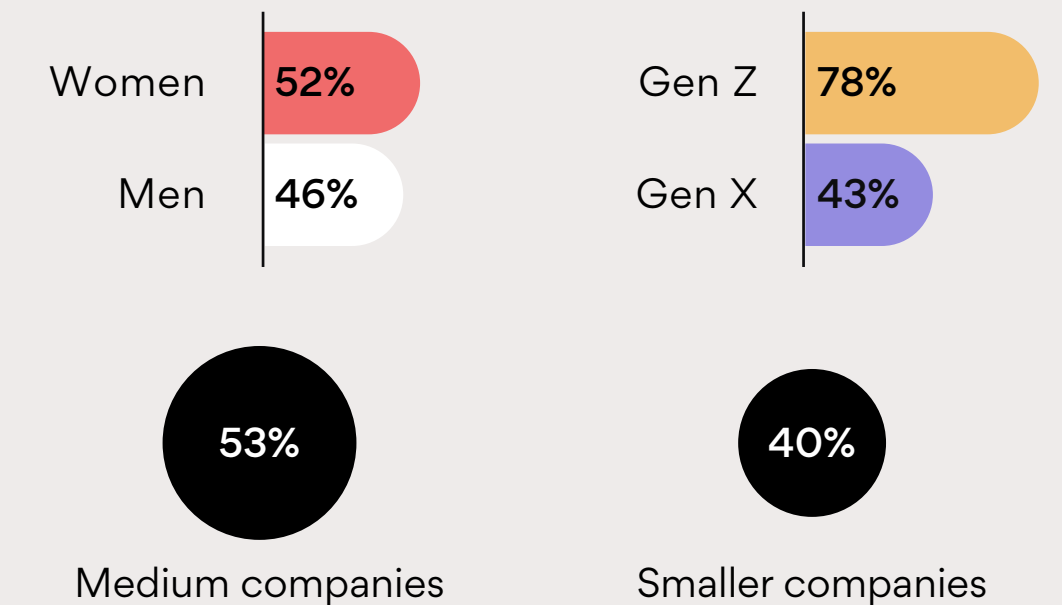
- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- Feelings of reduced professional efficacy

Once leaders are better able to spot burnout and imposter syndrome, it is important to also be aware that certain demographics are at more risk than others. True, everyone can experience burnout and imposter syndrome—and many people across all facets of life do—but knowing that some people are disproportionately affected is an essential piece to the puzzle.

Who is most affected by burnout?



Who is most affected by imposter syndrome?



Prevention is a long-term play

Reducing burnout and imposter syndrome in organizations is critical to tackle now, but it is also a long-game without easy answers. They aren't problems that lie solely on HR's shoulders to fix. People at all levels and in all departments need to be bought-in and part of the solution.

That said, when creating a plan—whether your organization is being proactive or reactive—note that combating burnout and imposter syndrome is a process more likely to involve subtraction than addition.

For example, it is easy for an organization to recognize that burnout is an issue in their organization and then look for tools to help. However, adding more technology to an already very loaded stack is unlikely to solve the problem and, in fact, might make things worse. Adding tools increases cognitive load, multitasking potential, and frequency of app switching—which can all contribute to more burnout and imposter syndrome.

“Once a person does get burned out, it can take months to work their way back to full health and performance. For organizational productivity and effectiveness, prevention is key.”

Dr. Sahar Yousef

Cognitive Neuroscientist, UC Berkeley



A cheat sheet for recognizing and addressing burnout

Recognize the signs

- Dreading work
- Feeling hopeless
- Can't stop procrastinating

Change processes

- Temporarily decrease the person's workload or re-scope role and responsibilities
- Have them take time off—and regularly schedule time off going forward
- Consider mandatory time off (like once per quarter) for the organization

Clarify priorities

- Know who needs to do what and delegate accordingly

Set boundaries

- Make sure people log on and off at specific times
- Have everyone turn off notifications after hours
- Tell people to specify and document their off-hours

Model behavior

- Follow the boundaries you want your team to follow

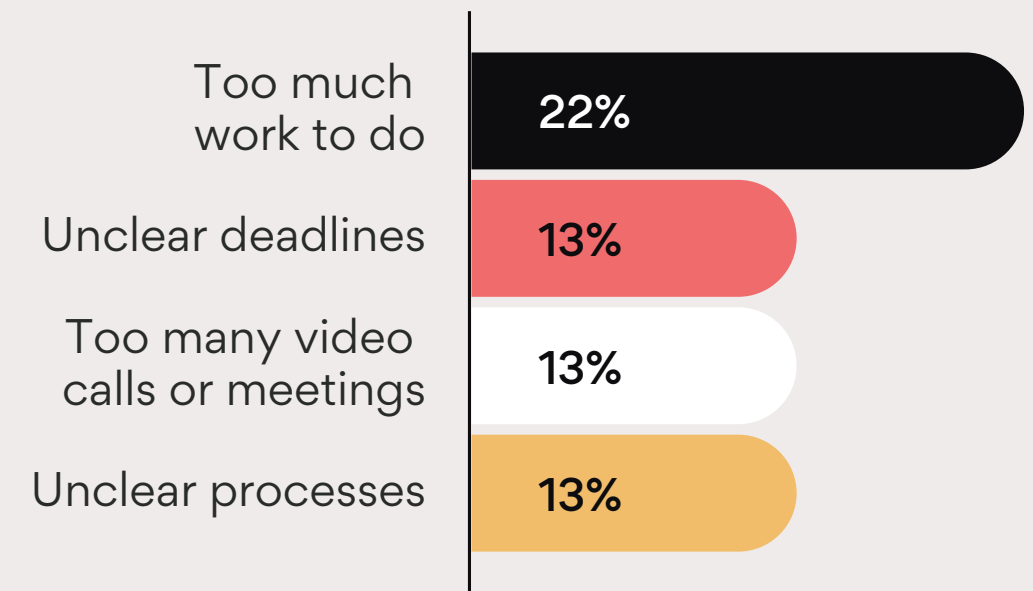
The data backs up why subtracting is the optimal solution, with nearly one-fifth of respondents saying that reducing the number of apps or software in use at work would improve their focus. The fact that 55% of workers experience burnout more when they receive a high number of notifications also reinforces the idea that subtraction is key.

It is also useful to look at workers who have warded off burnout over the past year and learn from them. These people were:

- More likely to have a clear start and/or finish time each day
- Less likely to multitask

These same people are also less likely to spend time on duplicative work, suggesting that their workplaces prioritize systems and processes with centralized visibility. They are also less likely to spend more time on meetings than before the pandemic, suggesting that their workplace has processes in place to support asynchronous work.

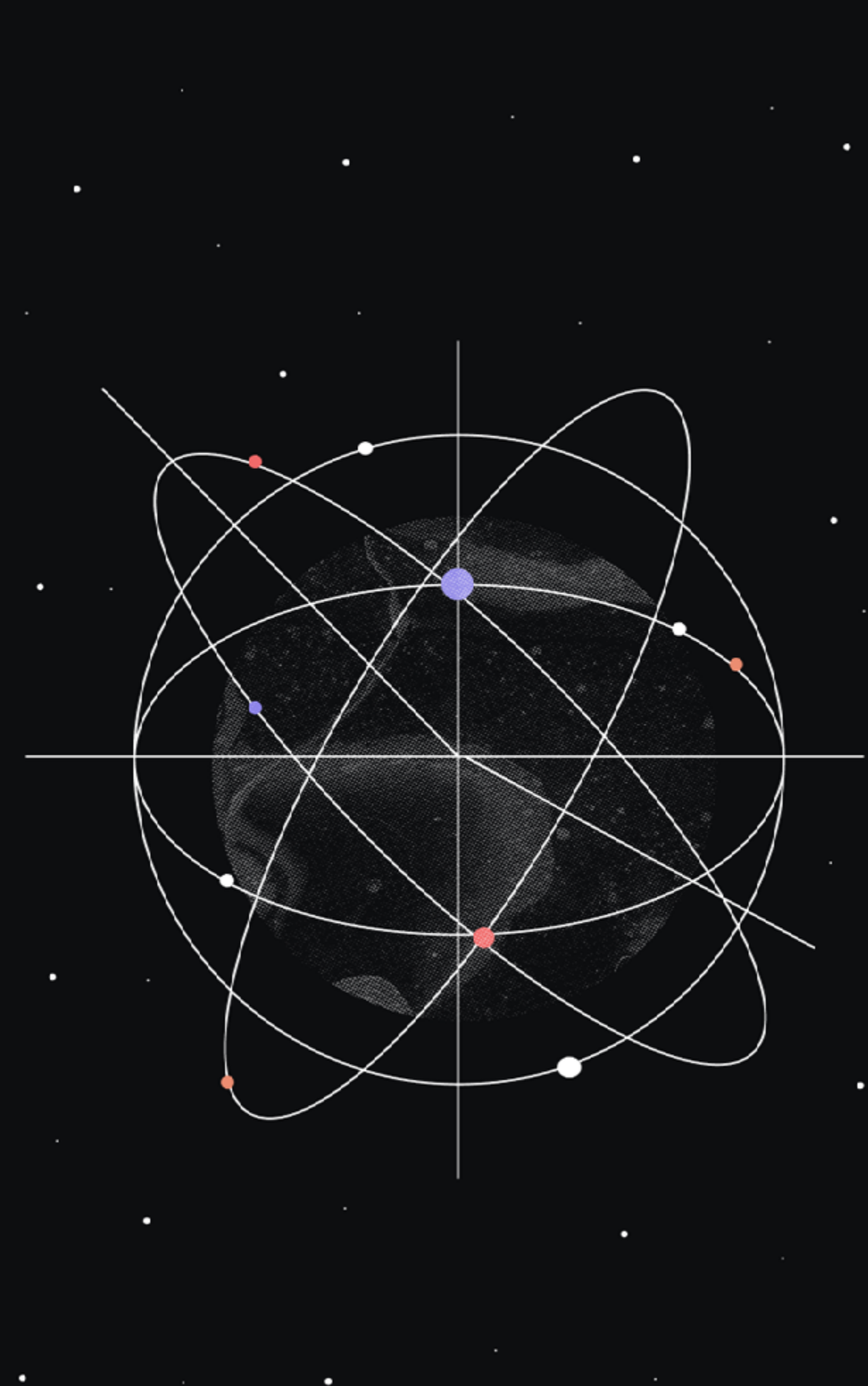
Top reasons people who suffer from burnout miss deadlines:



Given this, it's not surprising that workers who have experienced burnout in the past year believe that they could save more time on process improvements. In contrast, our research suggests that workers who were able to fight burnout say their organizations were already providing more clarity on roles and responsibilities and listening to employees more.

Looking at ways to improve imposter syndrome can also help organizations figure out how to deal with burnout. Asana found that people who suffer from imposter syndrome say that these measures would improve their symptoms:

- Create clear processes on how to get work done: 25%
- Encourage teams to celebrate successes, both large and small: 24%
- Be more transparent with communication and decision making: 24%



Creating resilient teams

By educating employees and managers about burnout and imposter syndrome, organizations can take steps toward building long-term resilience within their employee base—which will translate to resilience for the organization itself.

Learn more about how to give your teams the tools they need to succeed with Asana's [Inspire & Impact Collection](#).

Methodology and sources

In September 2021 quantitative research was conducted by Global Web Index (GWI) on behalf of Asana, to understand how people spend time at work. Asana and GWI co-designed the questionnaire and surveyed the behaviors and attitudes of 10,624 knowledge workers across Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Singapore, the U.K., and the U.S.

GWI defines knowledge workers as anyone who is in full-time or part-time work or is self employed/a freelancer. They primarily work on a computer and their work covers the following areas of responsibility: advertising or marketing, client or account management, company owner or founder, company strategy, direct reports/team management, general management, HR/training/office support, managing budgets, purchasing of any other products and services, purchasing of IT, telecoms or technology products and services, recruiting

new employees, sales or software development/computer engineering.

In addition to the Asana custom study, this report also leverages insights from the GWI Core and GWI Work studies. GWI Core is an online survey that is run four times a year and includes a panel of 22 million consumers. It consists of over 35,000 consumer data points. GWI Work recontacts business professionals in 17 markets who have taken GWI Core and is run once a year. It has a panel of over 63,000 business professionals and covers a wide range of B2B subjects including: working role and responsibilities, company overview, business outlook, day-to-day working practices, workplace and company culture, workplace communication, workplace tools, B2B purchasing, data security and social media in the workplace.

ABOUT ASANA

Asana helps teams orchestrate their work, from small projects to strategic initiatives.

Asana helps teams orchestrate their work, from small projects to strategic initiatives. Headquartered in San Francisco, CA, Asana has more than 119,000 paying customers and millions of free organizations across 190 countries. Global customers such as Amazon, Affirm, Japan Airlines, and Sky rely on Asana to manage everything from company objectives to digital transformation to product launches and marketing campaigns.

For more information, visit www.asana.com.