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**“Boreout Syndrome”**

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**Abstract**

The popular belief is that employees suffer from burnout which indicates overworking and over stretching of employees at the work place. It is an established fact that burnout creates depression, anxiety and stress disorders in employees. But, the recent studies are indicating that contrary to the popular belief majority of the employees are not stressed or over worked. But, they suffer from bore out-underworked, under challenged and frustrated. Bore out is the new office epidemic which causes demotivation to the employees. The effects of bore out are dissatisfaction with the job, weariness at work place, loss of zest or enthusiasm for life, useful office time frittered away in personal work and so on.

Surveys undertaken recently have indicated that nearly 35% of the employees do not have enough work to do and these under challenged and under stretched employees nearly spend two hours of the office time every day to attend to personal matters. This problem of bore out affects both the employees as well as robs the employer of productivity at work place. The employers have started recognizing this issue of bore out and are trying to address this problem. This case study is in this direction to bring to light this growing yet unknown problem of bore out, how to recognize bore out and how the organizations can work out strategies to save the employees from this bore out trap.

*Key Words:* Burn out, Bore out, Strategies of bore out, Symptoms of bore out

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Gupta walked in to his office sharp at 8.30 am in the morning. He was a person who prided on the fact that he was never late to the office. He believed that discipline and punctuality were the rungs of the ladder of success and always took an opportunity to poke fun or take a jibe at the other employees who were late. He was hailed as a model employee by the organization and he was a living example for discipline, decorum, punctuality, regularity, loyalty and all that usual bundle of stuff expected from an employee. But, off late Gupta was clearly uneasy at his work. He had a clear discomfort and was not very eager to come to office. Even at office he was very vague, distant and listless and was often caught staring at the ceiling or the computer monitor. His break times became longer and longer and often he was seen at the reception lounge talking furiously over the phone. When he was not on the phone he was normally hooked to his computer and would be busy looking at various bits of information, visiting the various survey sites to know the results of surveys previously done. Of late he was constantly having that queasy feeling while at work but was not able to put a finger on what exactly was his problem.

Gupta's problem usually started at the beginning of the day itself. Out of the bed early in the morning, his first feeling would be dread to go to office. Like a school goer who finds excuses to skip the school he will be on the lookout for reasons to skip going to office. With a sinking feeling he went to the office with a fear of what the day held in store for him. At office he had to use various strategies to create an illusion that he was indeed a very busy person and that he was overworked. He did not want others to know that he had a lot of free time which he devoted for his personal agenda and he was truly not overworked but under worked, demotivated and under stretched. To keep up the façade of being busy was an eternal problem for him. But, he was not willing to talk to his boss about his true feelings because he did not want to be saddled with more responsibilities at work and a part of him was contended the way things were-less work, more of free time to pursue his interests and a good pay check. He did not want to lose any of this.

Gupta took out a pen and tried to list out what he actually felt. Should he call them the symptoms of his disease?

Gupta realized that the list of symptoms he experienced increased in number every time he tried to list them. But, what baffled him more was the fact that he could identify only the symptoms but he could not identify the real disease or the problem.

Reminiscing about the good old days Gupta remembered the day on which he joined the organization. He sighed to himself when he realized as to how drastically he had changed as a person. He was not even a shell of his old self. He recalled with a pang how highly enthused he was with an urge to conquer everything under the sun. He used to be the problem solver for not only his department but also to many of his colleagues in the other departments. Even as a lone ranger left to resolve many problems he was always on the top of the problems and had always emerged with winning cutting edge solutions. He used to be the cynchlosure of all the eyes and everyone would eagerly wait for his words in a meeting. He would also take immense pride in sharing his views, thoughts and opinions in those meetings.

Gupta realized that like everyone else he had also started off his career very enthusiastically and wanted to do a great job. But, various circumstances at the work place had lead to slippages in the level of involvement, degree of participation and his inner desire to learn and grow had also taken a beating. What had happened in the long run is that instead of treating every problem as an opportunity he had become cynical and treated every problem as a means to give excuses.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> March 2012 Day of Awakening**

It was a usual day at work for Gupta when he stumbled upon the survey report of Kelly Services. What he was reading was startling and he just could not believe his own eyes. The more he read that survey report, the more he was convinced that he had at last found out his problem at office.

Gupta now understood the problem that was ailing him. He clearly knew that he was one of the 73% of the employees referred to in the report as under stretched, unmotivated and a bored employee. He was suffering from BOREOUT.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> March 2012 The day after the Awakening**

Once Gupta had identified the problem he was very eager to find out the meaning of bore out, symptoms of boreout and the remedies for boreout. He did not want to be eternally trapped in this bore out syndrome and he wished he knew the solution for his problem. But, before he could do all this, he wanted to be sure that he was a candidate of boreout. So he took the online test for the employees on bore out. Gupta answered almost all the questions asked above as “Yes “and it was officially certain that indeed he was suffering from boreout. Boreout, the opposite of burnout is a situation where the employee has reached the limits of boredom and is incapable of being any more bored. It comprises of three elements of being under stretched, uncommitted and bored in the work place. It manifests itself in many ways and modifies the behavior of the employees. The employees pretend to be busy and overloaded all the time and are unwilling to accept any new responsibilities or roles.

Gupta was reminded of the day on which this downhill trend started. When Paramesh had joined his team two years back he felt genuinely happy that at least his workload will ease out and he need not be stressed out at work all the time. At that point of time Gupta was overworked, stressed out all the time and clearly he was heading towards burnout. Paramesh was an aggressive team member and he slowly started to take away work from many team members including Gupta. Initially Gupta was also happy and had appreciated the work of Paramesh in easing out his workload. But, as time went on Gupta had less and less of work to do. He began to feel bored and under stretched. He began to use his free time to do personal work but kept up the façade of being busy all the time. He completely disengaged himself from his organization. Nothing seemed to interest him. Previously if anyone badmouthed his organization he would have been the first person to defend his organization. He would have acted like a mother hen protecting her chicks with fierce loyalty. But now, he no longer felt any connection and most of the time he was not even aware of what was going on around him in the organization.

Looking back, Gupta realized that he was not only bored at work; he lacked the zeal, commitment and loyalty he had earlier. He was surprised to realize that he was a totally changed person and he was no longer the old Gupta who was an asset to the

organization. But, he was willing to learn about his situation, find ways and means of getting over the problem and become his old active self again. His journey of self-introspection had already begun and he was willing to go that extra mile to fix the problem of boreout.

Once he knew that he was affected by the bore out syndrome, Gupta started to think in the direction of the various strategies he usually adopted to appear busy all the time. His intention of using these strategies was to ensure that he was not given any additional responsibility and also he had enough free time on his hand to use for his personal works. He took a pen and began to jot down the following strategies he usually adopted at the workplace

Gupta was ashamed about himself on the various strategies he had adopted at different points of time to avoid work. He was straining hard to recollect at what stage of his career this malady of bore out had started. Looking back at the literature on bore out Gupta was surprised to know that this bore out does not happen on a single day and it takes years for boredom to set in. Existing literature on bore out suggests that bore out happens only at stage 3 in a career. He chided himself for not being aware about this and vowed to learn all that he can about this bore out syndrome. Knowledge is power and equipping oneself with the requisite knowledge and information about a problem is battle half won. With this in mind Gupta set about to dig out more information and statistics about bore out.

When Gupta set out to fill his Self-Appraisal Form for the year he understood that his problem of boreout was very huge because he realized with a sinking heart that he had not contributed anything to the organization and could not establish anything in his appraisal form. Previously, he used to have so much information on his achievements and contributions and his appraisal used to be a smooth affair. He had bagged the “Employee of the Year” award consecutively for many years and he was a known performer. What has gone wrong with me? pondered Gupta.

The reasons for bore out can range from choosing a wrong career due to family pressure or other compulsions, wrong location with no career prospects or development, availability of better options at work place and influx of modern tools and gadgets. The

reasons for bore out can be varied. Gupta was also aware that many of his colleagues may be silently suffering from this bore out and he vowed to himself that he will identify these people and try to offer a solution for this bore out problem. Since he was already aware about the symptoms of bore out and the behavior of bored people in the organization, he knew that he could easily identify the bored out employees. But, he wanted to diagnose the stage of their bore out situation. So, he started to classify the employees in to different categories to find out the level of their boredom.

Gupta could easily identify many chameleons and a few maggots amongst his colleagues who were gnawing away at the very roots of the organization. He could also recognize a few others who would be jumping the band wagon within a few days or months. Knowledge about this boreout amongst his colleagues really worried Gupta and he wished that he could really correct the situation. He could empathize with the other employees who were in various stages of bore out because he himself was suffering from intense boreout.

### **Gupta-The Crusader:**

After the rude awakening about himself and many of his colleagues, Gupta was now ready for the crusade against bore out. That morning, after a very long time Gupta was eager to go to office. After many months of bore out syndrome, today was the day when Gupta was enthusiastic and was raring to go. He had mentally prepared himself for the crusade, and armed with the requisite knowledge and information he was optimistic that this destabilizing situation in the organization could be corrected.

Gupta approached their HR Department with a view to requesting for a **Workshop** and establishment of a **Self Help Group** which can set up an environment for enabling everyone to work with full potential and be part of a committee that drives excellence. HR department was thrilled to enlist the support of Gupta in bringing back the excellence in their employees. The crusade against bore out had already begun. What else can Mr. Gupta do to further the cause of fighting against boreout? What can be the contributions of HR in addressing the problem of boreout?

*Exhibit I: The Symptoms*

Unhealthiness at the thought of work  
Queasiness in the stomach at the thought of work  
Miserable, helpless, hapless  
Bored, uncommitted, under stretched  
Dissatisfied  
Frustrated  
Tiredness after the work  
Constant Irritability  
No desire to do anything  
Listlessness outside the work

**Source:** Overcoming Workplace demotivation, Phillipe Rothlin & Peter Werder, Kogan Page India

*Exhibit II: Survey Report of Kelly Services*

According to a survey by Kelly Services an international employment agency, the overall average rate for employees who feel stressed at work stands at 27%. The remaining 73% of the employees are either having right level of stress or are under stretched. It is not about the stress or the burnout, but it is all about the under stretched and the bore out. These 73% of the employees are under stretched, unmotivated and immeasurably bored with no challenge or interest in their work. These under stretched employees are the most dissatisfied employees in the organization.

**Source:** Overcoming Workplace demotivation, Phillipe Rothlin & Peter Werder, Kogan Page India

*Exhibit III: Are you suffering from BOREOUT?*

Four “Yes” out of ten is an indication that the employee is affected by the Boreout Syndrome

1. Do you attend to your personal work in the office?
2. Do you send private e-mails during office hours?
3. Do you catch up with your friends during office working hours?
4. Do you feel bored at work and lack the required initiative and interest?
5. Do you pretend to do the office work when you really are not doing the office work?
6. Do you pretend to have a lot of work and appear to be a busy person?
7. Are you generally unhappy with your work?
8. Do you feel that your work is unimportant?
9. Do you think you have better capabilities and can do better?
10. Do you feel tired at the end of the day in spite of actually doing nothing at work?

**Source:** Overcoming Workplace demotivation, Phillipe Rothlin & Peter Werder, Kogan Page India

*Exhibit IV: Strategies of a bored out person*

**Compromise strategy:** Doing the work with full concentration for days together or for weeks at a stretch so that the work gets completed faster and earlier than the deadline. The remaining days till the deadline can be fritted away in personal works, chatting with friends or gossiping with colleagues. The boss will not be aware about this because the work will still be submitted within the deadline.

**Obstruction Strategy:** This strategy is not for preventing the work but it is for postponing the work. The postponement will give more time for personal work. Use any hook or crook method to postpone the project, process or work so that it gets delayed.

**Leveling out Strategy:** The work is distributed over a longer period of time. The work will go on in full swing for a few days, followed by a lull in the work when the employee can enjoy doing personal work followed again by a bout of overworking.

**Brief Case Strategy:** Carrying the brief case from home to work and back again from work to home creates an illusion that the employee is devoted and very interested in work and doesn't mind sacrificing his personal time for the sake of office work.

**Pseudo burnout strategy:** Stating explicitly that the employee will fall apart if more work is given and demonstrating in words and actions that they are overloaded. People working with them think that they are already overworked and will not dare to give some more extra work.

**Uproar strategy:** Creating a lot of noise in the work place to give a feeling to others in the work place that they are very busy working.

**Source:** Overcoming Workplace demotivation, Phillipe Rothlin & Peter Werder, Kogan Page India

*Exhibit V: Bore out and Career Stages*

**Stage 1:** We are at the outset of our career, with little or no professional experience. We may be highly motivated and are looking forward to professional life and its possibilities. We also know about the dream of sweet idleness, but do not in our wildest dreams think that something like that can happen in real life. We expect stress and a challenge.

**Stage 2:** We begin to work and quickly establish that the world of work is not nearly as stressful as is always claimed. And so we learn to control the amount of work we do, while still sending out the appropriate messages. As we assume that idleness is pleasant, we plan our routines so that we have as little as possible, or even nothing at all, to do.

**Stage 3:** After sometime, we begin to suffer from bore out. Although, we recognize that idleness is anything but fun, we maintain this condition. We become dissatisfied and remain so; our behavior has become self defeating. We do not try to discuss this with a superior, or seriously consider changing job.

**Source:** Overcoming Workplace demotivation, Phillipe Rothlin & Peter Werder, Kogan Page India

*Exhibit VI: How bored are you?*

Samaritans	<p>Enjoy the work</p> <p>Balanced work life and personal life</p> <p>Absolutely not stressed at work</p> <p>Work is a motivator</p> <p><b>NO BOREOUT</b></p>
Journey Men	<p>Likes to learn</p> <p>Can be motivated by important and different work</p> <p>Work should constantly offer challenges</p> <p>Use a part of their time for personal work</p> <p><b>LITTLE BOREDOUT</b></p>
Titanic Passengers	<p>Initial stages of career is extremely good</p> <p>Routine work brings in efficiency and reduction in time required to finish a project</p> <p>Use of free time for personal works</p> <p>Can contribute more to the organization, but will not</p> <p><b>MORE BOREDOUT</b></p>
Chameleon	<p>Can adapt to the environment</p> <p>Bored and under stretched</p> <p>Unmotivated</p> <p>Lots of personal work done in the office</p> <p><b>INTENSELY BOREDOUT</b></p>
Maggot	<p>Do not contribute anything to the organization</p> <p>Do not show any signs of work or working</p> <p><b>BOREOUT KING</b></p>

**Source:** Bore out Overcoming workplace demotivation by Phillippe Rothlin & Peter Werder

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