

SPOTLIGHT: Mental Health

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Mental Health in the Australian infrastructure construction industry

Firstly:

1. Roads Australia

2. Participating Companies



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Context

- Regular meeting of concerned staff from Tier 1 & 2 companies
 - Anecdotal evidence of compromised mental health in white collar/infrastructure professionals
- High degree of employee turnover (+absenteeism)
 - Increasing demands of individual job, company and sector: reducing work-life balance
- Risk to completion of projects on time and on budget
 - Most concerning, ongoing observations of poor mental health, job performance/enjoyment, and burnout

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Process

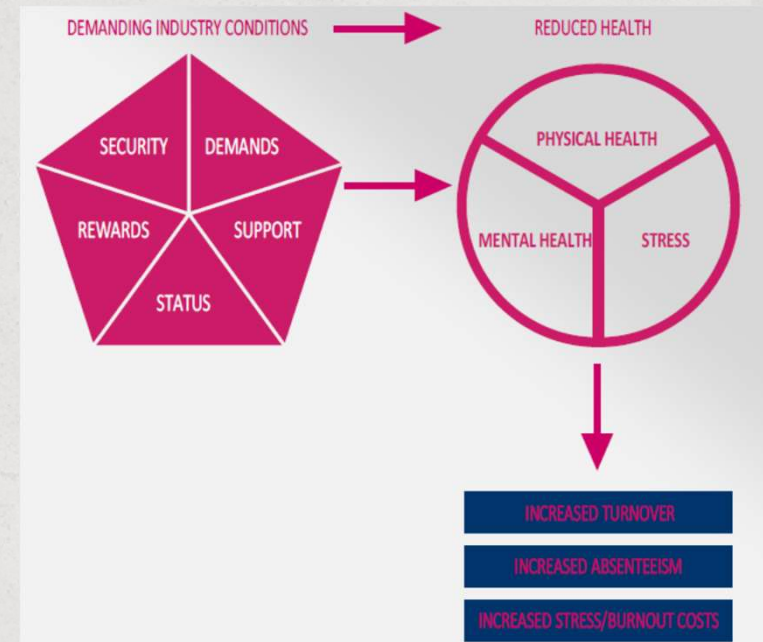
- Secure buy-in and funding from participating companies
- Identify relevant psychological processes
 - Depression, Anxiety and Stress: in the last week
 - Perceived Stress: in the past few weeks
 - Moods in the past week (depression, anxiety, anger....)
 - **Work-life balance**
 - Hours worked
 - Physical Health
 - Burnout
- Develop secure web-portal for survey administration (www.taly.com.au)



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Mental Health Initiative: Phase 1

1. Survey distribution: First week of May, 2018
2. Survey close: Second week of June, 2018
3. Eight participating companies
4. Over 1000 sign-ups to TALY website
5. Almost 700 completed surveys



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Mental Health Initiative: Sample & Roles

Role	Number of Respondents
Commercial Management	52
Design Management	47
Graduate Engineer	37
Project Director	15
Project Engineer	89
Project Manager	84
Project Support Services	157
Safety, Quality or Environment Management	84
Senior Project Engineer	60
Site Engineer	56

Sample & Psychosocial Aspects

- 683 completed surveys
 - 190 females
 - 493 males
- High levels of (>60%):
 - Job security
 - Feeling valued by their company
 - Job status
- Low ratings of (59%):
 - Work-life balance

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1. Average levels of depression, anxiety and stress exceeded population norms by 40% for depression, 38% for anxiety and 37% for stress.
2. Levels of “mood disturbance” were 2.5 times higher than the normal population
3. Levels of physical health complaints were observed to be 50% higher than the normal population and worse than the comparison populations.
4. 85% of respondents are suffering from moderate to high levels of stress, and 46% of respondents met the criteria for being burnt-out, in comparison to the normal population rate of 28%.
5. 64% of respondents reported working over 50 hours per week.
6. In contrast to the general population in which 20% of people report be dissatisfied with their work-life balance, 59% of the respondent's endorsed being “unsatisfied” with their level of work-life balance.

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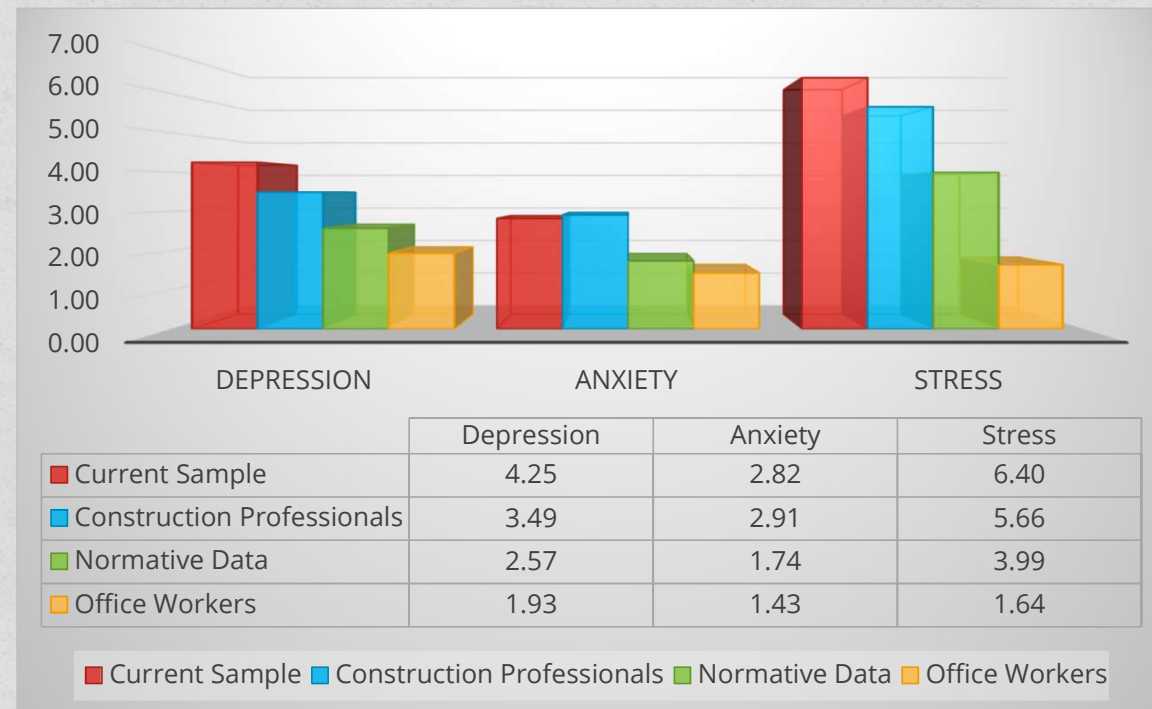
Research indicates that 'job stress and other work-related psychosocial hazards' are emerging as the leading contributors to the burden of occupational disease and injury

- When you are stressed you may experience many different feelings, including anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, or frustration.
- These feelings can sometimes feed on each other and produce physical symptoms, making you feel even worse. For some people, stressful life events can contribute to symptoms of depression.
 - As such, it is important to acknowledge that yours and your colleagues mental health is an important workplace health issue.
- Work-related stress can also have negative impacts on mental health.
 - Work-related stress accounts for an average of 23.9 days of work lost for every person affected.

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Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

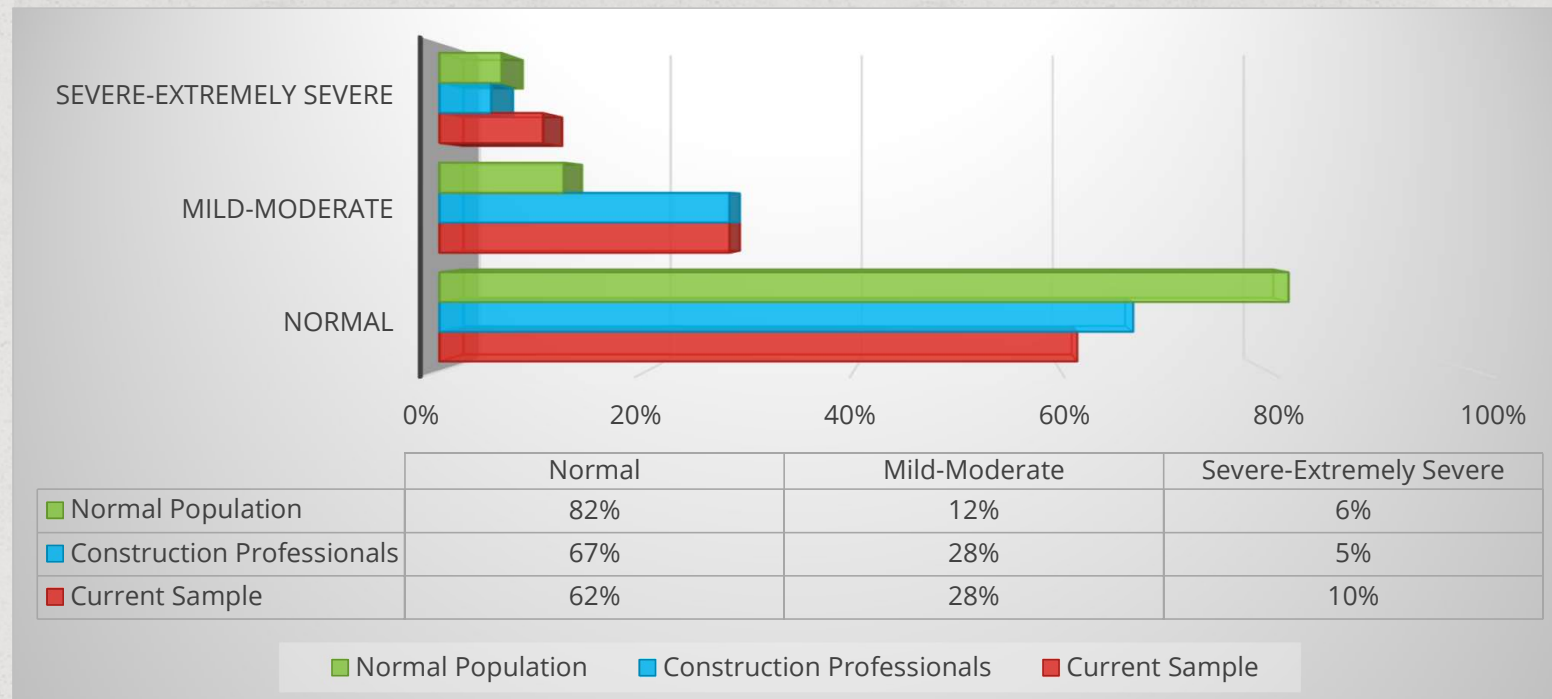
- The Depression scale includes items that measure symptoms typically associated with dysphoric mood (e.g., sadness or worthlessness).
- The Anxiety scale, includes items that are primarily related to symptoms of physical arousal, panic attacks, and fear (e.g., trembling or faintness).
- The Stress scale includes items that measure symptoms such as tension, irritability, and a tendency to overreact to stressful events.



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Depression

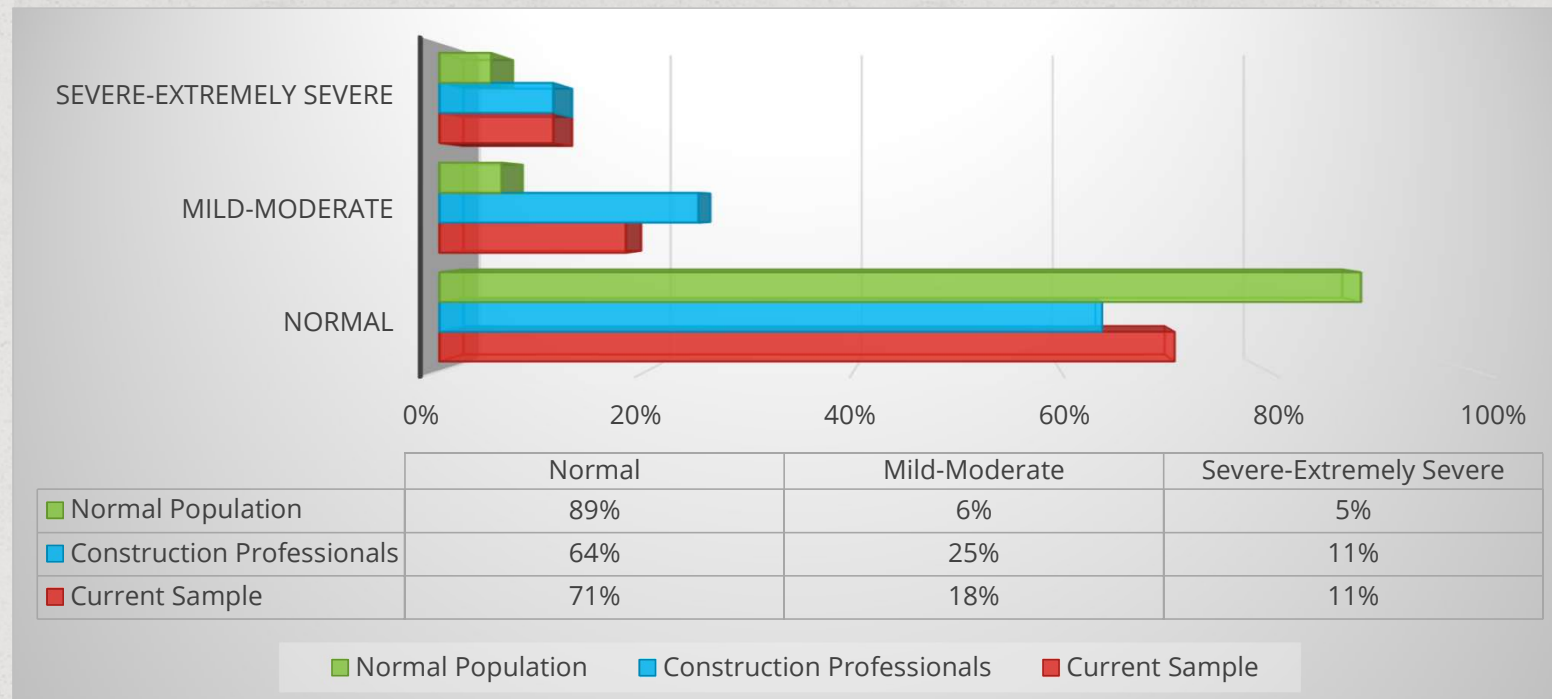
- 20% less levels of “normal”
- Elevated “severe”
- Industry specific?



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Anxiety

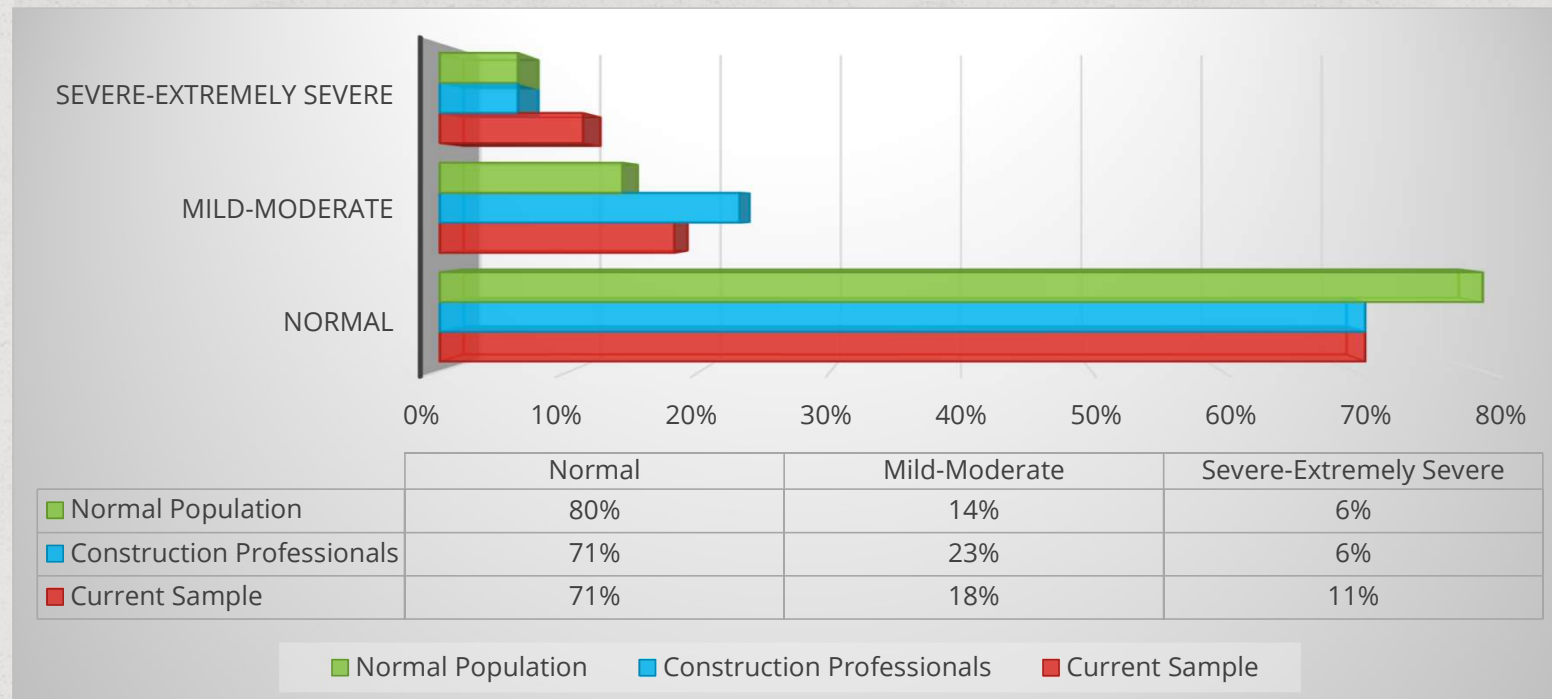
- Elevated physical & mental symptoms
- 18% less “normal”



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Stress

- Some stress can be adaptive
- Elevated “Severe” levels of stress



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Mental Health

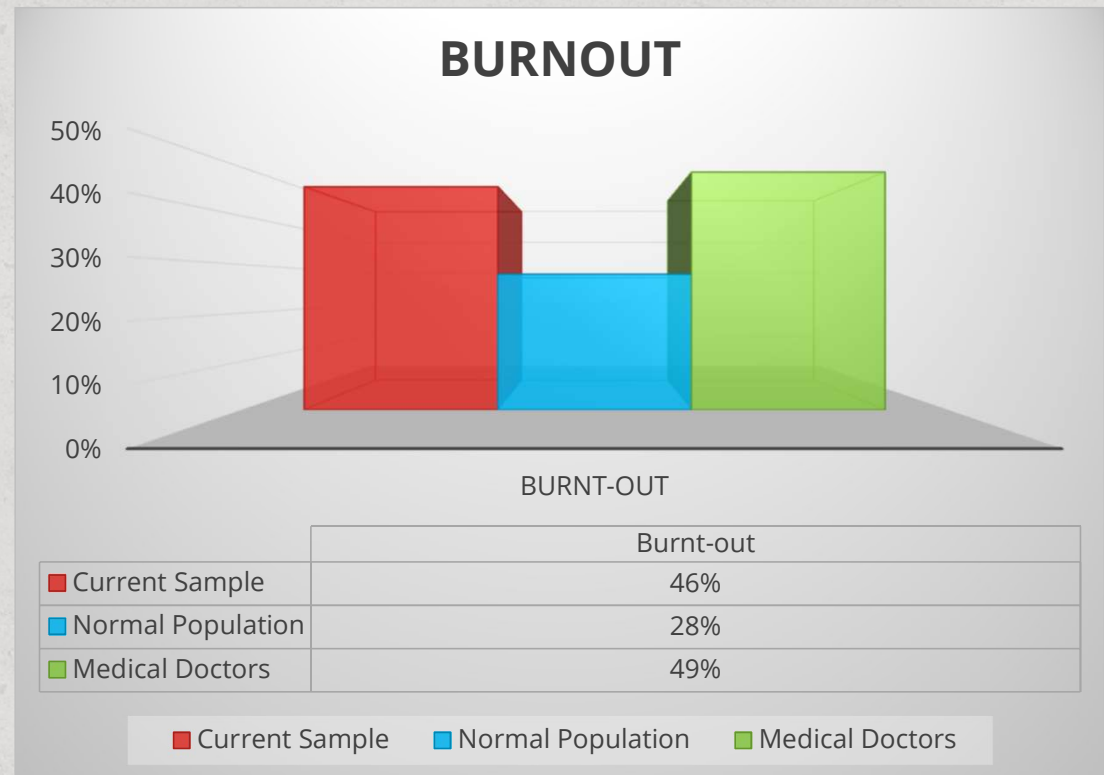
- i. Average levels of depression, anxiety and stress exceeded population norms by 40% for depression, 38% for anxiety and 37% for stress.
- ii. Between 62-71% of respondents returned “normal” levels of mental health (for Depression, Anxiety and Stress ratings), indicating that between 29-38% of the employees taking part were suffering from psychological illness; compared with 18% of the Australian population.



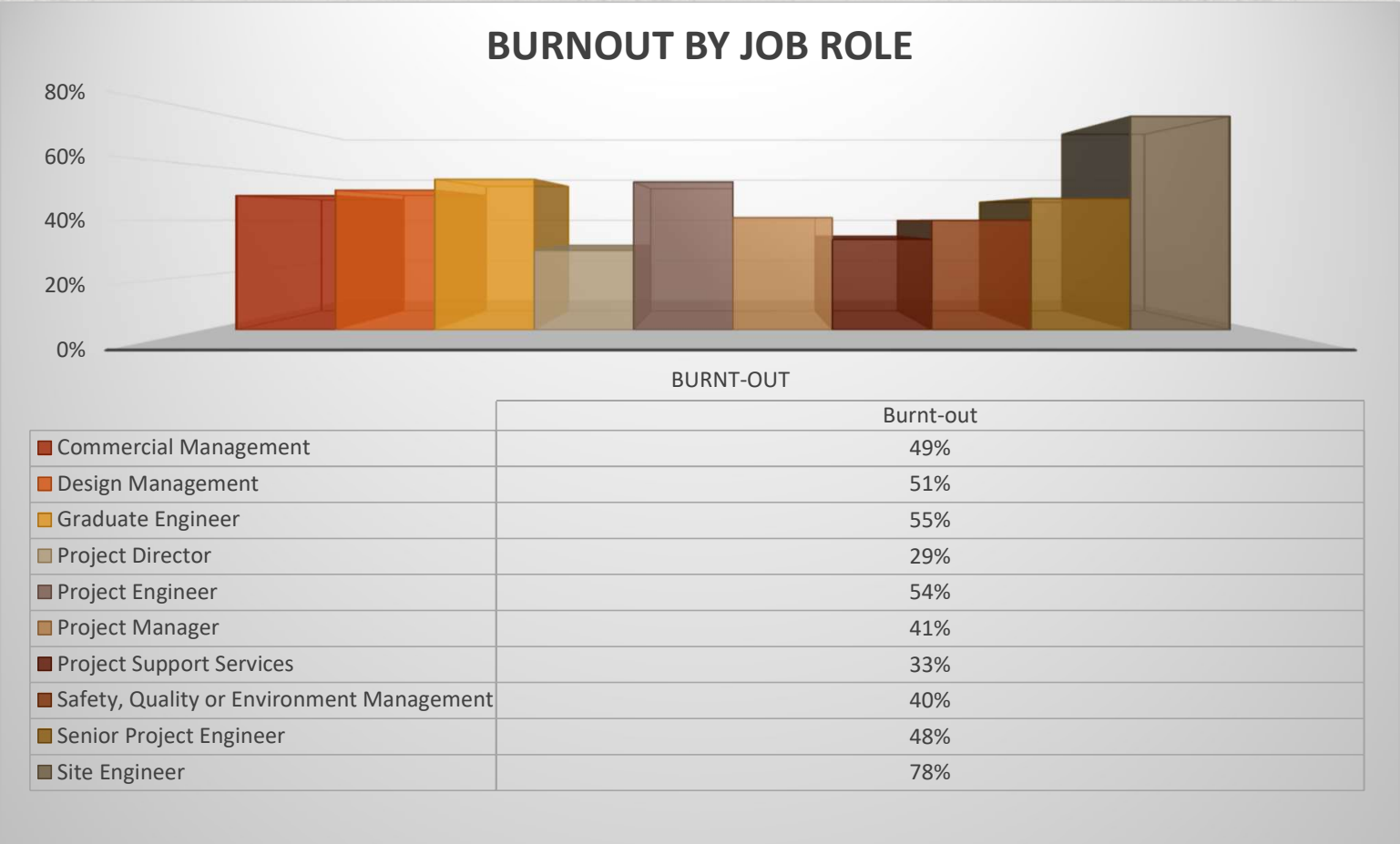
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Burnout is characterised by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness in the workplace, and by chronic negative responses to stressful workplace conditions.

- Burnout is having a growing impact on workplaces, in particular in advanced economies and during times of economic downturn.
- Burnout is more likely when employees:
 - Expect too much of themselves.
 - Never feel that the work they are doing is good enough.
 - Feel inadequate or incompetent.
 - Feel unappreciated for their work efforts.
 - Have unreasonable demands placed upon them.
 - Are in roles that are not a good job fit.



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Reducing the occurrence of burnout is imperative for employees productivity, mental health, physical health and willingness to stay in their job.

- Burnout is becoming increasingly prevalent in industries or professions where the average work day (hours) is not long enough to complete the tasks assigned to employees.
- In these professions, it is reported that eventually people feel as though they have nothing more to give. At this point, people are highly more likely to be absent from work, seek much needed mental health treatment, leave their workplace, and increasingly, leave the industry that has contributed to their burnout completely.
- But, what is driving these elevated levels of mental health and burnout issues?



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What are the drivers of these results?

We conducted two half-day focus groups (40-50 people each day) to identify what employees of these companies believe are driving these results and what initiatives could be employed

1. Individuals (interaction with management, training, expectations of role, hours worked...)
2. Organisational culture (policies, relationships with other companies, leave entitlement, values...)
3. Industry level (large projects, challenging deadlines, workload, focus on outcomes for the public...)

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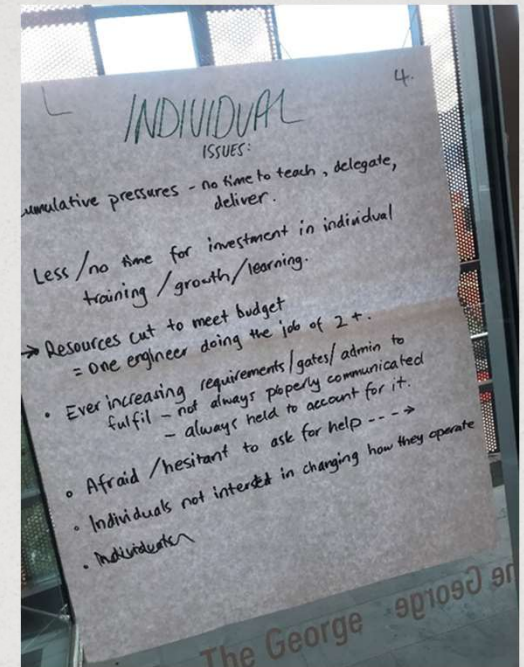
1. Individuals (interaction with management, training, expectations of role, hours worked...)

Issues

- Time
- Resourcing (lack of on-the-job training)
- Empowerment
- Individual/Intrinsic Motivation
- Poor leadership & delegation skills

Solutions

- Better work arrangements, turn-off at home
- Education: mental health and well-being
- Education: job training
- Empowerment to maintain a WLB, utilise training



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2. Organisational culture (policies, relationships with other companies, leave entitlement, values...)

Issues

- Culture (long hours, no breaks, no flexible hours)
- Projects: < budget, staff, resourced
- Poor communication
- Limited talent/training
- High admin loads and unclear decision-making

Solutions

- Increase rewards, recognition, support, resources
- Improved flexibility and accounting of work hours
- IT blackouts
- Improved teamwork and leadership



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What to do?

Recent Allianz report into mental health in the workplace offered 5 key action areas, that are consistent with improving our survey findings and the causes/solutions identified in the focus groups

1. Promoting the mental health benefits of physical activity and good general health
2. Fostering mental health and awareness through training, mental wellbeing leave and encouraging transparent dialogue
3. Creating positive organisational design that directly influences employee motivation and happiness
4. Nurturing a positive workplace culture that is transparent and inclusive
5. Developing partnerships and alliances between government, insurers, mental health professionals and other entities to improve communication, engagement and mental health recovery

THE COST OF WORKPLACE MENTAL ILL-HEALTH[®]

7,020

Australians compensated for work-related mental health conditions on average each year

20x

more sick days per month taken by workers with severe depression than other workers

\$24.5k

typical compensation payment per mental injury claim compared to \$9000 for other claims

15.3

weeks is the typical time off work per mental injury claim

80%

higher payments for mental injury claims than 10 years ago

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Conclusion

- Australian infrastructure/construction professional staff are highly stressed, report compromised mental and physical health, have unsatisfactory levels of work-life balance, and exhibit very high rates of burnout.
- Increasing demands, long hours, time pressure, and expectations to operate outside of normal working hours are requiring unsustainable efforts from construction professional staff that is resulting in mental and physical damage to the workforce.
- Changes are necessary to protect the health of this workforce.

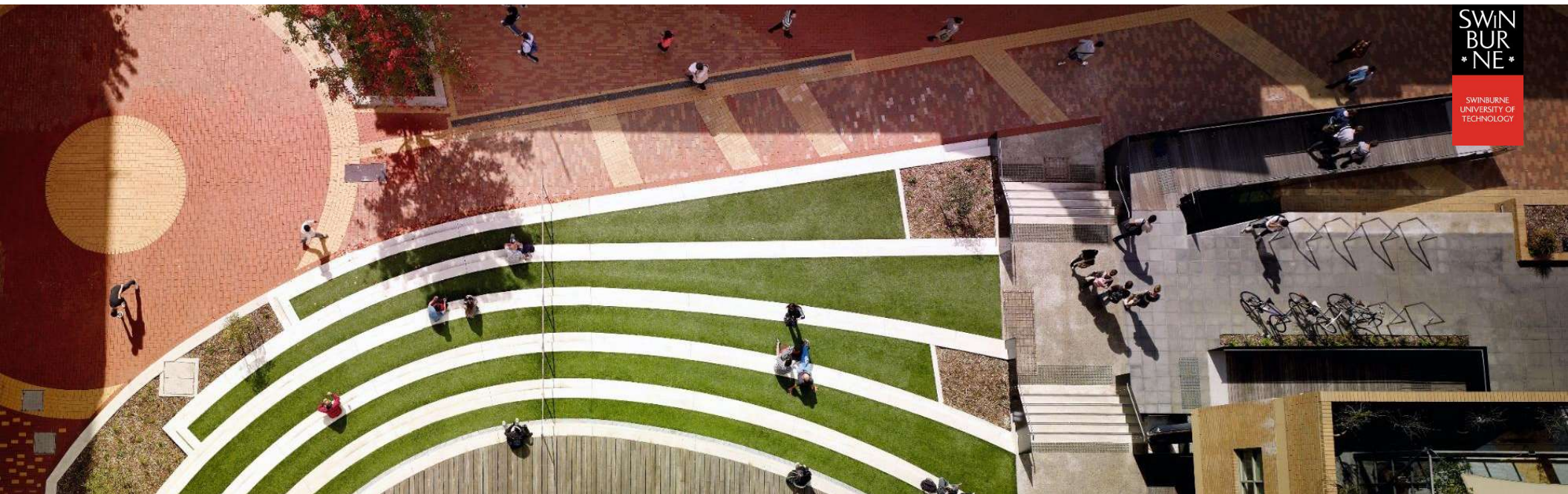
How to start?

1. Collect “valid” and “comparable” data (survey)
2. Ask your employees what is causing the issues (focus groups)
3. Implement key changes to mental health management (communicate them)
4. Monitor changes (see 1- 3)

SPOTLIGHT: Mental Health

1. White collar infrastructure professionals are highly engaged, motivated, feel appreciated by their companies
2. They report compromised work-life balance, mental health challenges, and are working to the point of burnout
3. This pattern of results is unlikely to be unique to the companies sampled
4. Shifting the spotlight to similar companies and employees is necessary to acknowledge the impact the workplace and industry can have on mental health





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