

Work For Employers

A white collar employee's death should make companies think more about responsive workplaces

Her mother's detailed and poignant letter about Anna Sebastian Perayil's life after her death, has touched a chord across the country's white collar workers. Per the letter, an overwhelming workload and relentless managers pushed the young chartered accountant beyond her limits. Even as the letter has drawn many others to share their own experience of corporate bosses putting unreasonable pressure on employees, MoS labour and employment has indicated there will be a thorough investigation into its allegations. As of now we don't know with certainty the cause and effect. But such conversations about work's role in human diminishing/flourishing are critical for moving the needle



towards better working conditions.

The fact is that no single sweeping statement can accommodate the reality of all workers in a company, let alone in society. By the same token, there is no blunt instrument by which everyone can be granted their ideal work-life balance. WHO officially recognised burnout as an occupational phenomenon in 2019, characterising it in three dimensions:

feelings of exhaustion, increased negativism towards one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. It's the opposite of resilience and purposefulness. It takes the most fleeting look at the energyful septuagenarian leaders around the world, to see how wasteful burnout in ordinary people is. Recall Charles Munger after a daylong board meeting at age 99, declare that you don't call it work when you enjoy it. To be disheartened by a job you wanted, is a tragedy by any reckoning. The only constructive thing to do with it is to build more observant and responsive workplaces. There is no one-shape-fits-all formula for this. But one factor that should help across the board is transparency about expectations. If an employee is going to be working weekends, let them know when you sign her on.

All employers should respond to this conversation about working conditions with a serious audit of everyday work practices. For example, who is supervising the supervisors? If their behaviour is oppressive, disrespectful and lacking in any empathy at all, then even the most qualified and passionate employees could end up losing their mojo. Different individuals respond differently to such pressure. Many are just walking away from jobs – attrition rates are high. There are also other ways to retain agency. The 'quiet quitting' phenomenon continues to be heavily peddled by influencers. But that's not a solution. The solution lies in employers understanding employees better.