

Operational Excellence in a Burnt out Workforce

Prof Teo Eng Kiong

CEO, Sengkang General Hospital

DGCMB (Regional Hospital Network), Singapore Health Services

13 August 2024

Scope of Discussion

Operation Efficiency

Operational Excellence

Healthcare Workforce

Causes of Burnout

Effects of Burnout

Strategies to Address Burnout

**Evidence of Reducing Burnout and
Operational Excellence**

Learning from Others

Conclusions

Operational Efficiency

Operational Efficiency = Expense/Revenue

The lower the number, the higher the efficiency.

To increase efficiency, we can decrease expense and/or increase revenue.

Decrease expense:

- Decrease resources
- Reduce wastage

Increase revenue:

- Increase load
- Increase complexity

Decrease Expense

- **Reduce Resources:**

- Not applicable in a resource constrained system.

- **Reduce Wastage:**

- Seemed to be the logical approach.
- Principle is sound but implementation tricky.
- Distinguish between true wastage and intended redundancy.
- Need to have a deep understanding of the work processes to construct the changes.
- To adopt a system level approach so that the reduction in wastage at one point does not add load to another.
- To ensure sufficient redundancies to implement change.



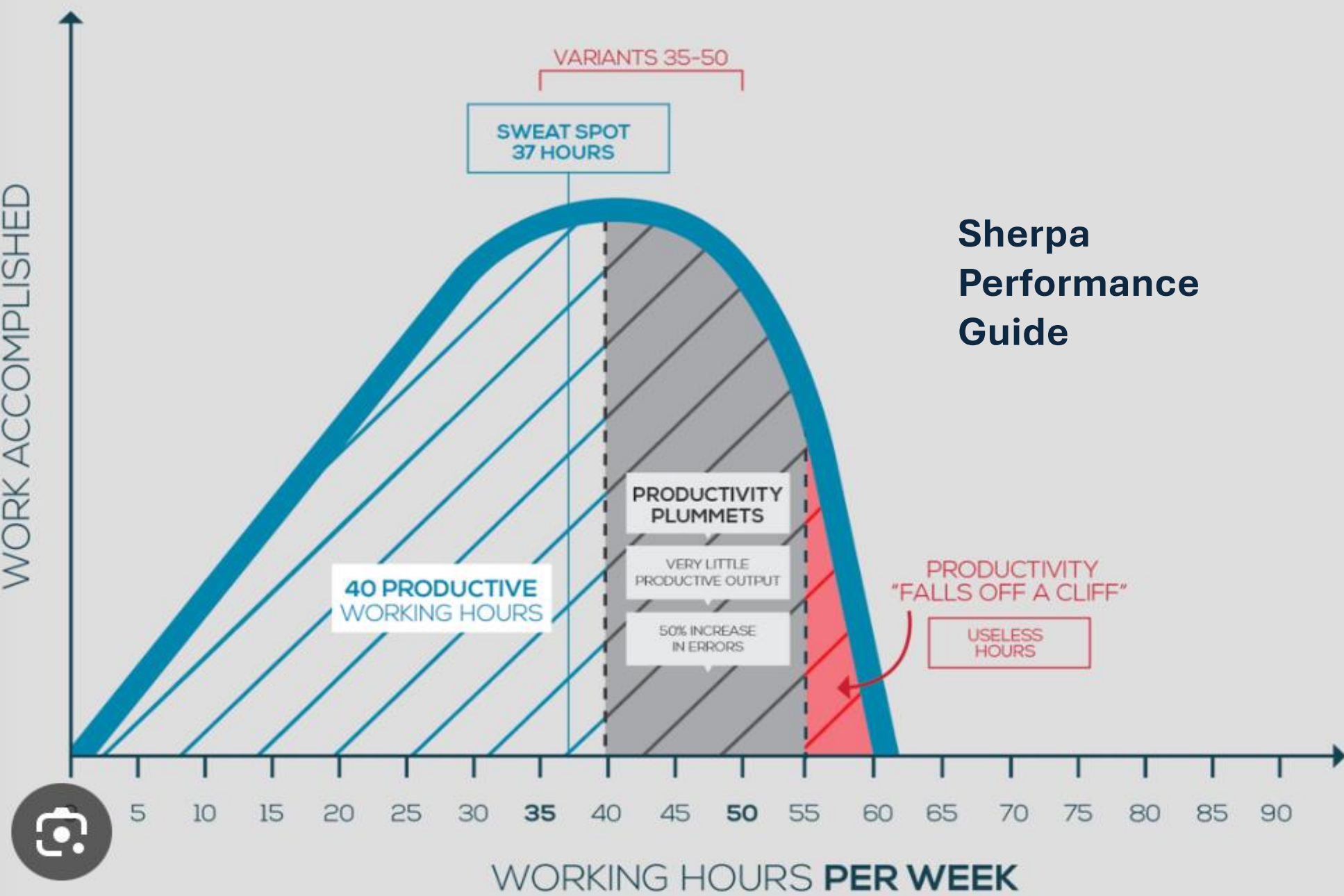


Increase Revenue

- **Increase load:**
 - Increasing load is the most direct way to increase revenue.
 - May result in monotony and a decrease in excitement and motivation for the staff.
- **Increase complexity:**
 - Dependent on capabilities of the staff and facilities at the organisation.
 - Increase in complexity is usually aimed at reducing the load of monotonous simple tasks.
 - Provide a sense of achievement for the staff.
 - However, the risks are higher and the rate of potential failure more.

WORK ACCOMPLISHED

Sherpa Performance Guide





Operational Excellence

- Operational excellence goes beyond operational efficiency.
- Builds on strategic alignment of the whole organisation.
- Based on customer/patient-centricity.
- Focused on culture that:
 - Management and staff are invested in success measurements.
 - Emphasis on continuous improvements.
 - Every staff is empowered to implement change.
- To maintain a sustainable, continuously self-improving operational system.

Traits of Healthcare Workforce

- Mainly Type A personality.
- Type A personality performed better than type B, especially in areas of teaching/ training and relationships with patients and colleagues.
- Type A personality also respond more intensely to stressors.
 - Identification with patients.
 - Deterioration and complication in patients' condition.
 - Job criticism
 - Daily workload
 - Least affected by family rejection.

Behaviour of Personality Type Toward Stress and Job Performance:
A Study of Healthcare Professionals. Yasmin J, Chandrakanta J
Family Med Prim Care 2012 Jul-Dec; 1(2): 109-113.



Type A Personality and Stress

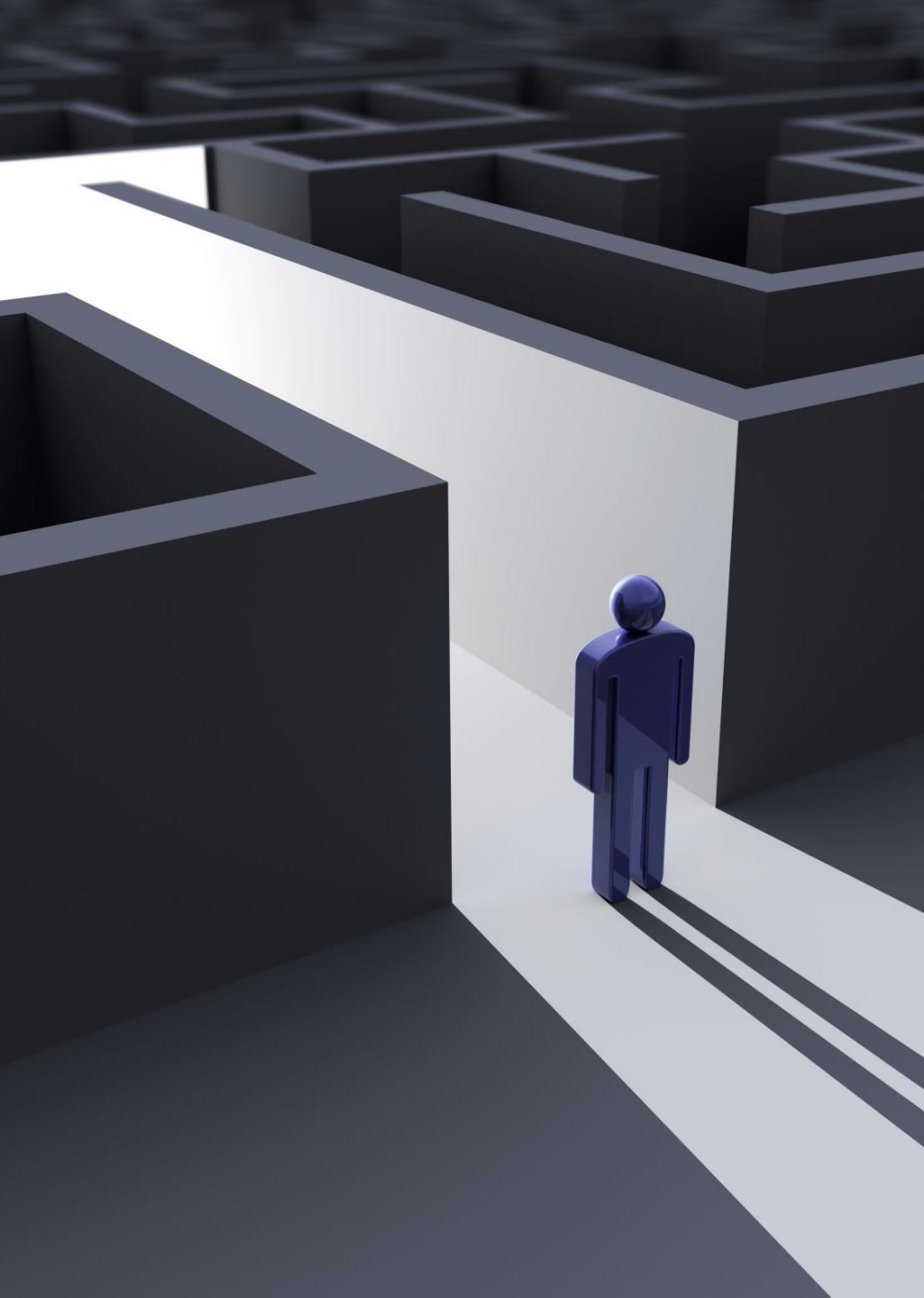


▪ **Type A description:**

- Competitive
- Hard-driving
- Time-urgent
- Hostile-irritable

▪ **Response to stress:**

- Prioritise over-achieving on top of self-care.
- Multi-task to compensate for lack of time.
- Some studies linked Type A to higher risk of CHD (Framingham vs MRFIT).
- Feels higher level of frustrations and anger.



Burnout

- Feeling of exhaustion:
 - Physical
 - Mental
 - Emotional
- Prolonged or repeated stress.
- Loss of sense of control to work out a possible solution.

■ Pre-burnout

- Over-engagement
- Over reactive emotions
- Hyperactive with sense of urgency
- Fatigue
- Symptoms mainly physical

Symptoms of Pre-Burnout to Burnout

■ Burnout

- Disengagement
- Blunted emotions
- Feeling of hopelessness and helplessness
- Unmotivated
- Symptoms mainly emotional

Causes of Burnout

**Lack of
autonomy**

**Lack of control over
work processes
and environment.**

**Given and made to
perform tasks
that are against the
ethics and beliefs
of the individual.**

**Perceived lack of
support from
leaders and
colleagues.**

**Goals of the
organisation
do not resonate
with self.**

Effects of Burnout

Increased risk of medical errors	Increased risk of mental health issues	Increased incidence of physical ailments and absenteeism	Reduced job satisfaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Impaired cognitive function▪ Miscommunication▪ Poor analysis and decision making resulting in delayed diagnosis and treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focused on patient-care and neglect self-care.▪ Feeling of depression, anxiety, sense of helplessness and hopelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Present with headaches and backaches.▪ Increased BP among the hypertensive staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increased attrition.

Strategies to Address Burnout

➤ Self:

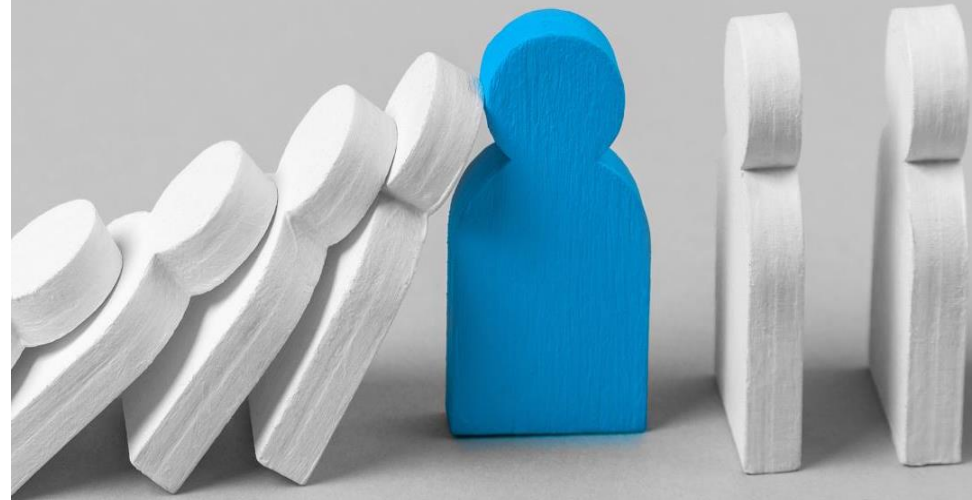
- **Set realistic goals.** Ensure that the goals are:
 - Achievable.
 - Aligned.
 - Available resources.
- **Prioritise self-care:**
 - Enough sleep.
 - Hydration (and going for toilet breaks).
 - Nutritious meals.
 - Engage in stress-reducing activities like exercise, listening to music, meditation, meeting up with friends.
 - Take self-care as a preventive investment for sustainable continuing service.



Strategies to Address Burnout

➤ Self:

- **Create healthy workplace boundaries.**
 - Set time limit for work.
 - Create protected space from work.
 - Ok to say “no”.
- **Be authentic and confident.**
 - Recognise that different individuals have different strengths and weaknesses.
 - Have realistic expectations with regards to contributions vs rewards and recognition.
 - Be confident that your value is in doing your best for the task given to you.



Strategies to Address Burnout

➤ **Organisation:**

▪ **Safety:**

○ **Physical safety:**

- Adequately and appropriately facilitated to perform the tasks.
- E.g. ceiling hoist in the wards.
- Zero tolerance to physical abuse at workplace.

○ **Psychological safety:**

- More subtle and often overlooked.
- Isolation to bullying.
- Sexual harassment.

○ **Open channel of communication.**

Strategies to Address Burnout

➤ **Organisation:**

▪ **Autonomy and control:**

- Do the staff have a say in how they perform their tasks?
- Do they have control over their own leave application? Reporting time to work?
- Leaders sending mixed or equivocal signals.

▪ **Collaboration:**

- Shared decision-making wrt work schedule.
- Shared decision wrt career progression and development.

▪ **Empowerment:**

- Sufficiently equipped to do the job.
- Sufficiently resourced to do the job.
- Workload management.

▪ **Social dynamics development:**

- Bonding and camaraderie.

Strategies to Address Burnout

➤ Organisational culture:

▪ Equity and justice

- vs equality and fairness.
- Rewards and recognition.

▪ Alignment with mission and vision

- Consistency

▪ Approach to KPIs

- KPI-tis – an extremely infectious disease that affects leaders resulting in a loss of vision and a blind chase to hit a target.

▪ Addressing the urgent vs the important.

- Pre-emptive vs reactive.
- “Don’t try to fix it if it ain’t broken.”



Effects of Burnout on Operational Excellence

- ↓ Increased absenteeism
- ↓ Increased attrition
- ↓ Increased errors
- ↓ Increased complaints
- ↓ **INCREASED EXPENSE**
- ↓ Decreased morale
- ↓ Decreased improvements and innovations
- ↓ Decreased productivity
- ↓ Decreased business activities
- ↓ **DECREASED REVENUE**



Reducing Burnout and Productivity



Legitimising rest:

- Pomodoro technique (25/5)
 - 52/17 (2014)
 - 112/26 (2021)



Joy at Work

SingHealth's
initiative

SKH Initiatives

Have a Break, Have a Kopi!

- ☑ Coffee Corners were set up at pantries in 78 locations in SKH for patient-facing staff.
- ☑ Convenient access to refreshments has enabled staff to recharge and refuel their energy during their busy days.



Re-charge Corners for Staff

Resting space at ICU



Resting Corner



Refreshment Corner



Recreation Corner (games & books)



SKH Initiatives



Rest Areas for Staff



Learning from Others

□ Apple:

- ✓ People are at the heart of Apple.
- ✓ Feel Good:
 - Body and mind
 - Whole family
 - Financial
 - Growth/Development
 - Renew and Recover
 - Giving (Match 1:1 donation and USD25 donation for every 1 hr of volunteering)
 - Special discounts for Apple products
- ✓ Ownership. All staff eligible for stocks grants and discount when purchasing Apple stock.



Learning from Others

□ **Google:**

- ✓ Health and wellness (Emphasis on mental wellness).
- ✓ Financial peace of mind
- ✓ Time off to recharge (4 weeks per year work from anywhere).
- ✓ Family and support care
- ✓ Personal development
- ✓ Matched donations and time-off to volunteer.
- ✓ Collab space with onsite meals and snacks.
- ✓ Fitness center / massage programs / ergonomic support.
- ✓ On-demand fitness, well-being and cooking classes.
- ✓ Ownership through GSUs packages.

Learning from Others

☐ Asia-Pacific Brewery:

Brew Your Career with Us.

- ✓ Recognition for excellence.
- ✓ Workplace amenities:
 - Including steam bath and nap pods.
 - Tiger Tavern: Brew the joy of togetherness with beer on the house.
- ✓ Flexible work arrangements
- ✓ Health screening
- ✓ Life insurance
- ✓ Parental and family leave (including adoption leave).
- ✓ Discounted beer and complimentary beer on festive occasions.
- ✓ Competitive remuneration





Learning from Others

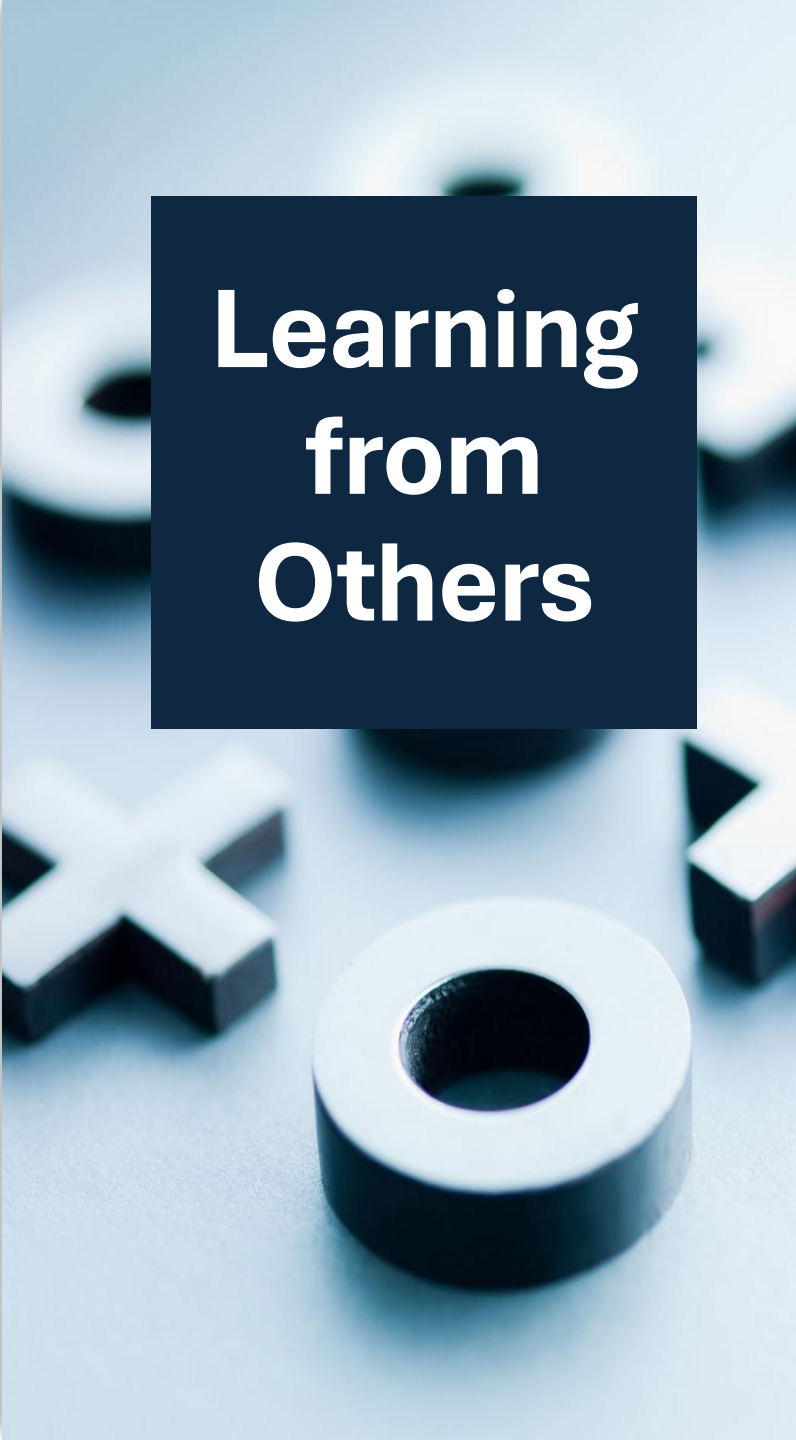
□ **General Electric (1981-2001)**

- ✓ CEOed by “Manager of the Century”.
- ✓ Phenomenal increase in stock value.
- ✓ Introduced Lean and Six Sigma improvement strategies.
- ✓ Removed wastes and increase efficiencies.
- ✓ Transformed GE from a company for household products to a MNC with financial, media and industrial products.

➤ **GE's (Jack Welch's) strategies:**

- Rank and Yank
- Firing of employees ranked lower than 10%.
- Leading by fear
 - Shouting matches
 - Not open to contrary ideas.
 - Employees described going to work as akin to going to war.
- Neutron Jack approach
 - Units were expected to be no.1 or 2 in the market.
 - Units that failed to achieve will be closed down.
- Foster a cutthroat culture that pitted one colleague against another.

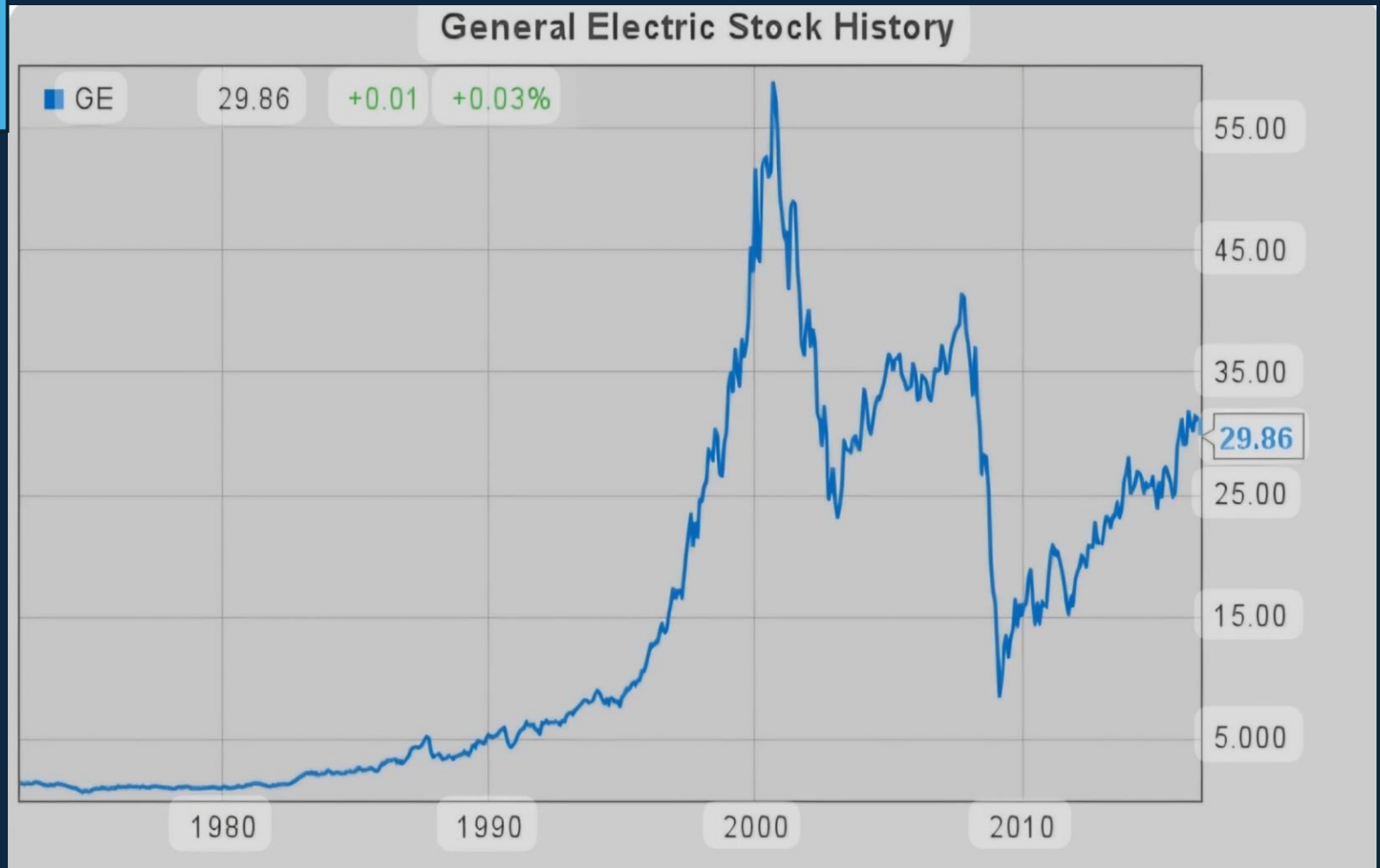
What Jack Welch Got Wrong (Just About Everything). David Gelles May 31, 2022.



**Learning
from
Others**

GE Stock History

The Motley Fool
Sept 14, 2016



Apple and Google Stock Price



Conclusions

Operational excellence and strategies to combat burnout are not contradictory.

Creating a psychologically safe, secured and nurturing work environment that works towards sustained operational excellence.

Need to build a conducive work environment including:

- Work volume**
- Work hours**

Suggest studies on rest and efficiency to be conducted in the healthcare environment.