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Workers suffer GFC blues

The relentless pace of work is taking its toll on employees

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MARKETING co-ordinator Karen Wu had been thrilled to find work after many months, but found herself quitting her job soon after starting because of her inability to cope with the demands of her employer.

She has yet to find another job but says the increasingly heavy workload at the previous company left her emotionally and physically drained.

Karen says her passion for her work had been declining and she found herself feeling overwhelmed at the thought of going to work each morning.

"The workload was simply too much for just one person and the boss did not want to acknowledge that," she says.

She adds that some companies exploit their staff by trying to cut costs and increase work hours with lower pay, particularly during an economic crisis.

Wu is not the only one. The insidious effects of the global financial crisis continue to be felt in the Australian workforce, with a recent study showing many employees have lost their passion for their jobs and their belief in themselves and their managers.

The key findings of management consultancy RogenSi's Global Mindset Index this year give an alarming insight into the mindset of the workforce compared with a year ago, indicating a dramatic erosion of motivation and a loss of mental toughness in the workplace.

A year ago, the index showed that while employees doubted their managers, they still believed in themselves.

Clark Perry, director and psychologist at RogenSi, says among the key findings is that workforce passion for the job has dropped by an alarming 18 per cent on the previous year.

Another finding is that 26 per cent of the workforce surveyed is suffering from symptoms specified as indicators of depression by the World Health Organisation.

"While in line with depression levels found in the general population, these can significantly [affect] personal and organisational performance," Perry says.

The index surveyed 668 employees across various age groups, job titles and industry sectors, focusing on the mindset of the workforce in 26 behaviour areas. About 70 per cent of the respondents were Australian.

Perry says the results should ring



Clark Perry, a director and psychologist at RogenSi, an international management consultancy

alarm bells for organisations, as uncertainty and nervousness across the global marketplace have been internalised by employees, which has affected, them dramatically. "Following the global financial crisis, some organisations have been operating at a frenetic pace and have become blinkered and so focused on trying to achieve outcomes or indeed just survive," he says.

"The result has been much more demand on an employee's time, with little or no reward or recognition for their effort."

Perry cautions that without proper intervention and leadership, employers can expect reduced performance. They can also expect resignations as employees look for more rewarding work.

He cautions, however, that employees should not play victim but instead make necessary behavioural changes and empower themselves to perform better.

On a more positive note, the index also found that workers' perception of

their organisation's prospects had improved 15 per cent compared with the previous year.

Another encouraging sign is a 25 per cent increase in employees' recognition that managers are trying to respond to the challenge presented in the workplace and create a motivational environment.

Keith Suter, a lecturer in the department of politics and international relations at Macquarie University and a leading economic and social policy commentator, believes that despite Australia emerging relatively unscathed from the GFC, many in the country fear a possible second economic dip.

He says while numerous organisations kept lay-offs to a minimum, there were some who endangered their companies by overworking their staff.

"If you get one person to do the job of three people they will be cutting corners, not following proper procedures, and they will burn out before the com-

pany burns up," he says, noting that this was not sustainable in the long term.

He says generation Y employees may be hardest hit because their older colleagues have lived through similar economic crisis situations and ensuing economic recovery in the past.

"As you get older and you survive problems, you do get a greater sense of resilience. What you need is to live through it, come out on the other side and realise that life will go on," he says.

Referring to the depression indicators in the workforce, Suter also points out that the WHO has issued repeated warnings that mental health issues will be one of the big problems of the 21st century.

"In physical terms, people are able to live longer, but the stress of modern life may well be leading to an increase in mental health issues," he says.

The stresses he refers to include the frenetic pace and overloading through multi-tasking in the workplace, constant competition and also the fal-

lacy that increased wealth brings greater happiness.

Suter says that while existing social policies were inadequate for dealing with mental health issues, it would be difficult to bring about change as long as there was stigma attached to admitting problems and seeking help.

He points out that just as employers were happy to place posters in workplace bathrooms advising people on how to prevent passing on the flu, they could similarly have posters encouraging employees with mental health problems to seek assistance.

Suter also says the government needs to put more money into the health sector, including increasing the number of doctors and nurses to treat mental-health issues.

"In the past when people died of cancer, people would only say they died after a long illness. We have brought cancer into the open now. We have got to do the same with mental health," he says.