


HOW BURNOUT SYNDROME FUELS TURNOVER IN TECH COMPANIES


THE STATE OF BURNOUT IN TECH

2022 EDITION

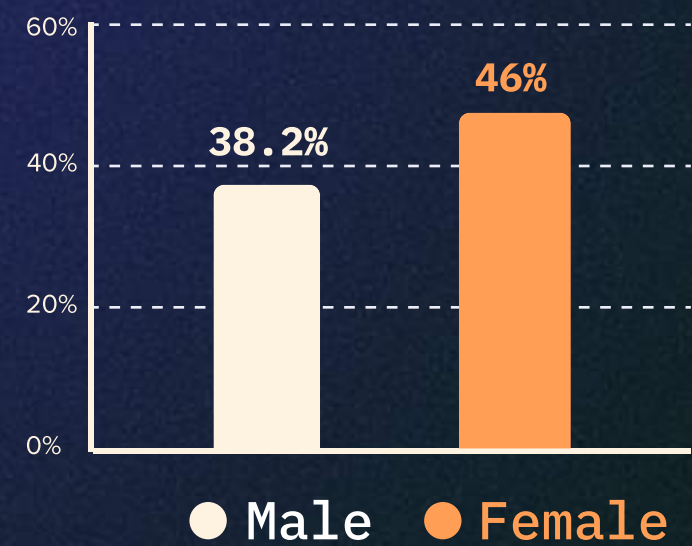
BurnoutIndex by **yerbo**

THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS

2 in 5 
of the workers surveyed show a high risk of burnout.

42% 
of IT professionals with high levels of burnout risk are considering quitting their company in the next 6 months

High Burnout Risk Level



More women have a high burnout risk than men



62% feel physically and emotionally drained

Executive Summary

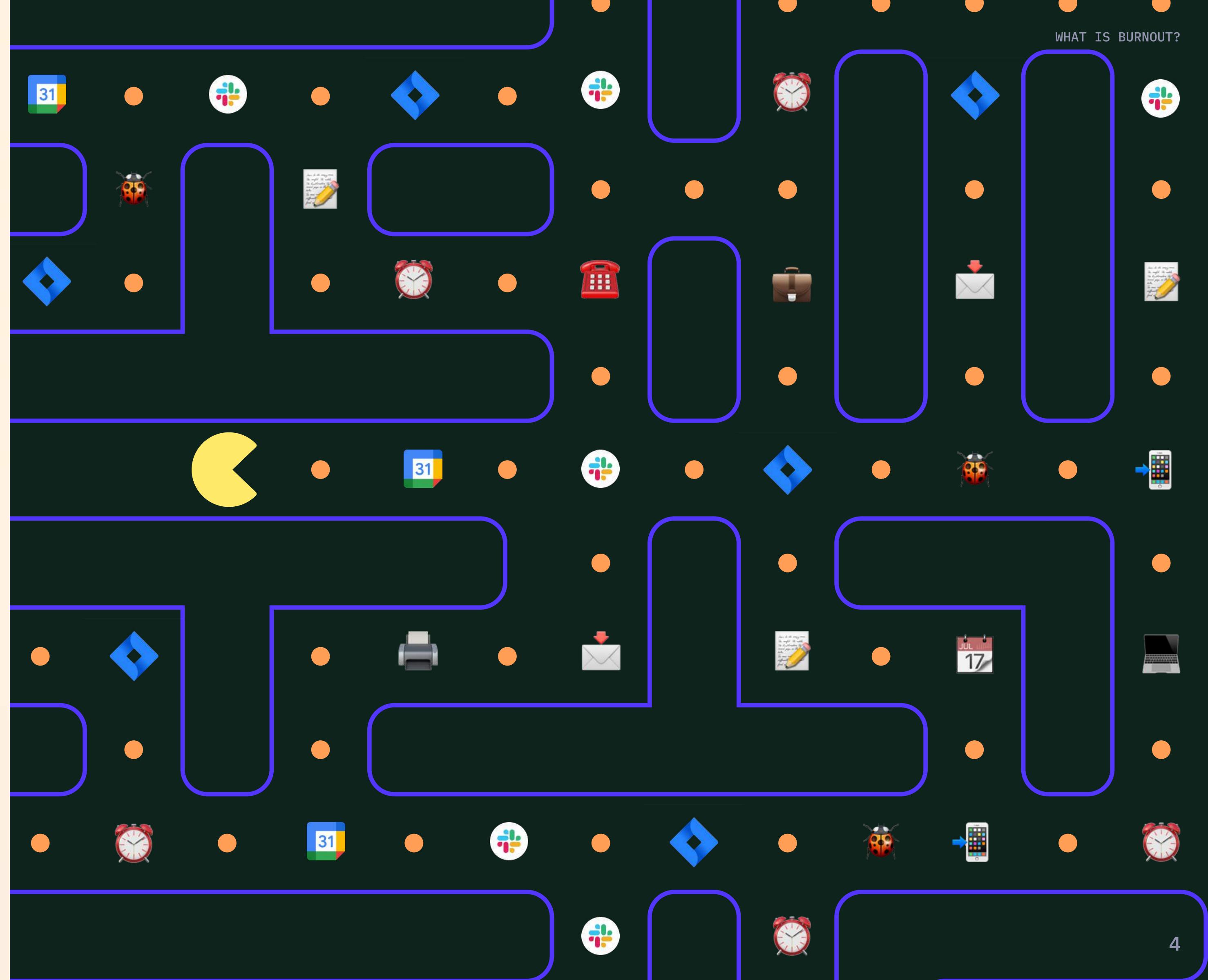
Between January and September 2021, the Burnout Index collected 32,644 answers from IT professionals across 33 countries. The results point towards a burnout crisis in the tech sector, with poor outcomes for workers and companies.

<https://burnoutindex.yerbo.co> ↗

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WHAT IS BURNOUT?



The WHO calls burnout an occupational phenomenon resulting from “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”



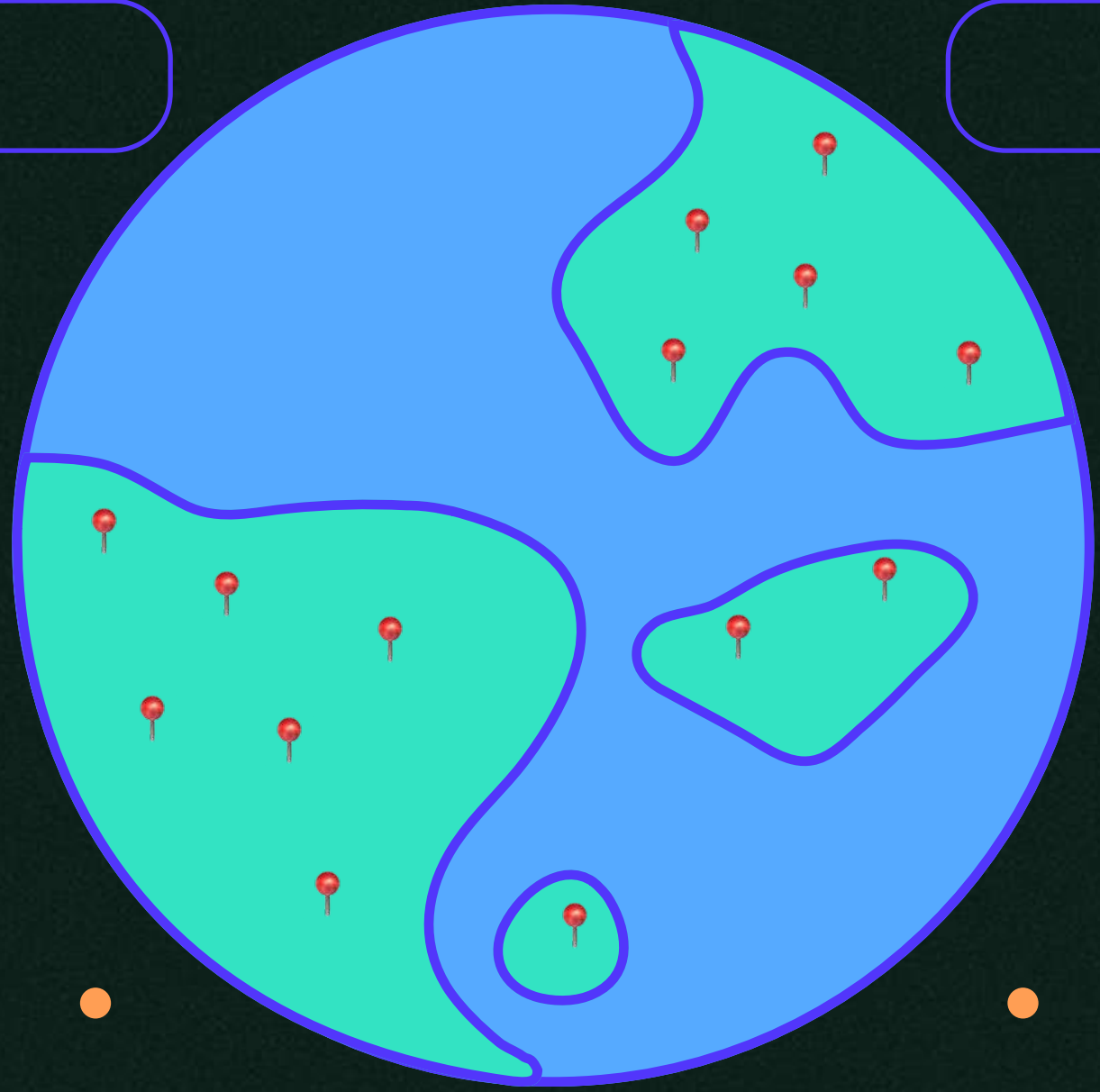
We have all heard the word “burnout”. But what exactly is burnout? An illness? Anxiety or depression? The World Health Organization (WHO) says it is not a medical condition, even if it often leads people to seek medical services.

To really understand what is behind the burnout syndrome, it's helpful to go over the scientific research briefly. Initial research (Christina Maslach, 1982) found that burnout was characterized by 3 major states: "overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment".

However, now it is thought that burnout is best represented by a four dimensional model (Marisa Salanova and Wilmar Schaufeli, 2005) that includes emotional or energetic exhaustion, professional self-inefficacy, cynicism, and depersonalization. These are the 4 "ghosts of burnout" that haunt workers, which we will explore later on.

EXHAUSTION**SELF-INEFFICACY****CYNICISM****DEPERSONALIZATION**

THE BURNOUT INDEX



33 countries

32,644 answers

47% female

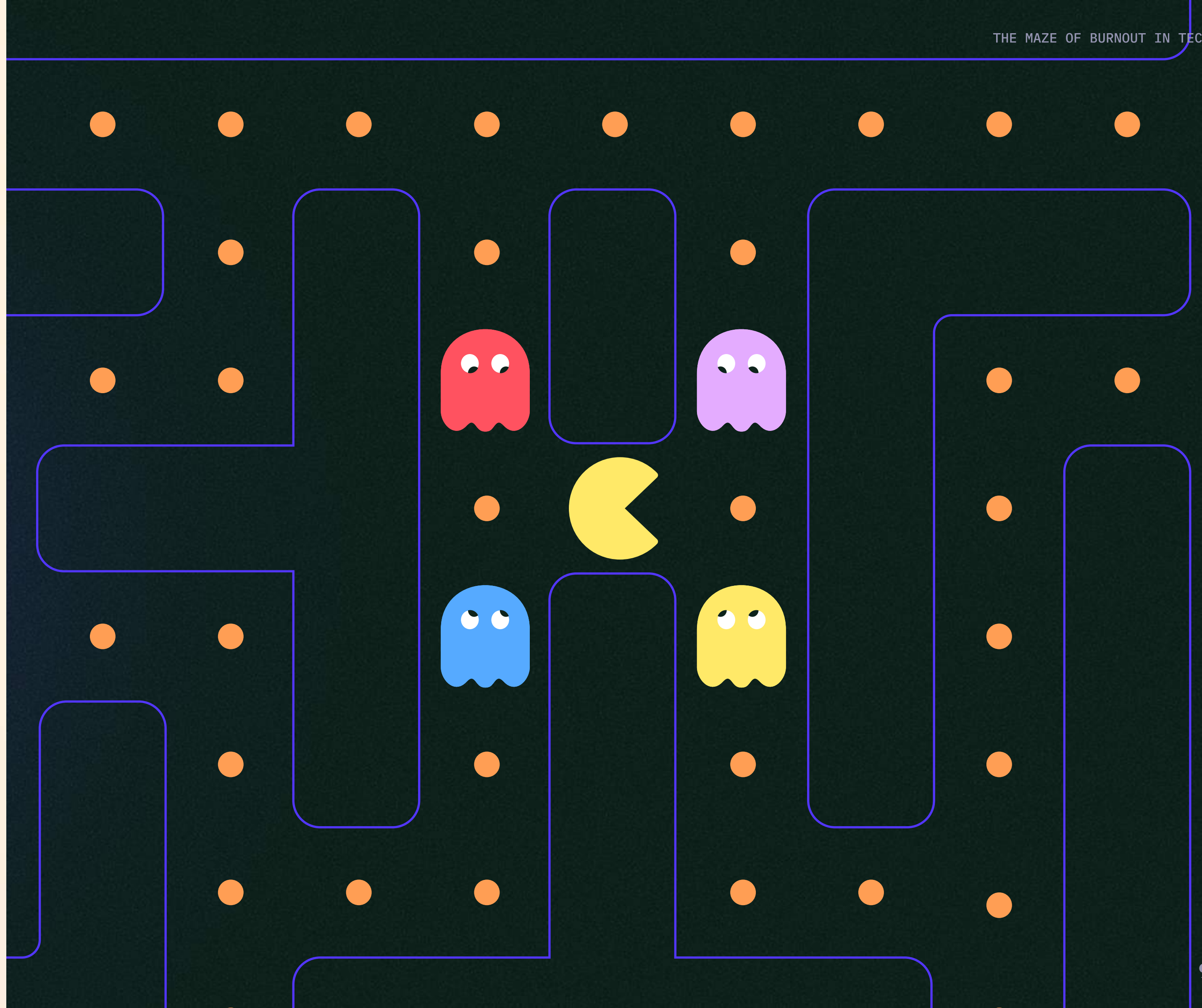
53% male

We set out to uncover how burnout is affecting workers in tech through the **Burnout Index**, the largest scientific-based assessment of this kind ever made: we collected 32,644 answers from IT professionals across 33 countries. In essence, the Burnout Index is a calculator.

Based on a self-administered 10 question survey, we used the four-dimensional model of burnout to measure the degree to which the professional is feeling exhausted, inefficient, cynical, or experiencing depersonalization. Each of these corresponds to a score, resulting in a "low", "moderate" or "high" risk of burnout.

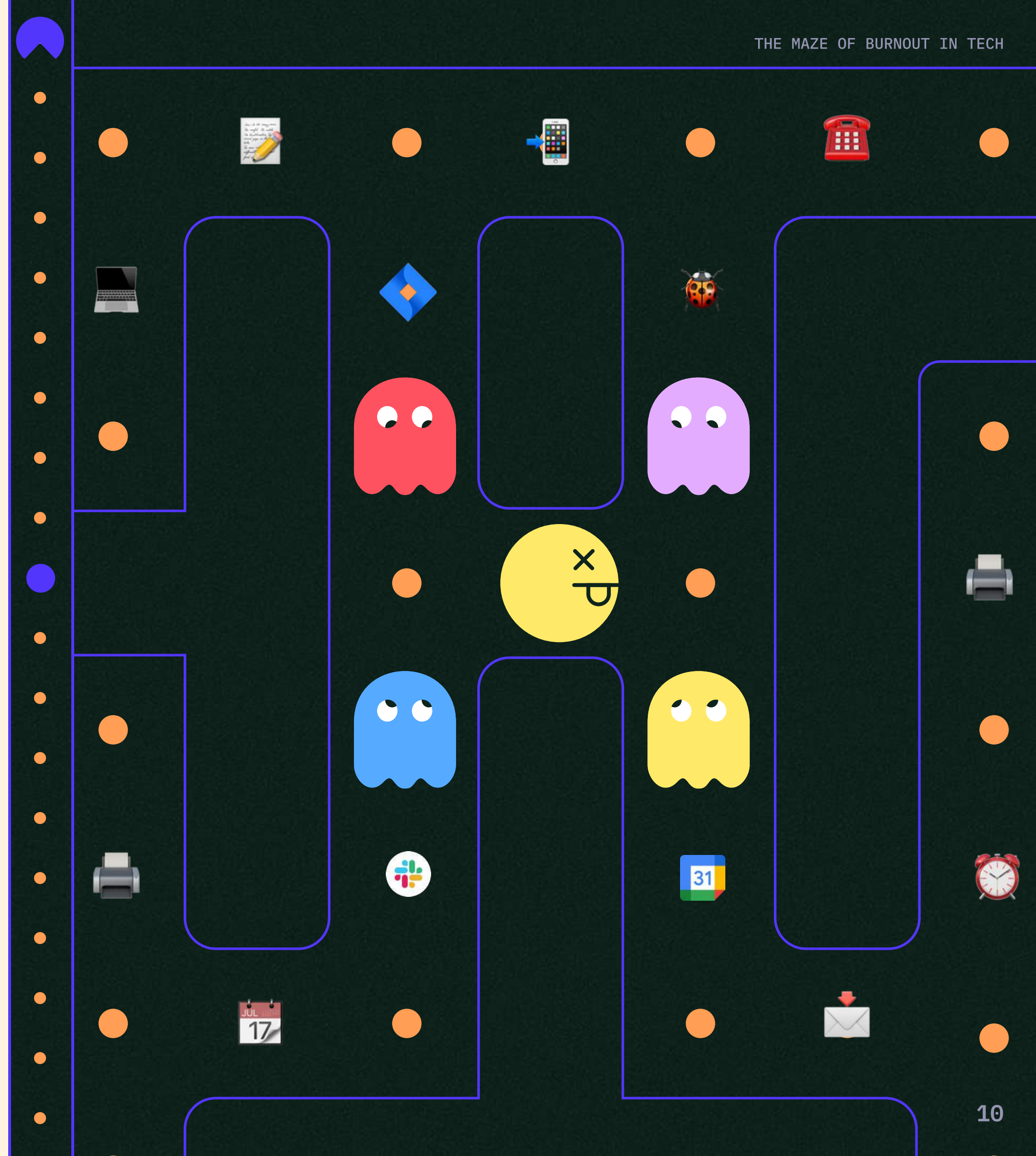
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THE MAZE OF BURNOUT IN TECH

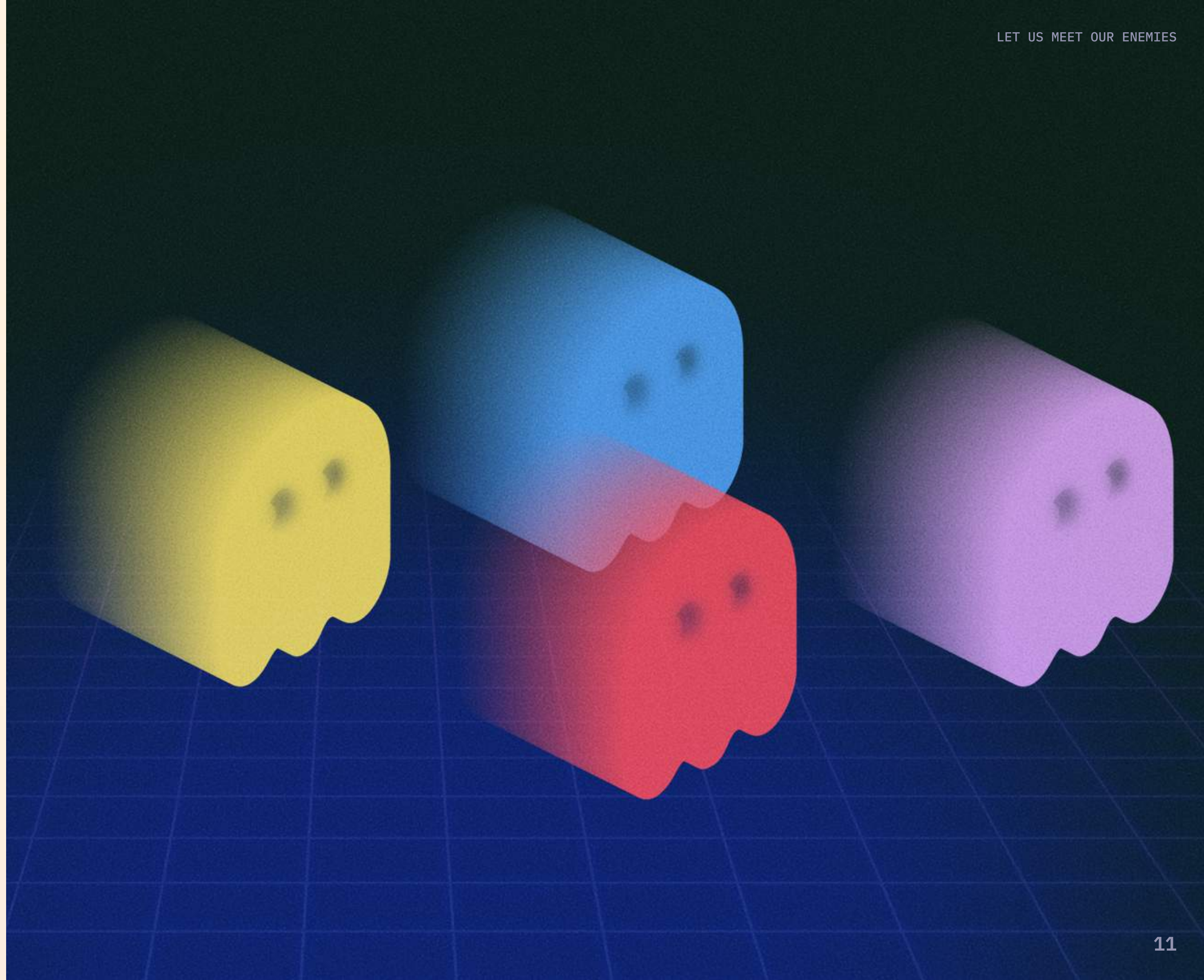


The pressures of working against the clock to feed the global tech frenzy often force employees to work late hours, leaving little time for personal life and **creating work-life conflicts**. Besides, time pressures often drive workers to resort to **anti-patterns**: short-term fixes to get the job done that usually lead to bigger problems and extra work. When this happens day after day, allowing **no space to recover mentally or physically**, the ghosts of burnout - **Exhaustion, Self-Inefficacy, Cynicism, and Depersonalization** - start closing in.

The ghosts are around every corner, and workers must avoid them to get through unscathed. It's starting to sound like Pac-Man, so let's run with it - but make it Tech-Man (for pun purposes only, since this narrative very much includes women) so that we can further explain how burnout happens in tech.



LET US MEET OUR ENEMIES



EXHAUSTION

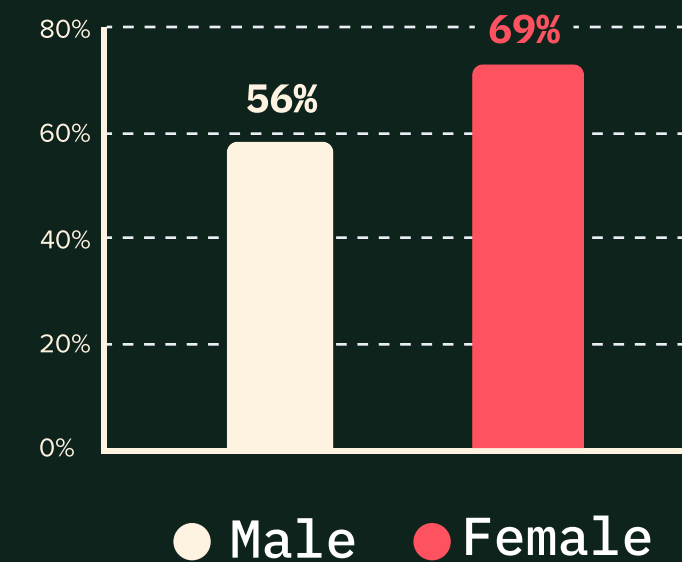
- The ghost of Exhaustion is usually the first to go after Tech-Man.
- Once the ghost catches Tech-Man, they are enveloped in an overwhelming sense of emotional, creative or physical exhaustion and are unable to unwind, recover and restore energy for the next day.
- After Exhaustion's power attack, Tech-Man experiences loss of energy, depletion, debilitation or fatigue that compromises its ability to reach to-dos.
- Eventually, Tech-Man can develop depression, cardiovascular problems, and other stress-related illnesses.



How powerful is the ghost of Exhaustion?

What the Burnout Index discovered

- 56% of IT professionals can't relax once their workday is over
- 62% feel physically and emotionally drained



69%
of women feel run-down

69% of women feel run-down and drained of physical and emotional energy after a workday, compared to **56% of the men who reported the same**. We can only speculate why. It could be because women bear more of the burden of child care and housework, which accumulates with their work-related tasks. We could also speculate that there's pressure associated with being a woman in a male-dominated environment. Some studies suggest that women and minorities in tech suffer from more stress and discrimination.

"I went to bed feeling exhausted and woke up still feeling tired."

Pujaa Rajan,
Deep Learning Engineer at Node



"Striking a balance is even more complicated for our female peers. It may be because of their responsibilities as caretakers or even due to impostor syndrome."

Domenica Obando,
CoFounder and CEO at Talently

SELF-INEFFICACY

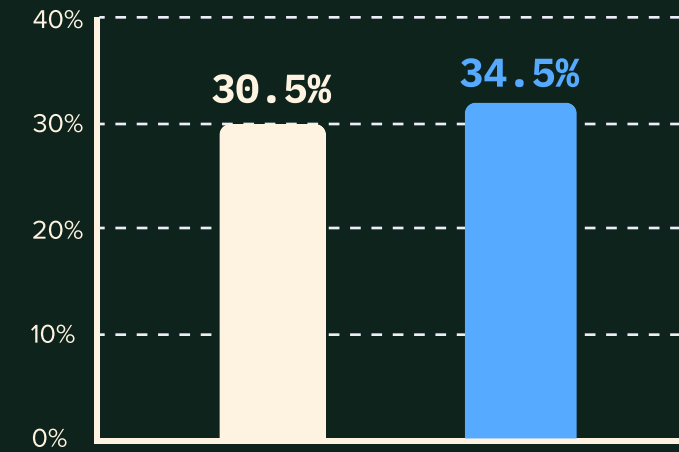
- Self-Inefficacy is a conman. Slowly but surely, it makes Tech-Man doubt their abilities to accomplish to-dos.
- Even if Tech-Man is still capable of performing their tasks, they simply lack confidence in themselves and in what they do.
- Once the ghost of Self-Inefficacy strikes, Tech-Man is overcome with a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. Eventually, they become unproductive and develop low morale.
- Over time, they develop an emotional crisis that leads to procrastination and may end in "Imposter Syndrome".



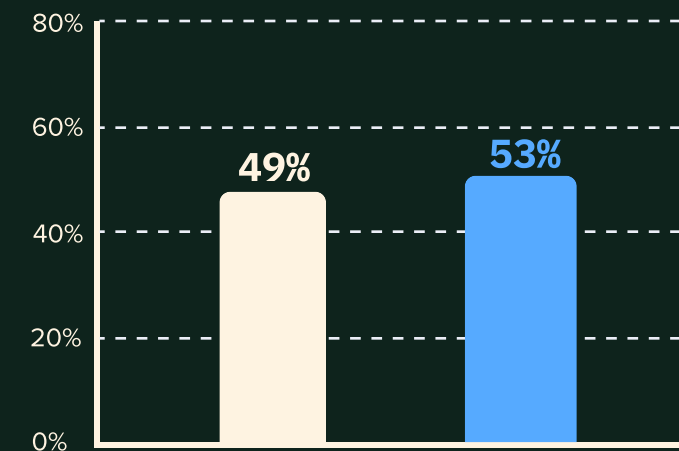
How powerful is the ghost of Self-Inefficacy?

What the Burnout Index discovered

- 51% feel like they are achieving less than they should.
- 33% of the tech workforce feel inefficient at their job



There's only a slight difference in self-inefficacy between subordinates (34,5%) and team leaders (30,5%).

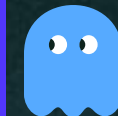


53% of subordinates perceive poor personal achievement, compared to 49% of leaders who feel the same.

You would imagine that team leaders have a stronger sense of achievement, making them less vulnerable to this ghost. But there's not a significant difference between the two, suggesting it can happen at any stage in the career.

“There are a lot of insecure overachievers in tech, and when someone is secure and confident, especially women, it’s shocking.”

Cate Huston, Director,
Mobile Engineering at DuckDuckGo

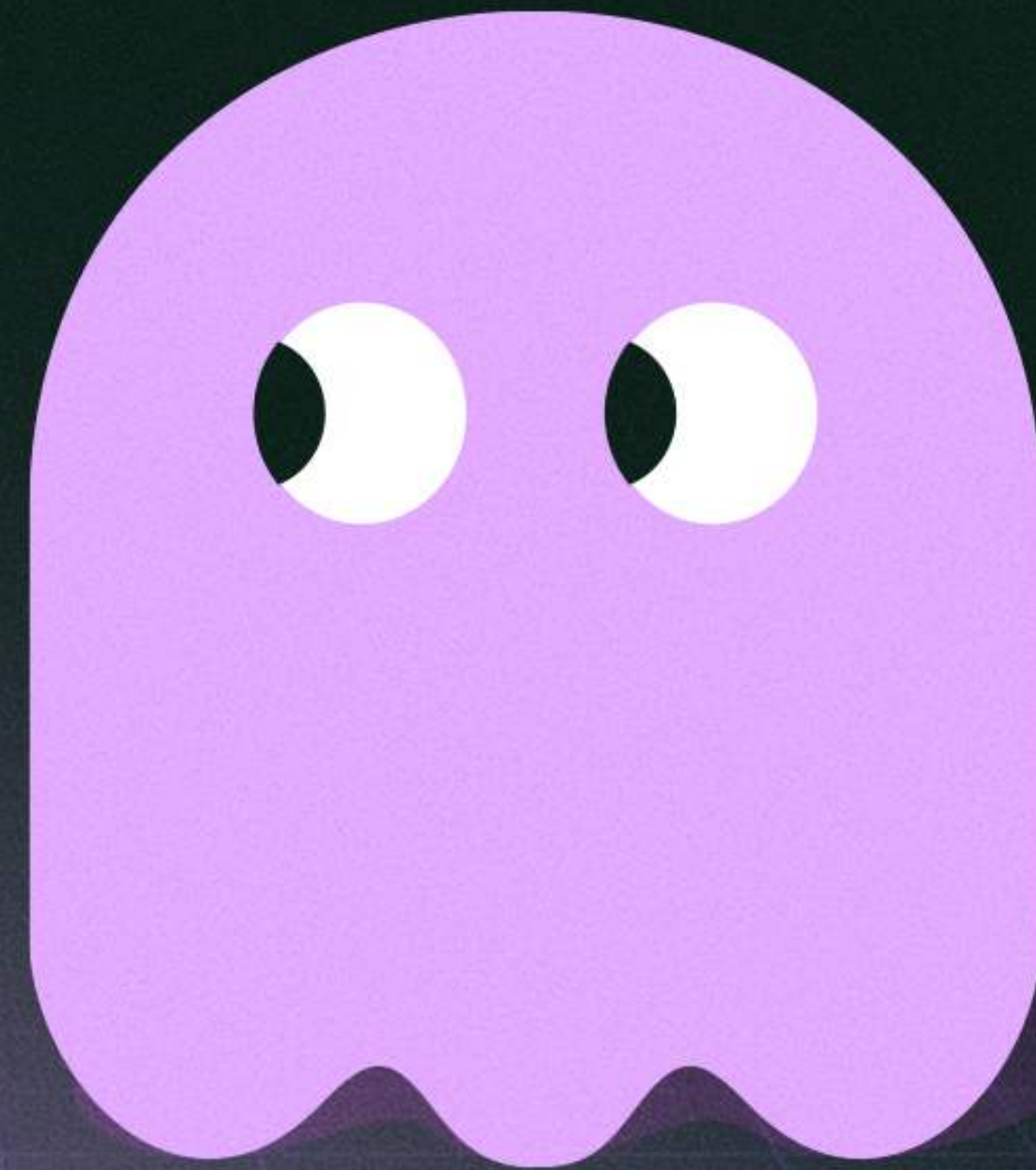


“For me I’ve found that it is the little negative voices in my head that start getting louder until you’re consumed by self-doubt”.

Taylor McCaslin, Sr. PM at GitLab

CYNICISM

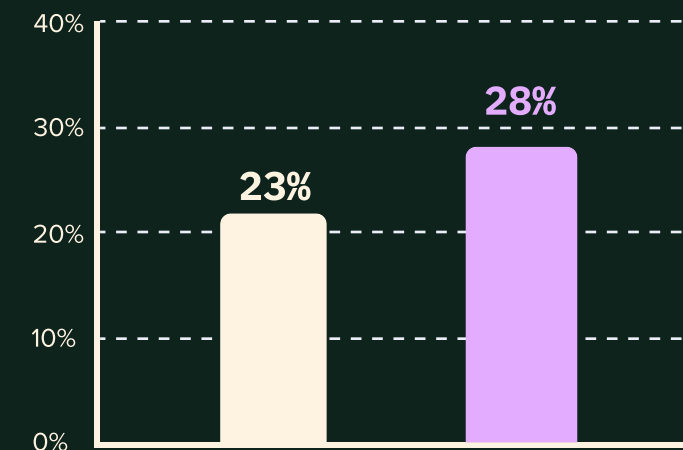
- Cynicism is the trickiest ghost Tech-Man has to face.
- When it strikes, it dumbfounds Tech-Man and they start acting erratically. They may act coldly towards people they were previously kind to.
- It then unleashes its signature move, detachment. Tech-Man no longer finds satisfaction or meaning in finishing tasks or accomplishing goals, as they don't sense that the effort will be properly appreciated. So they move slowly, carelessly, and are unproductive.
- Once it strikes, it's the likeliest ghost to drive Tech-Man out of the job. In fact, Cynicism is the best predictor of turnover.



How powerful is the ghost of Cynicism?

What the Burnout Index discovered

- 43% feel less and less engaged in their work.
- 27% don't see the value or purpose in what they do.



Workers who don't oversee anyone, who we call Individual Contributors (IC) report higher cynicism (28%) than team leaders (23%). Similarly, nearly 30% of ICs don't know their purpose or value, compared to 24,3% of leaders who report the same. Their lack of purpose opens the way to an overwhelming sense of detachment, possibly triggering emotional defense mechanisms and depersonalization.

"I believe that those that I have seen burnout lost sight of their why [...] When you can't explain to others why you get up and go to work each day, you are well advised to take that as an early warning sign of burnout."

Peter Awad, Director of Development
at Tekside.io



"I remember thinking, I genuinely can't imagine what any company could say to me to get me excited about joining right now."

Jean Hsu, VP of Engineering at Range

DEPERSONALIZATION

- This ghost's signature attack is exploiting an emotional defense mechanism where Tech-Man shuts down emotions in order to cope and continue working.
- After Tech-Man is struck by Depersonalization, they become cold and distant towards colleagues, clients and superiors.
- Lacking a sense of community, they may even compromise the working environment with a bad and callous attitude.



How powerful is the ghost of Depersonalization?

What the Burnout Index discovered

- 22% feel that they are harder and less sympathetic with people that they work with than they deserve
- 29% vs 23%: Women tend to worry more than men about becoming emotionally harsher

1 in 4    

emotionally harsher

26% are worried that their job in IT is making them harsher emotionally. This may lead to a deterioration of human relationships in the workplace, causing a never-ending loop of depersonalization and detachment.

"The days of the talented ahole engineers are over. (...) They breed a bad environment for developing and nurturing teams."**

Dave Marsland, Hussle



"I understand that the job, by itself, cannot be the sole motivation. But when people move to the extreme opposite, inertia takes over."

Diego Eis, Director of Digital Products at Sympla

CONCLUSION



We've seen, perhaps unsurprisingly, that most tech workers report having high levels of exhaustion. But when we combine exhaustion with emotions, experiences, and perceptions that are tell-tale signs of other dimensions of burnout – self-inefficacy, cynicism and depersonalization – what's the state of burnout in tech?

Using the Burnout Index tool, by their own assessment, 42.1% of tech employees are working under a high risk of burnout. In all likelihood, some people in this group are already experiencing burnout.

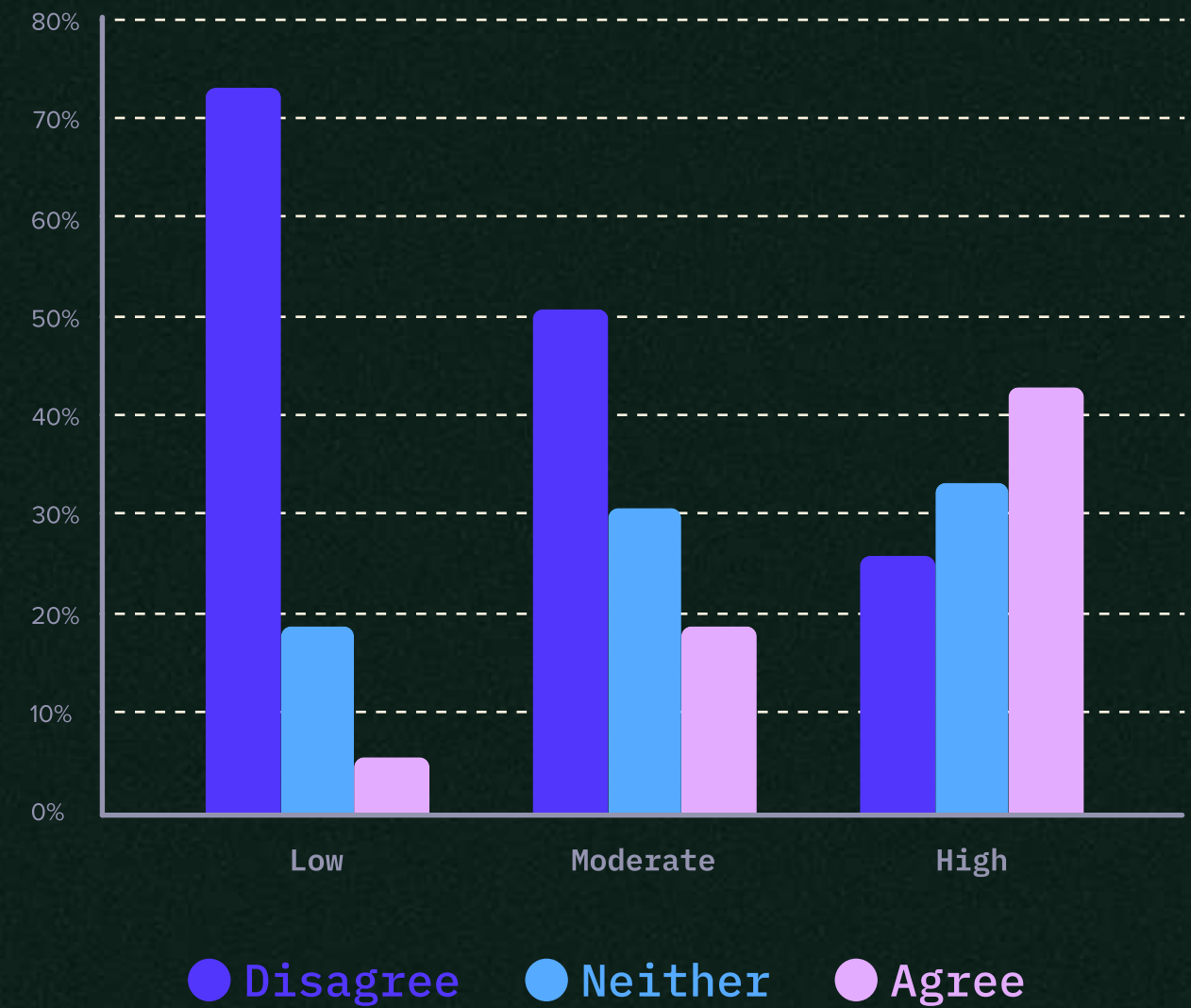
Out of the
32,644
tech workers surveyed

42.1%
have a high risk
of burnout

What are the consequences for tech companies? Burnout is associated with reduced commitment to the job, leading to low productivity, high absenteeism, intention to leave the company and turnover. In fact, experts believe that burnout is one of 4 factors that contributed to the Great Resignation of 2021, where millions of people quit their job globally.

Among professionals with a high risk of burnout, more than 2 in 5 (42.1%) want to leave the company in the next 6 months. Overall, also taking into account those with moderate and low risk of burnout, 1 in 4 tech professionals want to leave their workplace in the short term.

Burnout & Leaving the Company



2 in 5 workers with a high risk of burnout want to leave their company

"I've definitely been close to burnout and it has led me to quit and find a different job."

Alexandre Freire,
Senior Director of Engineering at Nubank

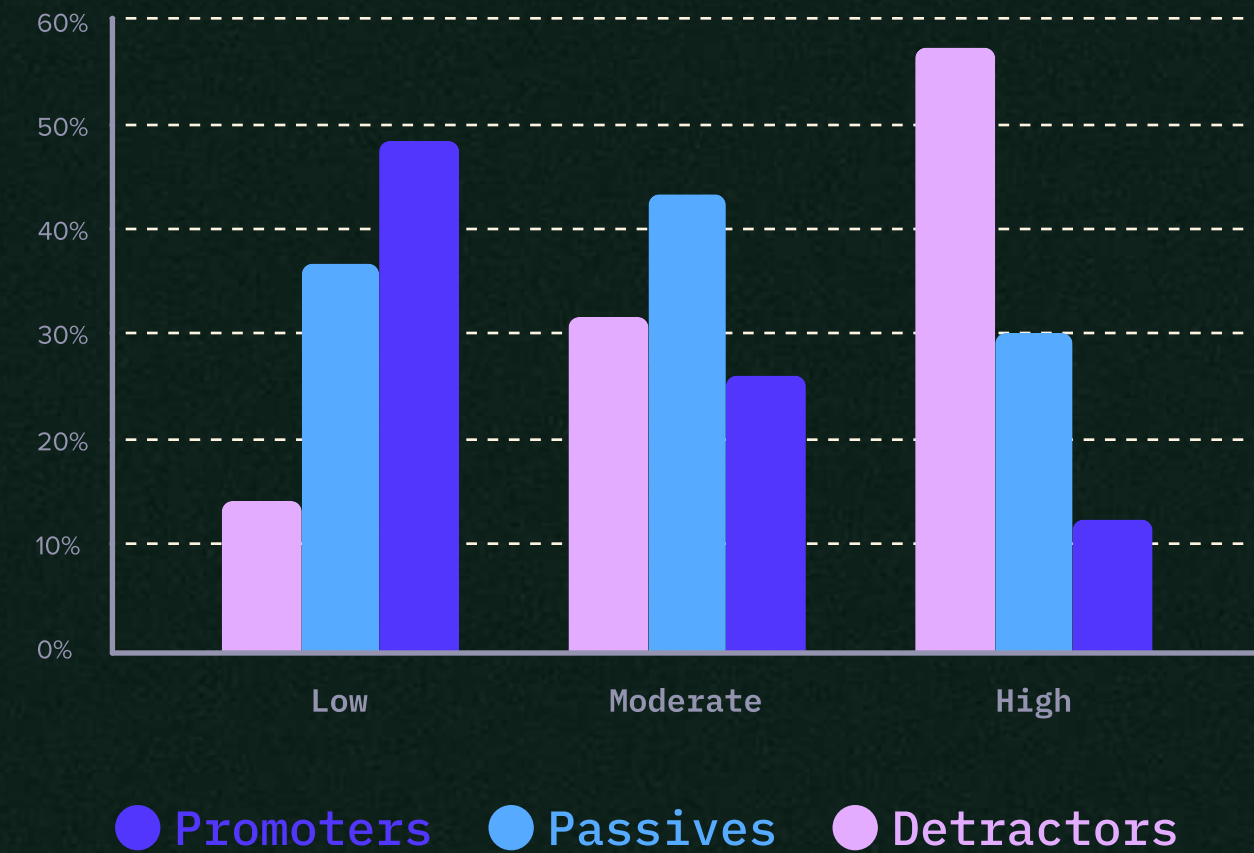
"Creating a sense of value starts from scratch. This involves sharing clear job descriptions and responsibilities because these are expectation guides and will act as a roadmap to drive performance, motivate and give a sense of purpose to the daily routine job."

Lina Wells,
Head of People - Treble.ai

In case you're wondering whether or not the intention to leave the company is unrelated to the level of burnout, 76.0% of the workers with low burnout want to stay. Therefore, we can safely conclude that looking out for the well-being of employees, thus avoiding burnout, is key to reducing turnover.

The negative outcomes for organizations don't end when a burned out employee quits. **Burnout compromises talent acquisition as well.** Burned out tech employees are more likely to damage the company's reputation as an employer, limiting access to their personal network, friends, and family.

Burnout & NPS



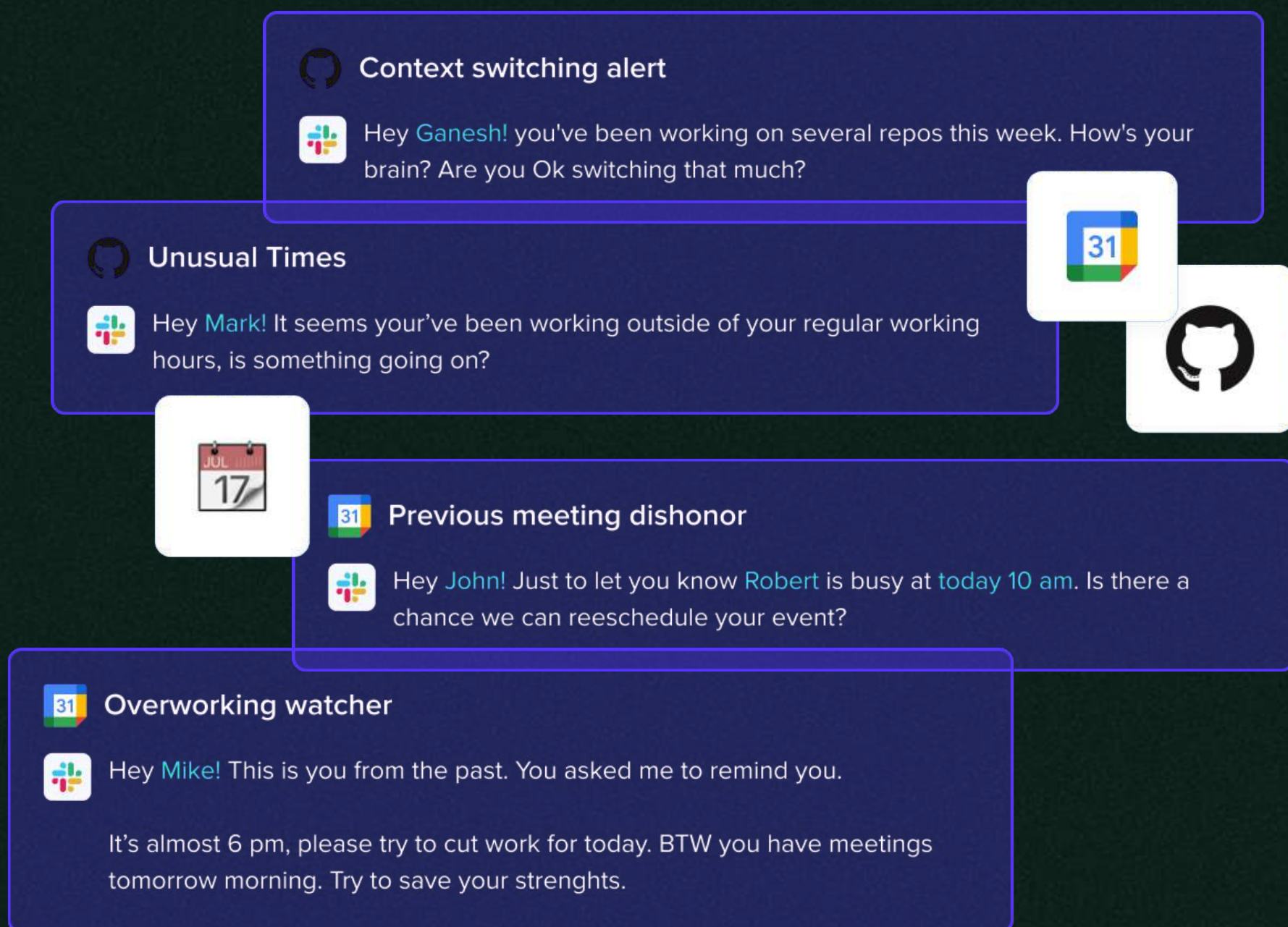
57% of workers with high risk of burnout are detractors

Unfortunately for managers, avoiding burnout is not a “one time job” or something they can fix with a team retreat or paid vacation time. The ghosts of burnout are on the loose, and they can haunt anyone at any time, unless you know how to keep them all at bay. We’re once again reminded of Pac-Man’s Power Pellets, which act as boosters that help Pac-Man fend off the ghosts (albeit temporarily).

In a real life situation, what can those boosters be? They’re motivational resources (such as mentoring, good working relationships or opportunities for advancement) that act as a counterbalance to job demands (like time pressures, heavy workload or role ambiguity). Research on the Job Demands-Resources model shows workers are more immune to strain and more motivated – even in a highly demanding job – when they strike a balance between motivational resources and job demands.

“Instead of burnout, the worker who has these 16 resources will experience FLOW at work: that feeling of productive happiness that is healthy for them and the company.”

Carlos Sponton -
Head of Behavioral Science at Yerbo



It's worth noting that each company deals with a different set of challenges and demands, so the resources that their employees need the most can vary. And that's where Yerbo comes in. Through weekly anonymous surveys, individual contributors, HR, managers, and the C-suite receive valuable insights on their employees' emotional well-being. Once they have these insights, they act in time and strategically to prevent high levels of burnout.

Additionally, Yerbo's tool for high-performing teams displays the levels of satisfaction regarding 16 motivational resources, divided into 4 categories: leadership, task, team and organizational resources. Each one has actionable suggestions that your team can implement to target each ghost and promote a culture of well-being. Ultimately, the goal is keeping teams motivated and reducing turnover.

ASSESS YOUR OWN BURNOUT RISK

<https://burnoutindex.yerbo.co/>



Methodology

Between January 2021 and September 2021, participants voluntarily completed an electronic version of the Sydney Burnout Measure (SBM), available at <https://burnoutindex.yerbo.co>. This is a free access, self-administered survey, with items selected from globally validated and standardized questionnaires. The survey also measures turnover intention and eNPS, which allows us to draw associations between the levels of burnout and the intention to leave the current company and the likelihood of promoting your company as a good place to work.

The sample comprises 32644 workers (47% female, 53% male) from the Information Technology (IT) sector, living in Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands,

New Zealand, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States.

No atypical cases were identified (score $z \pm 3$). However, the cases with homogeneous responses (for example responses "1" in the study variables, 495 cases) or missing data in the study variables were eliminated. In the case of the "age generation" variable, those cases with responses under 18 years of age (516 cases) and over 80 years of age (133 cases) were eliminated. The final sample was $N = 31,500$. The data collected presented a normal distribution in all studied variables (less than ± 1.5 for Kurtosis and Asymmetry).

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