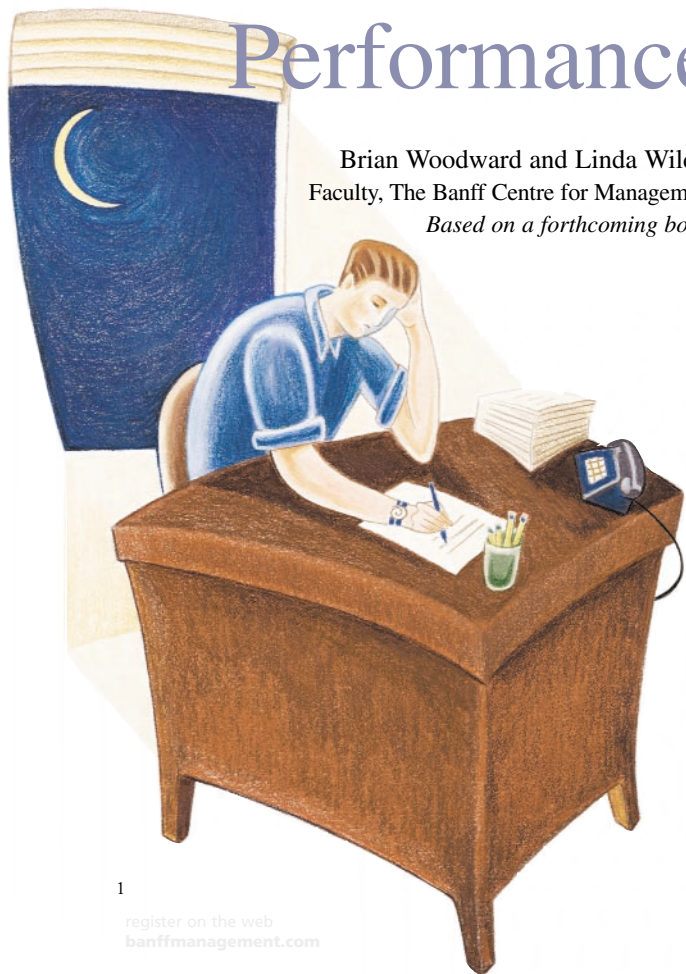


Protecting Human Capacity: The First Steps Towards Sustainable Performance

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Based on a forthcoming book.



Jeremy is a middle manager for a large organization and is living a life typical of many managers today. His company has been through a series of restructures and reorganizations resulting in more work for the people remaining. He is committed to his organization, he puts in many extra hours, and he is very aware of the stress levels in his staff. With fewer managers now in the organization, Jeremy is feeling greater responsibility for increased numbers of employees. Communication within the organization has been disrupted by the reorganizations and there is a constant state of uncertainty about the future.

Jeremy reports directly to a Vice-President and his workload is steadily growing. He wonders whether his boss understands the effect on him when he assigns more work or when he asks for a surprise report in the middle of a project. His boss has become more and more pre-occupied with senior management issues and Jeremy feels more and more on his own. He misses the mentoring relationship they had created. Two of Jeremy's peers and friends have left the organization: one with a package, the other to a competitor.

Although Jeremy appears to be performing well enough at work, he feels fatigued and is starting to question himself and his effectiveness.

At home, Jeremy has little to give and he finds himself overwhelmed by the tasks of the family. He spends less time with his three young children and with his wife, Claire. He takes work home, comes into work on the weekends and work issues are constantly on his mind. He feels guilty about how tired he is when he does get home and he tends to spend time unwinding in front of the TV. When he engages with his children, his growing fatigue makes his time with his children seem more like a chore compared to the enjoyment he used to feel. Claire understands what Jeremy is going through and tries to fill-in as much as possible with the children but her growing home-operated business is also very demanding. Both Jeremy and Claire do not have the time to do the kinds of recreational activities they used to do so neither is getting the exercise they need. Their conversation is characterized by the practicalities of living in a family and they spend little time in intimate conversation. What concerns Jeremy and Claire is that there seems to be few alternatives to the way they are living. Jeremy sees most of his peers in the organization working as much as he is and they, too, have little time to enjoy life outside of work.

Jeremy goes to bed about 10:30 pm and a few weeks ago he started to wake up at 4:00 am and could not get back to sleep. More recently, he has been waking up earlier and earlier, causing his fatigue to increase. Jeremy has more trouble finding his keys and wallet when he wants them. He has noted a loss of enjoyment in those activities that he used to look forward to. Both at work and at home, Jeremy is much more irritable, impatient and he is much more prone to anger.

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Last night, while driving his daughter home from soccer practice, Jeremy's heart started to pound wildly and his chest ached and he was short of breath. He had to pull over and lean his head into the steering wheel until the pounding had passed - Jeremy had his first panic attack. He told Claire about it and he agreed to see a doctor but at the end of the tests, nothing was detected. Jeremy continued to work as before.

This story is true and it is representing more and more what is happening to managers in organizations today. Recent downsizes and reorganizations have decimated the middle manager ranks in most organizations. More responsibilities for more staff and more accountability to senior management have placed an increasing pressure on managers. So what is happening to them?

The demand for performance is costing more and more and it is being paid for by a loss of capacity. Most of these managers maintain a high level of performance, but for many of them, it is costing more and more to do so.

Their loyalty to the organization, their sense of professionalism, or their work values prevent them from any consideration or questioning, let alone correcting, their workloads and work responsibilities. And many are paying the cost by slowly losing their capacity for effective performance although it has not yet affected their actual performance.

Capacity is what makes people resourceful and it is this human resourcefulness that organizations count on more and more to create the performance they need to compete in the way that keeps the organization viable. Today, many organizations increasingly count on their employees to create the changes that are necessary for

organization success. Managers operating between senior management and front line supervisors and staff are expected to shoulder the responsibility for ensuring that change occurs but it takes capacity to ensure that the change occurs and this capacity is slowly eroding in many managers. Organizational change requires the essential ingredient of human resourcefulness and the elements of human resourcefulness, and their direct link to performance, need to be well understood by today's leaders.

Human resourcefulness is based on three human capacities. Together, these three types of capacity combine to make a resourceful human being. Over attention to one of the three and/or under-development of any of the three, results in reduced capacity and therefore, reduced performance and ability to make change happen. The three types of capacity are:

1. **K-Capacity** – the capacity for knowledge and learning
2. **R-Capacity** – the capacity for creating successful relationships
3. **Z-Capacity** – the capacity for zestfulness and enjoyment

The first capacity, K-Capacity, reflects an individual's personal sense of competence and skill and ability to exercise their intellectual ability to create the best possible judgements and decisions. It also includes a drive to learn and an ability to fluidly use different thinking styles to address a variety of issues and circumstances. Individuals with this capacity constantly seek out a wide variety of experiences and have developed a strong sense of self-evaluation.

R-Capacity includes the ability to create and maintain supportive relationships through interpersonal and communication skills. The ability to inquire and to advocate creates an interpersonal space for gathering necessary information and for presenting one's position, interests, and ideas. The ability to feel and demonstrate compassion for others and to experience empathy with the emotions of others are also included. Finally, this capacity includes the ability for integrated functioning with others by assuming roles and by exchanging roles.

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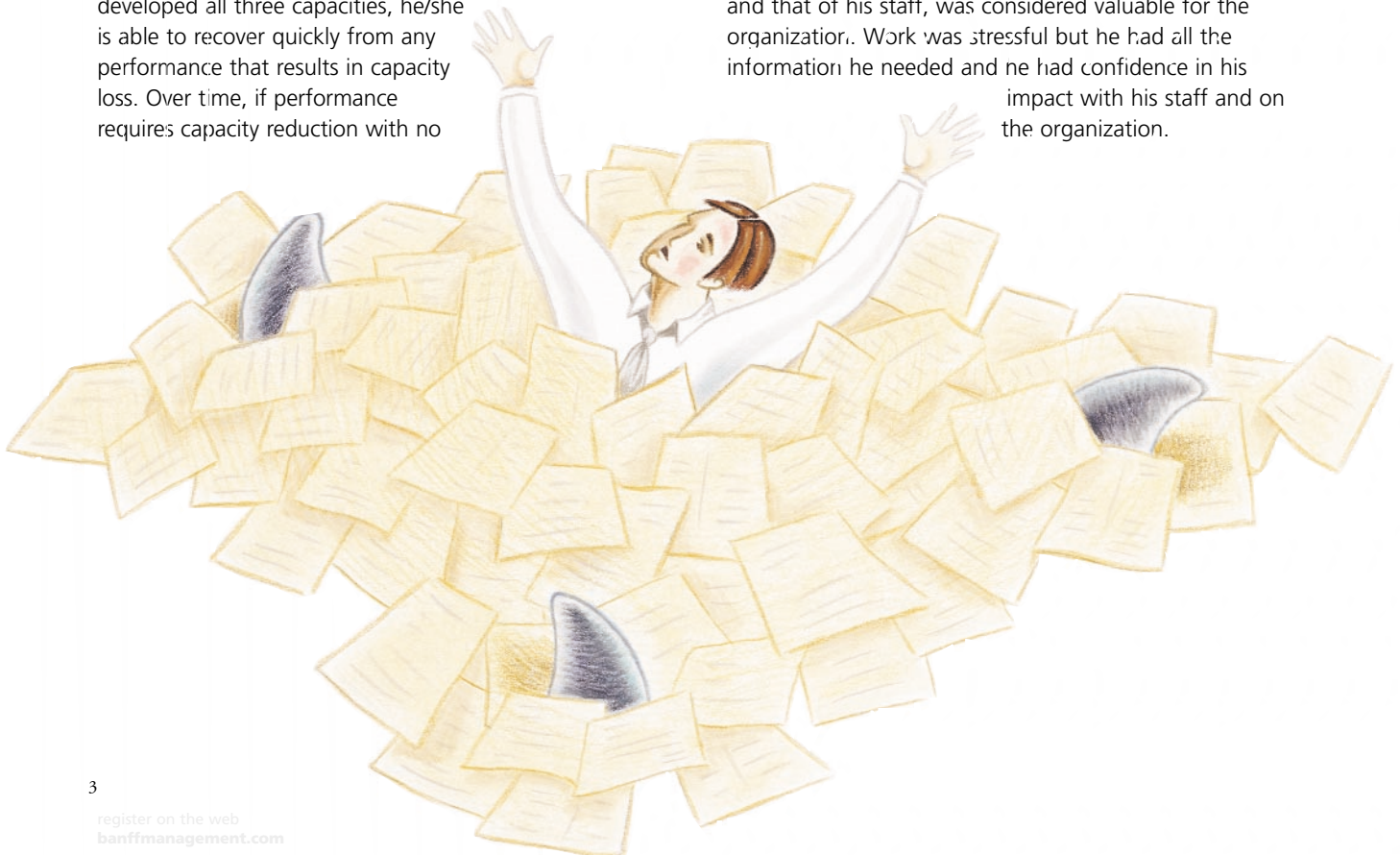
Can we identify when capacity erosion is occurring?

Z-Capacity requires self-awareness and self-understanding and a sense of self-efficacy—the confidence that one can make a difference in their own lives. A sense of aspiration and of motivation provides a sense of direction and inspiration for one's sense of meaning and purpose. The individual has the capacity to fully exercise their autonomy within a network of other individuals. Finally, physical health and an ability to feel joy and pleasure contribute to an individual's energy and contribution.

When all three capacities are developed, an individual is able to meet most challenges and life demands and to grow and learn from them. An individual is at maximum resourcefulness when he/she can sustain performance over time without appreciable loss of capacity. This is critical! Any performance will reduce capacity to some extent - it is expected. However, when an individual has developed all three capacities, he/she is able to recover quickly from any performance that results in capacity loss. Over time, if performance requires capacity reduction with no

opportunity to renew, capacity erosion begins to set in. Erosion results when there is no opportunity for capacity renewal or development and ultimately a given performance level costs more and more to maintain. And the reduction of individual capacity, and ultimately resourcefulness, results in slower organization change and organizational sustainability.

The critical question then becomes "Can we identify when capacity erosion is occurring?" Jeremy's story provides an illustration and an answer to this question. When any capacity is used stress is created but when the performance also increases capacity (e.g. new learning, relationships, sense of confidence, etc.) then enjoyment, commitment, drive, and excitement results. Prior to the current organizational circumstances, Jeremy experienced a high degree of work satisfaction and personal growth. He was feeling effective in his role and his performance, and that of his staff, was considered valuable for the organization. Work was stressful but he had all the information he needed and he had confidence in his impact with his staff and on the organization.





However, as the organization underwent constant change, Jeremy began to lose his sense of satisfaction and he began to show the signs of capacity erosion—capacity that he was not able to replace or renew. Initially, he just felt the stress of working more hours. His family adjusted to what looked like a temporary set of circumstances. Over time, Jeremy began to lose his sense of impact and positive impact. He was just as active, if not more so, but it was increasingly difficult to see his effect and he began to lose his confidence. He put more effort into his work and made the changes needed but more and more changes were needed and he was not able to recover from one project to another. Elements of Z-Capacity were eroding as well as increasing elements of K-Capacity.

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The signs of capacity erosion began to show. His physical fatigue felt like a familiar companion and his irritability at work and home became more chronic rather than episodic. He and Claire noticed the changes but saw them as natural results of work. As more time went by, Jeremy's short-term memory gave him difficulty. He could not remember where he put files or personal affects. He forgot conversations and pieces of conversations, promises and commitments he made to others. It really surprised him, one day, when he forgot to pick up his children from school and they waited for two hours.

R-Capacity was beginning to erode. Jeremy put it all down to work stress, but he was seeing that the stress was affecting his relationships at work and at home. However, he just worked harder and fit work into 'spare' time when the kids went to bed or out with Claire. He then noticed an increasing sleep disturbance resulting in

more fatigue. On Sunday nights, he had noticeably more difficulty getting to sleep. Work issues kept going around in his head and occasionally he would get up and work because he could not sleep. More Z-Capacity and K-Capacity was eroding.

Jeremy was experiencing the increasing signs of capacity erosion. These signs come into our conscious-

ness in a progressive manner. Slight and incidental at first, they continue to increase in severity until we pay attention. If we ignore the more minor signs and continue without change, we experience something more dramatic and noticeable. Short-term memory loss, if ignored, may lead to progressive sleep disturbance. Progressive sleep disturbance leads to general anxiety or depression.

Jeremy ignored the more minor signs and was then faced with a much louder and more dramatic sign of capacity erosion—a panic attack. His left arm ached and his chest was very painful and his heart raced and pounded enough to make him think he was having a heart attack. This type of event signals a significant level of capacity erosion. But more would be in store for Jeremy because he did not see the link between his capacity erosion from work and his panic attack. The signals would become progressively more dramatic until he finally would take notice and make the link and ultimately make some changes.

Organizational success depends on the resourcefulness of people like Jeremy. Human capacity is a critical underpinning of desired organizational performance so paying attention to both the signs of erosion and to consciously building capacity is a necessity. Leaders in organizations need to take responsibility for identifying the signs of erosion and for directly or indirectly ensuring capacity development in all three areas. Leaders first need to be aware of their own capacity levels and those of the people they lead. ■