

BIG IDEA

Busy-ness

The wheel is turning but the hamster is dead! There's a lot of churning in today's organisations – people caught in an activity trap, creating more heat than light. Whose fault is that? Primal fears, organisational life and personal weaknesses all play a part. For most of history, activity has been dictated by the needs of the tribe or the season. In between bursts of activity there was a lot of sitting around. The arms race of busy-ness is quite recent and driven by ratcheting up the fear of falling behind. Now bosses sacrifice work-life balance to keep their heads above water, although enlightened companies are seeing how self-defeating this is.

But the worst culprits of busy-ness are us – the obsessional-compulsive type rises inexorably to the top. That's because lazier, smarter folks are content to lie just beneath and regard with schadenfreude the busy folk who bear the risks, suffer the anxieties and anticipate with dread the abyss of empty time that could befall them if they run out of steam. Or if it is sussed that all their wheel spinning doesn't actually move anything.

➔ To see Nigel Nicholson's book, *The 'I' of Leadership: Strategies for seeing, being and doing* (Jossey-Bass, go to iofleadership.com)

