

# Work Demands Research case Study 4: Organisation D

## Organisational context

Organisation D is a Government Department in the UK, employing over 70,000 staff. This research focused on a 55-member team responsible for advancing diversity, wellbeing and inclusion of colleagues. Sponsored by senior leadership, a 10-member PAR Committee was formed to identify work demand challenges and test a practical solution. Members were chosen for their expertise, decision-making authority, and frontline insights, ensuring representation across sub-teams.

## The challenge of work demands

The committee identified work demand challenges that were seen to impact employees' productivity and wellbeing. These were:

- High volume, complexity, and urgency: Reactive, last-minute requests led to task overload and limited accomplishment.
- Emotional and psychological demands: Supporting others' distress, managing pressure, and balancing personal responsibilities added strain.
- Pressure to meet expectations: Balancing business partner and expert roles, with constant pressure to "get it right", left staff feeling stretched and judged.
- Task switching and boundary challenges: Frequent interruptions, cognitive demands, and hybrid working fostered an "always-on" culture.
- Lack of resources: Limited breaks, insufficient resources, and isolation added to pressure despite supportive messaging.

The reactive nature of work hindered proactive efforts, frustrating a passionate team focused on supporting colleagues and driving change. This imbalance amplified feelings of being overstretched and under-resourced.

## Addressing work demands

### The intervention for this research

Based on the work demands identified as significantly affecting employees above and findings from the Time 1 survey highlighting high cognitive demands, the committee agreed on the following intervention approach: *the allocation of 10-20% of colleagues' working weeks for uninterrupted 'focus time'*.

The aim of this intervention was to reduce the negative impact of high work and cognitive demands. It sought to support colleagues in prioritising and progressing on critical tasks, increasing autonomy, and enabling greater concentration on single tasks. Additionally, it aimed to encourage healthier work boundaries by reducing the temptation to work outside core hours or to skip breaks. To ensure successful adoption of the intervention, the committee established the following implementation guidelines:

- Proactive blocking: Allocating 10-20% of weekly hours to focus time, while minimising notifications, messages, and meetings during this period.
- Task alignment: Using focus time specifically for tasks requiring deep concentration.
- Personalisation: Tailoring the scheduling of focus time to suit individual and team needs.

- Respect for colleagues: Honouring others' focus time by avoiding interruptions, such as scheduling meetings or asking questions during these periods.

### Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands

Key facilitators to implementation of this intervention included advocacy and support from colleagues who helped to protect focus time by pushing back on non-urgent demands. Employees already using time management strategies found it easier to integrate and focus time proved beneficial for recovery breaks and time-bound tasks. Sharing success stories and active line manager support—reinforcing focus time and minimising interruptions—boosted adoption and effectiveness.

Key barriers to implementation of this intervention were that many employees struggled to schedule focus time due to constant urgent tasks, interruptions, and competing priorities. Unexpected demands, particularly during high-pressure projects, disrupted focus blocks, and some felt the intervention lacked flexibility and consultation, perceiving it as micromanagement. For those already managing schedules effectively, it felt unnecessary. Inadequate line manager support for some and resource constraints in understaffed teams further hindered implementation.

### The benefits so far

The 'focus time' intervention successfully raised awareness of an alternative way of working within the team, with 89% of employees acknowledging it through effective communication channels such as newsletters, team meetings, and direct check-ins. The intervention was generally well-received, particularly among employees in policy- and case-related roles, though it was thought less effective for frontline workers, highlighting differences across roles.

Outcome data from the time 2 survey indicated that the intervention did not significantly reduce work demands. However, the PAR committee expressed little surprise, attributing this to heightened demands over the summer period caused by the general election, race unrest, and other urgent project deadlines. Positive feedback highlighted the intervention's benefits for managing workloads, improving focus, and the effectiveness of the committee, with leadership buy-in playing a critical role. The project also demonstrated the team's appetite to explore new ways of working, with employees who experienced benefits showing a commitment to continuing the practice.

### Next Steps

A key learning for Organisation D was the effectiveness of the committee in encouraging new ways of working to address work demands, with clear appetite to continue this approach in 2025, sustaining momentum for solutions to workplace challenges. Future intervention rollouts will focus on enhancing engagement during through dialogue-driven methods, such as face-to-face events, short videos, and greater line manager involvement. Success stories will be shared to inspire broader buy-in, and barriers faced by frontline roles will be explored to develop tailored solutions. Mid-implementation 'temperature checks' will assess progress and allow for adjustments as needed, and a PAR toolkit will be developed to empower other teams to implement future interventions independently.