

Work Demands Research case study 1: Organisation A

Organisational context

Organisation A is a large organisation in the energy sector, with employees based on multiple sites. The operational departments taking part in the work demands research have been going through a large-scale reorganisation over the past year. Employees in the operational teams have experienced high work demands as well as change to their line-management, team and departmental structure.

The challenge of work demands

The committee identified high cognitive demands as impacting employees, the number of updates employees get, needing to keep their eye on lots of things while working and digesting large amounts of information. There is a lot of information to digest, and a lot of information to capture, and it is not always clear what needs doing, where to find answers to questions. This information overload comes through in the survey data where employees report high cognitive demands, especially needing to remember a lot of things while at work.

The team also discussed the high number of new starters, and quick turnover. New staff need support and training to understand the processes and get up to speed. Energy specialists are regularly reorganised across teams to share experience and grow the skills and knowledge of others. A systematic approach to storing and transferring learning profiles would avoid duplication of effort in creating a new learning profile when energy specialist joins a new team and avoid repeating learning programs that have already been completed.

Team leaders were mentioned as a group with high work demands, team leaders carry a lot of responsibility and pick up the pressure for others. Team leaders are responsible for organising training, helping new starters to settle in and often also have other responsibilities and dual roles. The committee felt that the pressures people are under sometimes makes it feel difficult to do a good job, which is hard in environment where people are passionate, proud of the organisation and they want to make a positive difference.

Addressing work demands

What has been done before

The committee in organisation A discussed what has been done before to tackle work demands, and what initiatives are currently in place that are worth understanding to get a better idea of what is working well and what could work better. A rapid response team was mentioned as a great resource to the business with multiple initiatives to tackle work demands and support staff.

Other supportive ways of working to help manage work demands were discussed such as coaching in teams, buddy's, trainers on the floor to help where needed but also team social activities or games, and Friday team get togethers. More organisational level support was also mentioned such as employee networks, occupational health and the employee assistance programme. A final area of support that was discussed was around communication channels to share support and best practice will all staff.

The intervention for this research

The committee was asked to be big and brave when proposing interventions and solutions. The committee wanted to make sure to focus on something big and impactful enough to make this a worthwhile investment of time, but at the same time small and manageable enough that it was doable as a team and within the given timeframe.

Team support was identified from the survey as a key strength to focus on when thinking about a possible intervention and implementation. The committee identified *'the need for people to remember too many things and cope with information overload'* as the key issue to focus on.

The committee agreed that to make a difference to this key issue in a short space of time supporting a better use of available tools and resources would be the area to focus on and defined three key actions for the PAR intervention.

1. Support better use of Slack (all employees in this part of organisation A)
 - a. Share best practice
 - b. Protect people from information overload
 - c. Making sure information does not get lost
2. Sharing learning profiles of energy specialists with team leaders (team leaders only)
3. Learning guide for team leaders (team leaders only)

Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands

Workload was seen as the key barrier to the success of any intervention. In Organisation A many initiatives were already in place, without employees necessarily knowing about it. Timing was seen as a barrier to success of an intervention.

The passion to make a difference was identified as a facilitator to success, with key stakeholder support. Working with people from different sites common issues were identified and the opportunity to streamline and share best practice was seen as the key facilitator.

The benefits so far

These results are really positive, we managed to reach 60% of a large population in a very short space of time, our people also reported that our initiatives resulted in improving their wellbeing, a fantastic achievement.

Overall, the committee was very happy with the implementation and impact of the intervention. The project and survey came at a time of high pressure and structural change. The committee was also very happy with the face-to-face approach taken for the Slack sessions, high effort but also high impact.

Survey results at time 2, when looking at employees aware of the intervention, showed a significant improvement on all wellbeing outcomes (stress, wellbeing, burnout), as well as an improvement across all psychosocial hazards and a significant improvement in terms of the experience of emotional demands. Cognitive demands showed an improvement but remain an area of focus, especially for team leaders.

Next Steps

The committee commented on the scores for team leaders, there was consensus around the room that team leaders take on a lot, they are never finished and can't do it all. The discussion moved to thinking about a follow up focus on team leaders. The pack created for team leaders is really valuable but took longer to get signed off and had only just been rolled out. How can we prioritise focus on team leaders?