

Work Demands Research case Study 3: Organisation C

Organisational context

Organisation C is a busy department organising a wide programme of activities and managing the needs of a range of stakeholders and customers. As part of a larger organisation coordinating activity with other departments, working within wider administrative systems and constraints was a key feature of work.

The challenge of work demands

The experience of work demands in Organisation C suggested a high level of frustration in working with inefficient systems and processes, as well as a lack of alignment between functions. As noted above, the nature of the wider organisation also meant that many systems and processes were determined elsewhere and were constraints the teams had to work within, therefore some factors that were identified as frustrations had to be treated as out of scope.

In aiming to focus on issues within their control, it was also clear that different teams in Organisation C faced different work demands, both in terms of the sources and nature of these demands, so even within the area chosen for intervention, there was a need to choose an issue which would be of relevance across the teams. Based on the survey data, cognitive demands were identified as the most common challenge and issues with communication, coordination and processes were identified as key contributors to this.

Addressing work demands

What has been done before

It was highlighted that various wider organisational initiatives were underway to address broader issues with systems and processes. Similarly, organisational approaches to communication issues had been implemented, but it was felt that these had not yet had local impact.

The intervention for this research

The committee evaluated a range of possible solutions to the identified issues and compared these based on their ease of implementation and how many people within the team would benefit from their implementation. Based on this assessment, the committee chose to focus on two solutions:

- A Communications Charter – this tool was designed to provide guidance on how best to use the communications channels available within the organisation and to make this more effective. By highlighting the appropriate use of each channel and some best practice for their use, the aim was to reduce the overall volume of communication, simplify processes and ultimately reduce the information load for colleagues and the requirement to shift attention or concentrate on irrelevant messages.

- A Meetings Framework – this tool was designed to encourage best practice around the planning and conduct of meetings to allow for best use of time for employees. It was recognised that time could be released for colleagues if meetings were run more efficiently and more targeted in their invite list.

To ensure that these tools were more successful than previous initiatives, committee members committed to supporting the deployment of these tools locally and having follow-up conversations with their teams.

Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands

Key barriers to the implementation of the solutions were the continued complexity of working within wider organisational systems and managing the diverse nature of roles and demands within this team. Individual capability, working styles and preferences were also recognised as a possible barrier, as the use of communications tools and working space was negotiated, particularly in a hybrid working environment. It was also noted that openness to challenge behaviour was still low, and this could be built over time by leadership role-modelling of openness to feedback. Further, the intervention coincided with structural changes in the organisation and a seasonal peak in workload.

Implementation was helped by leadership role-modelling and positive reactions to the new guidelines, particularly where teams could already see the benefit in terms of streamlined communications.

The benefits so far

The initial response to the interventions were positive, although committee members acknowledged that some changes were more impactful for some teams than others. While the outcome data from the time 2 survey suggested that the intervention had not been effective in reducing work demands, this was against the backdrop of the implementation of structural changes within the organisation and a seasonal peak in workload. Therefore, it was felt that with further time and different efforts to embed the tools, it would be possible to achieve greater impact in the future. As the context of Organisation C made it complex to choose an issue that was within the control of the committee and relevant to all employees within the scope of the intervention, it was also recognised that this increased the difficulty of choosing a relevant and impactful issue to tackle.

Next Steps

The committee identified a number of ways in which further implementation could be improved, including a range of methods to encourage behaviour change to improve adoption and using a wider variety of communication tools to increase reach. They intend to complete this plan and then measure again in the future to assess the impact of their chosen intervention.