

The 'Elephant In The Room' Of Psychosocial Hazards: Address Potentially Harmful Work Demands And Workload'

Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium



About Affinity Health at Work

- Founded in 2006, we are a multi-award winning research and consultancy organisation.
- We work with policy makers and professional bodies, and organisations of all sizes and sectors across the globe.
- We are recognised as the experts in evidence based wellbeing at work



Why focus on Work Demands and Wellbeing?

73% cite workload as a cause of stress¹, with 52%² as the primary cause

61% feel exhausted at the end of most working days⁴

55% of workers feel work is getting more intense and demanding³

Workers globally are working 9.2 hours of unpaid overtime per week - up from 8.3 hours last year⁵

70% of managers cite a key barrier to supporting wellbeing of team is their own workload

52% report working longer hours than pre-Covid, with 25% saying more than 10 extra hours per week⁶

Background and research aims

- Advance research and practice in the area of preventative wellbeing approaches
- Offering resources to support organisations to address work demands
- Foster organisational learning and knowledge transfer in participating organisations
- Create better working lives for all



Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium Research Summary

Addressing the 'elephant in the room' of psychosocial hazards: Identifying how to address potentially harmful work demands and workload

What We Do

Consultancy

Research

Development

Insight

Case Studies

We conduct pioneering research in the field of work demands, professional bodies, universities, evaluate interventions and develop evidence.

We combine traditional approaches to research with modern methods to ensure we are recognised for our expertise in translating research into practice.



Research Consortium

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 specialists join 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 an 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 with 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.

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Work Demands Research 2024



Summary of our approach



Literature review and round table findings

Themes from academic and practitioner literature

Reduce demands:

- Preventative approach
- Risk assessment
- Staffing levels
- Job redesign

Reduce *impact* of demands:

- Resilience training
- Wellbeing apps
- Skills training for managers and employees

Techniques to manage high demands:

- Time management strategies
- Workload planning
- Breaks
- Managing information overload
- General best practice guidance

Themes from the round table conversations

Technology

Job Design

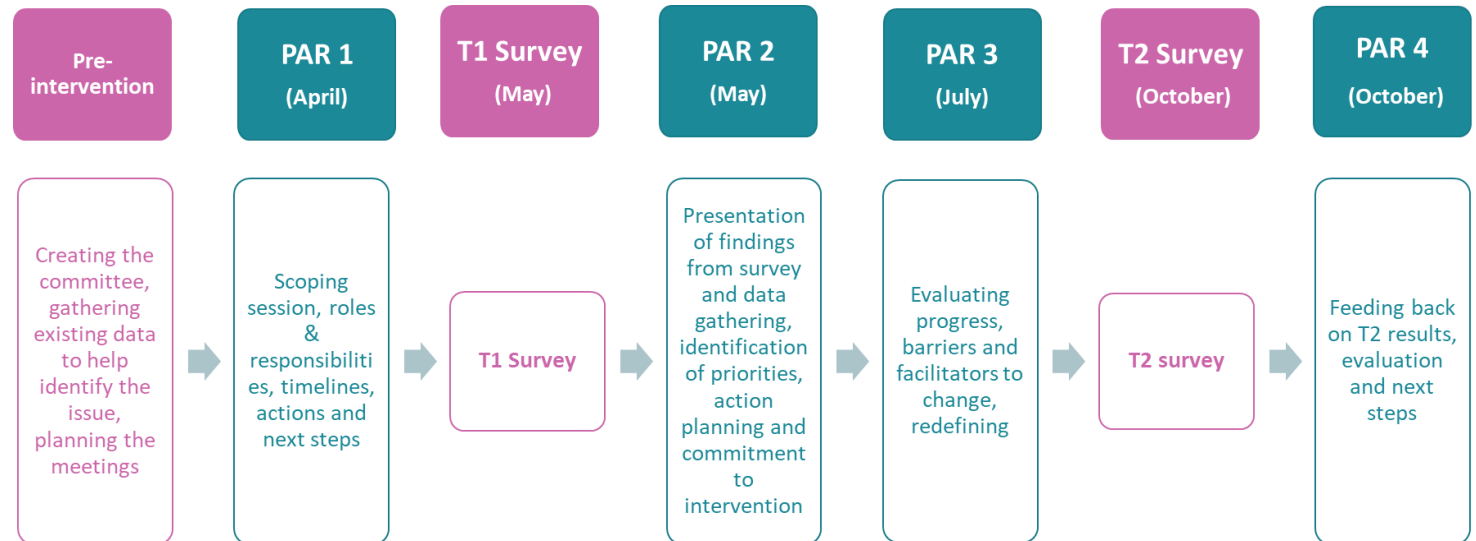
Work
organisation

Line managers

Personal
strategies

Participatory Action Research (PAR) to address work demands

- Collaborative approach between the organisation and the researcher.
- Interventions designed by employees for employees based on experience, more easily supported than a top-down approach
- 4 organisations took part in our PAR research
- Overall aim to tackle the impact of work demands
- Evidence gathered to identify key issue related to work demands



Case study - Organisation 1



- Energy sector
- Two operational teams
- 1395 employees



- The need for people to **remember too many things** and cope with **information overload**
- **Team leaders** needing support to manage multiple roles and high workload



Support a better use of available tools and resources through three key actions

1. Support better use of Slack
2. Sharing Learning profiles with team leaders
3. Learning guide for team leaders



- 82% felt the intervention had been effective in reducing work demands
- Emotional, work and cognitive demands all improved
- All wellbeing outcomes improved

'The methodology works great, collaboration, best practice sharing and evidence-based practice'

Case study - Organisation 2



- Healthcare sector
- Emergency Operations centre
- 389 employees



Cognitive demands:

- People feeling inundated with updates
- The number of new directives was overwhelming
- After a day or a few days off it is very hard to see the wood for the trees



- Offering **supportive drop-in sessions** to colleagues where key information would be presented, and questions could be answered.
- Provide a safe space to discuss any concerns, queries about process or policy and discuss recent key updates.



- 60% feel the intervention has been successfully implemented and will be continued
- Increased manager and peer support
- Reduced burnout
- Mixed results with regards to work demands

'The intervention was a big success, with great attendance and positive feedback.'

'This initiative has inspired us to do more'

Fireside Chat

- What is your key learning from the participatory approach to reducing (the impact of) work demands in your organisation?
- What is your top tip for other organisation thinking of addressing work demands?



Questions & Answers

- Please write your question in the Q&A tab
- We will be able to answer as many questions as possible in this webinar
- We will answer all questions and add the Q&A to the slide pack that we will share



Recommendations

- Avoid individualising the challenge
- Understand your unique context
- Encourage collective problem-solving
- Take a collaborative approach
- Secure leadership support
- Allocate resources
- Start small and manageable
- Embrace continual learning



Research Consortium

- A network of researchers, policymakers, and employers dedicated to improving employee health and wellbeing. Through quarterly masterclasses and annual research projects voted for by our members, we strengthen the evidence base for workplace wellbeing, share best practice, and unite multidisciplinary perspectives to prevent ill-health and promote wellbeing.
- For more **information**, to **download report** or to **join the consortium** please visit <https://www.affinityhealthatwork.com> or email hello@affinityhealthatwork.com
- Our 2025 research project is to **develop a Professional Framework for Wellbeing Professionals**. Are you a wellbeing professional or responsible for wellbeing in your organisation and **would you like to be involved in this research?** Please scan the QR code.

