



**Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium  
Research Report**

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



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With the greatest thanks and appreciation to EDF, King's College Language Centre and our two other participating organisations, all organisational sponsors, stakeholders, employees and thought leaders who so generously gave their time and insights to our research.

The research team at Affinity Health at Work

Rachel Lewis  
Marleen Reinke  
Claire Agate  
Nathan Palmer  
Sophie Walker  
Jo Yarker

# Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Background .....	3
Summary of approach.....	3
Interventions and key findings.....	3
Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands .....	4
Conclusions .....	4
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Background to the research.....	5
Aims of this research.....	7
<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>RESULTS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Academic Literature review .....	10
Practitioner Literature review .....	12
Organisational data collection .....	15
Interventions conducted to address work demands .....	22
Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands .....	30
<b>OVERALL SUMMARY AND LEARNINGS .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Strengths and limitations of this work.....	32
Conclusions and observations.....	32
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>34</b>
1. About Affinity Health at Work.....	34
2. About the Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium.....	35
3. Search terms for Academic Rapid Evidence Review .....	35
4. Inclusion/exclusion criteria for Academic Rapid Evidence Review .....	36
5. Results interpretation framework.....	36
6. Psychosocial hazards.....	39
7. Demands item by item .....	40
8. Survey items and provenance .....	42
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>44</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

Psychosocial hazards, such as high workloads, long hours, and lack of control or autonomy, significantly impact employee mental health and wellbeing, with stress and mental ill health often arising when demands outweigh individual's resources. Job demands, including unachievable deadlines, cognitive overload, and emotional challenges, have intensified due to societal changes.

Recognising the issue of excessive job demands and the impact on employee wellbeing, there is a need for collaboration between researchers, organisations, and employees to answer the question: **"How can we effectively manage the issue of excessive work demands?"**

### Summary of approach

This research was part of a multi-organisation Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium project involving four organisations representing four different sectors. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology was used. Widely applied in public health, mental health, and organisational research, it has proven effective in stress management, including job redesign to reduce workplace stress.

In organisations, PAR aligns objectives with research goals by forming committees of employees from various roles and levels. These committees diagnose issues, analyse evidence, design and implement interventions, and evaluate outcomes. This process ensures those affected by changes are actively involved, fostering ownership and acceptance. The success of PAR depends on factors such as organisational size, employee and managerial engagement, and the scope of the intervention. Focused, smaller-scale initiatives with strong participation are more likely to achieve meaningful results.

### Interventions and key findings

All four organisations took an evidence-based approach to identify the key issues in their organisation related to work demands. Based on a survey as well as evidence gathered from within the organisation, committee members in each organisation identified cognitive demands as the key area of work demands impacting employees.

In a series of PAR meetings committee members designed an intervention and the implementation in the organisation. Interventions ranged from a better use of existing tools and channels to information sessions, a focus on communication tools and meeting effectiveness to planned focus time to work on tasks requiring deeper concentration.

Our key findings from the PAR intervention were:

- Committee members and stakeholders valued collaborative approach
- Over a third of employees participating intend to keep using the intervention
- Changes seen over short space of time
  - Improvement across organisations in perceptions on peer support and change management

- Some improvement in wellbeing outcomes in all organisations
- Mixed results across employees' experience of work demands

## Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands

The main barrier to addressing work demands and implementing and evaluating an intervention, identified across all organisations was prioritisation, due to high work demands and workload. Time and workload pressures as well as other organisational change initiatives made it harder to find the time, resources and commitment to a work demands initiative.

Buy-in from management, senior leaders and key stakeholders was identified as key to the successful implementation and continuation of work demands initiatives.

## Conclusions

This research offers a comprehensive review of the academic and practitioner literature, organisational case studies and insights from expert round tables to support both organisations and employers in implementing interventions to address work demands. Our final key recommendations for organisations seeking to address work demands are as follows:

- **Avoid individualising the challenge:** Focus on creating systemic change rather than expecting individuals to adapt or cope within the environment.
- **Understand your unique context:** Take the time to explore and appreciate how issues may vary across departments and locations.
- **Encourage collective problem-solving:** Leverage the power of bringing people together to reflect, share insights, and collaboratively address challenges.
- **Take a collaborative approach:** Involve and gain input from those most affected by the intervention to ensure relevance and buy-in.
- **Secure leadership support:** Engage senior leaders and managers to champion the initiative and drive cultural alignment.
- **Allocate resources:** Establish a dedicated committee or resource to maintain momentum and ensure the intervention's longevity.
- **Start small and manageable:** Recognise that meaningful change can begin with small, achievable steps.
- **Embrace continual learning:** View setbacks as learning opportunities and remain open to experimenting with new ways of working.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background to the research

### Tackling psychosocial risks

Psychosocial hazards refer to unfavourable working conditions in terms of the way that work is organised and managed (such as high workload, long working hours, lack of autonomy and support, harassment and bullying at work). Stress and mental ill health can occur when psychosocial hazards, demands and pressures are not matched with individual's resources (those aspects which enable individuals to thrive at work), knowledge and abilities to cope.

The pandemic created a change for many in ways of working and in doing so raised awareness of the impact of the working environment and culture (and therefore psychosocial hazards) on health and wellbeing. Work related psychosocial hazards are recognised as one of the key concerns to be addressed in modern working life across the world (Schulte et al, 2020) and numerous calls have been made to prioritise them in policy and practice initiatives (ILO 2020, ILO 2022).

The most common interventions to address stress and wellbeing are those that target the individual (Fleming, 2024), by either supporting them to better cope within their existing working environment (secondary interventions such as stress management training) or providing support when they are struggling or are ill (tertiary interventions such as an employee assistance programme). Despite this, there is a clear business case (e.g. Deloitte, 2022) which has found that the most effective way to manage wellbeing is through a focus on preventing stress (primary interventions).

In the last five years there has been an increase in both national legislation and international guidance (such as ISO 45003) which has focused on the need to take a preventative approach to managing psychosocial hazards and risks. A recent study by Jain et al (2022) found that having national legislation around psychosocial risk resulted in more organisations creating action plans to address this. The research however found that the action plans had largely focused on improving and increasing job resources (those elements that enable people to thrive such as having support from peers and managers, having control and autonomy) rather than reducing job demands (those elements which deplete energy). Importantly, the outcomes were that action plans were related to increases in job resources; but also increases in both job demands and stress; showing that addressing stress and wellbeing through increasing job resources is not enough – and that a focus on reducing job demands is key.

### The issue of job demands

Whilst job and work demands can sometimes be referred to in literature as any psychosocial hazard or risk (those aspects of work which deplete energy), this research takes work demands to refer to demands such as unachievable deadlines, long working hours, and a lack of breaks; cognitive demands (having to keep an eye across a lot of aspects of work or having to remember a lot of information) and emotional demands (being emotionally triggered or feeling emotionally involved in work).

Ratanen et al (2021) talked of the increase in the intensity of work and cited that the general accelerated pace of society and the ubiquitous nature of change at work had meant that workers

were subject to increasing workloads and deadlines, a constant need for decision making, and a requirement for continual learning. Surveys such as that by MHFA England (2023) and People Management (Churchill, 2021) corroborate this by finding that most workers feel that work is getting more intense and demanding and is resulting in longer working hours.

Year on year, workload is cited as the leading cause of stress at work and is attributable to 60% of employee stress according to the CIPD Health and Wellbeing report in 2022. Further, many posit that workload and working hours are continuing to increase year on year as a result of both the speed of change as cited by Ratanen et al (2021) and socio-economic trends such as hybrid working, 24-7 technology access and the cost-of-living crisis.

McVicar et al (2013) argue that despite the dominance of individual approaches to manage stress and wellbeing at work, a systems-based approach involving collaborative action to affect job design and reduce job demands and psychosocial hazards may be a more beneficial approach for both organisations and individuals. With levels of mental ill health and stress at work continuing to rise, there is a need for organisations to better understand how to reduce, or reduce the impact of, work demands and workload.

### Using Participatory Action Research as a methodology

Participatory research methodologies were first developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1940's, proposing a cycle of continuous inquiry, action and evaluation (Macaulay, 2017). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research methodology that brings together the researcher and the researched to embark on a collaborative journey of data collection, reflection and action. The methodology has been successfully used in public health research, and health promotion and more recently in mental health research. In organisational research PAR has been used in stress management research, an example is research into a job redesign intervention to reduce stress (Bond & Bunce, 2001).

In the case of organisational research, a PAR methodology attempts to meet both organisational goals and research objectives, through a collaborative and participative process that occurs between the researcher and members of the organisation who work together as a committee (Israel, Schurman & House, 1989). In practice this means that a researcher brings together a team of people in an organisation; employees with different job roles, backgrounds and seniority levels, with the shared purpose of positive action through building an understanding of what the issue is. This team of people, (termed 'a committee' in PAR methodology), works together through the stages of an organisational change process; the diagnosis of an issue, the analysis of available evidence, designing an intervention, implementing and monitoring the intervention and evaluation the process and the outcome.

The benefits of taking a participative approach are that the people who will be impacted by the change are involved in the design of the change, as well as the impact of the change intervention and therefore that there is also a greater sense of control (Bond & Bunce, 2001). In an organisational context we do need to be aware of the range of variables that can impact the success of the PAR research, such as the size of the organisation, engagement of the employees and the managers and duration of the intervention (McVicar et al., 2013). A PAR intervention is more likely to be successful when the scale is not too ambitious, employees are engaged, and specific, important issues are targeted.

For this project, 4 organisations participated in the research representing four different sectors; the energy sector, the healthcare sector, higher education and the public sector. Each began with a shared aim to reduce (the impact) of work demands in a part of their organisation.

## Aims of this research

Recognising the issue of excessive work demands and the impact on employee wellbeing there is a need for collaboration between researchers, organisations and employees to answer the question 'How can we effectively manage the issue of excessive work demands?'

The specific aims of the research were to:

- Support participating organisations to design and implement interventions to address work demands while upskilling employees to foster organisational learning and knowledge transfer.
- Provide broader benefits to other organisations and employers by offering case studies, guidance, and insights into the barriers and facilitators of addressing work demands.
- Advance research and practice by contributing to the field of preventative wellbeing approaches, with a focus on managing work demands, and promoting the Affinity mission of creating better working lives for all.



## METHODOLOGY

This project was conducted using an evidence-based approach in which evidence was taken from both academic and practitioner literature and from data within four organisations.

---

### Stage One: Systematic Rapid Evidence Review

An academic rapid literature review was conducted to identify research around addressing potentially harmful work demands and workload. The following three databases were used to identify studies: PsycInfo, PsychArticles and EBSCOhost Business Source Premier. Google Scholar was also consulted for a more general search of the literature. Search terms and inclusion criteria for this review are included in Appendix 3 and 4 69,386 papers were found on initial search, 51 papers were identified for full screening and 11 final papers were reviewed. A rapid review of practitioner literature was also conducted. CIPD, Business in the Community, Deloitte and HSE as well as general google search were used to identify a further 11 relevant practitioner papers related to reducing work demands.

---



### Stage Two: Organisational research

Organisational research was conducted in four organisations, the stages are summarised below.

#### Participatory Action Research

The participatory action research process consisted of 4 sessions (PAR sessions) of around 90 minutes each per organisation. The sessions were facilitated by the researcher and held online via Microsoft Teams in all except for one organisation which held all four sessions face to face. Each meeting had a specific focus, headline topics are listed below.

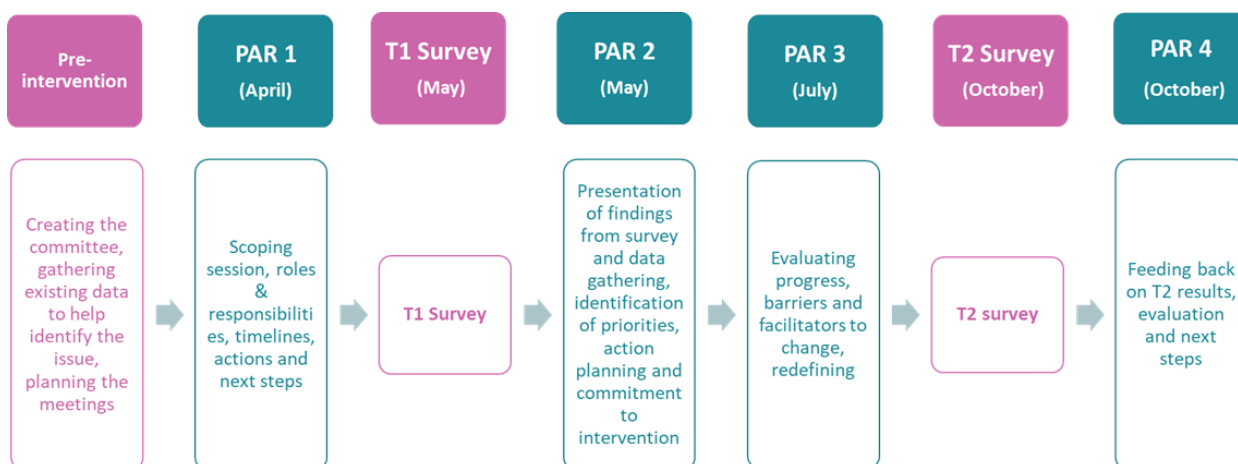
#### PAR sessions:

1. First PAR session in **April** focused on scoping
2. Second PAR session in **May** analysing organisational data and the data from the work demands survey followed by action planning
3. Third PAR session in **July** to evaluate progress and refine actions
4. Fourth and final PAR session in **October** to evaluate impact based on the second survey scores and evaluate the process and look at next steps.

#### Committees:

Organisations were asked to set up a committee of people dedicated to the work demands project, empowered to make decisions and implement change and representatives of employees of different seniority. The size of the committee varied from 8 to 12 members in the team

---



### Time 1 and Time 2 survey in the four organisations involved in PAR

A survey was conducted in the participating organisations in the departments of focus measuring demands, control, manager support, peer support, relationships, role clarity, change management, stress, mental wellbeing and burnout. Full details of the survey can be found in appendices 7.8.

At time 1, a total of 908 surveys were completed and analysed, at time 2, 792 surveys were completed and analysed. The Time 2 survey repeated the measures from Time 1 as well as evaluating the reach and impact of the intervention.

### Roundtable

In addition to the 4 participating organisations, further organisational insight was sought by convening an expert roundtable to discuss how other organisations experience and manage work demands.



### Stage Three: Evaluation, Analysis and Report writing

Data from Stages One and Two were analysed and synthesised.

An **evaluation of the outcome** of the PAR interventions was conducted in each organisation through quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey data and reflections from the committee.

A **process evaluation** was conducted to better understand the suitability of participatory action research in addressing (the impact of) work demands in organisations.

The production of a scientific report including case studies and recommendations to equip organisations to better address and mitigate work demands. Specific organisational reports were produced for each of the participating organisations.

Figure 2: Methodology flow chart

## RESULTS

### Academic Literature review

An academic rapid literature review was conducted to identify research around addressing potentially harmful work demands and workload. The following three databases were used to identify studies: PsycInfo, PsychArticles and EBSCOhost Business Source Premier. Google Scholar was also consulted for a more general search of the literature. Search terms and inclusion criteria for this review are included in Appendix 3 and 4 69,386 papers were found on initial search, 51 papers were identified for full screening and 11 final papers were reviewed.

#### Summary of the study characteristics

The types of job role, business and industry varied across the 11 included studies, including senior managers and employees in both private and public organisations including sectors such as social/public services, finance, education and health care. Studies were conducted mostly across Europe but also Asia and South America. The known age ranges of participants were 19 to 65 years of age with an overall slight bias towards male participants.

#### Interventions to reduce work demands (5 papers)

Interventions to reduce work demands took varying approaches including altering staffing levels during known busy periods (Scheepers et al, 2020), engaging employees in job crafting behaviours (van Wingerden et al, 2017) and management workshops on psychosocial hazards (Nylen et al, 2016; Nylen et al, 2017). Levels of success varied. Increasing staff levels at known busy periods was found to effectively reduce work demands on those shifts (Scheepers et al, 2020), however engaging in job crafting behaviour interventions did increase resources but had no effects on work demands one year after the sessions (van Wingerden et al, 2017).

#### **Management workshops**

Nylen et al (2016) conducted pilot research on a program using four manager workshops to address job demands. Workshops covered raising awareness of psychosocial hazards including work demands, developing an understanding of how managers can influence demands, helping develop individual action plans to reduce demands and identify potential obstacles to their plans and how to overcome them. At a follow up to this program, work demands had decreased. Based on these pilot findings, Nylen et al (2018) conducted a larger study of the manager program. The four workshops were again run with the first workshop covering theoretical background to increasing the competence of – and creating an awareness of – different ways to promote long-term health and reduce the various health risks at work, integrating survey feedback on demands and resources from employees to start discussion points and raise specific awareness. Workshop 2 focused on helping managers assess the current situations and priorities of demands and resources with action plans to address these being developed in workshop 3. Workshop 4 covered the identification of challenges and possibilities with the action plans and developing forward strategies. Contrary to the pilot findings, the findings of this program were an increase in workload, unnecessary tasks and unreasonable tasks. However, this was found in both the control and intervention groups,

suggesting the intervention had no impact rather than a negative impact. The researchers suggested potential issues with the design, implementation and short time frame as explanations as why no effect was seen.

A recent review of British workers by Fleming (2024) found that preventative approaches such as job redesign are more effective at addressing work demands and suggested intervention combinations that address both demands and resources could be most beneficial.

### Interventions to reduce *the impact* of work demands (6 papers)

Interventions to protect against and reduce the negative impacts of high job demands (for instance absenteeism and exhaustion) also utilise a range of approaches including manager training, mindfulness training, break taking and education.

#### Job redesign:

Kim et al, (2016) looked at the content of microbreaks through the day and their impact on negative affect caused by job demands. They found microbreaks during the day that involve social activities (talking with a colleague or family/friend about non-work topics) and relaxation micro breaks (employee engages in an activity for relaxation purposes such as strolls, naps, stretching, listening to music, daydreaming, etc.) reduced (protected against) the negative affect caused by work demands of employees at the end of the working day.

Van Woerkom et al (2016) looked at the impacts of employers adopting a strengths-based approach with employees on absenteeism caused by high workload. They found that supporting employees by enabling them to engage in tasks in line with their individual strengths, or by letting two or more colleagues with complementary strengths join forces, reduced absenteeism rates in those with high workloads and emotionally demanding workloads.

Three papers explored the impacts of training to develop skills on managing the impacts of work demands. One looked at employee training and two looked at manager training

#### Employee training:

Moreno-Jimenez et al, (2020) conducted a small-scale study on the impacts of five 'psychoeducational sessions' on job demands and emotional exhaustion. Sessions focused on increasing awareness of work stressors such as workload and pressure, increasing self-compassion, establishing preventative plans, emotion regulation and ACT techniques around flexibility. They found the five sessions decreased the work stressors and protected against emotional exhaustion caused by high demands for half of the intervention group.

#### Manager training: 2 studies used variations of manager training programmes

Mellner et al, (2022) utilised a mindfulness intervention aimed at enhancing compassionate leadership skills, increasing empathy, motivation and efficiency in the workplace. They found a larger decrease in job demands and a smaller decrease in job resources, a larger increase in psychological detachment, work-nonwork boundary control, work-life balance, and mindfulness from baseline to post-intervention when compared with the reference group with these effects being maintained at 6-month follow-up. However, it should be noted that mindfulness interventions require specialists to deliver.

In contrast, Ângelo et al (2013) implemented manager training to address and manage stress caused by high demands. A three-day training program involving education on stress, stress

management strategies, the role of leadership with a focus on the importance of social support as well as designing and implementing action plans to address stressful situations and improve colleague support. While this training programme did increase social support from colleagues, perceptions of chronic demands were slightly worsened in the intervention group compared to the control group while no effect on burnout was found. The researchers suggested that the impact on job demands could be explained by those in the intervention group being more aware of their demands as a result of the training so perceived greater demands afterwards.

Recent reviews by Jain et al (2022) and Fleming (2024) reviewed working practices and interventions to address job demands in Europe and specifically the UK respectively. Both found that attempts usually focus on increasing resources available through methods such as resilience training, mindfulness, wellbeing apps and actions plans. Jain et al (2022) concluded that action plans to reduce demands may actually increase demands slightly as well as having a stronger impact on increasing resources, while Fleming (2024) concluded that the strategies often adopted to increase support do not provide additional or appropriate resources in response to job demands faced.

## Summary of academic literature review

The results from the literature review highlight that, to date, research around job demands tends to focus on the relationships between high job demands and other outcomes such as engagement, burnout, absenteeism and productivity. Research focusing on interventions is less common and is split between attempts to directly manage the work demands themselves and, more commonly, attempts to protect against or reduce the impact of high work demands. Research to directly address job demands has taken varying approaches with varying degrees of success, however preventative approaches such as job redesign are best. Attempts to reduce the impact of high job demands often focus on increasing resources, again using various methods. Recent reviews into these support interventions suggest that these may not be sufficient at managing the impacts of demands.

## Practitioner Literature review

Deloitte, CIPD, IOSH, HSE, and BITC as well as general web searches were used to identify any pieces of practitioner literature that addressed ways to reduce work demands or the impact of work demands. 11 items of practitioner recommendations were included for the practitioner summary.

## Summary of the evidence

Similar to the academic literature, evidence mainly concentrated on techniques to cope with and reduce the impacts of high work demands. Practitioner literature focused on 4 areas to help cope with existing work demands and their impacts. The four areas were job crafting (including time management and prioritisation), strategies to reduce information overload, breaks; and guides with general best practice and recommendations for organisations. Most focus on individual level techniques employees can use as part of a wider organisational strategy to have an impact on work demands or their impacts.

The search found a range of techniques offered, reinforcing the importance of different techniques working for different people and in different organisations and sectors. While there is limited empirical numbers reported, the variety of techniques are listed as combinations of these methods and approaches can be used to work for different people. While employees could choose to implement their own combination of techniques, it is important for organisations to lead and support these initiatives to allow them to be effective.

### Summary of practitioner literature review

Job crafting techniques were often suggested as ways to help employees work more efficiently to manage their work demands and impacts. These typically referred to time management techniques and work prioritisation. Time management techniques such as the Pomodoro method, task time blocking, the two-minute rule (Page, 2024) and the one-hour stress plan (Sutton, 2021 based on Bregman, 2014) were recommended by a range of practitioner reports to help employees manage their time and complete tasks more time-efficiently. A brief summary of the time management techniques suggested:

Technique	Summary
Pomodoro method	Break down big projects into doable chunks of work. Create a to-do list of tasks, set a 25-minute timer and focus on a single task (notifications and distractions off) until the timer goes off then take a 5-minute break away from your desk. Repeat until you have completed 4 25-minute blocks and then take a longer, 30-minute break.
Task time blocking	In place of a to-do list, schedule blocks of time for specific tasks throughout the day to prioritise and manage workload. Visual overview of tasks in a day may help clarify commitments and their priorities. Utilising personal preference and working times for focus tasks is useful, for example if you work best in the morning, block time for difficult tasks then where possible.
Two-minute rule	If a task can be completed in two minutes or less, do it immediately instead of postponing. By taking immediate action on quick tasks, you prevent them from becoming larger, more time-consuming issues later.
One hour stress plan	When under pressure, plan the next hour. The hour is broken into the first 15 minutes concentrating on fast, small tasks then 35 minutes on a challenging task (without interruption), then a 10-minute break away from desk. For the next hour after the break, replan your hour using the shortened list of tasks to complete.

Work prioritisation methods were also commonly suggested as job crafting techniques employees could utilise to help them manage their personal work demands. Prioritisation methods suggested included ‘eat the frog’ (Caba, 2024), Triage (George, 2010) and the Eisenhower matrix (Garcia, Herrity, Eads & Kellogg Murray, 2024). Other advice highlighted the need to regularly assess urgency and adjust task lists and priorities in the day, focusing on completing critical tasks first (Ceta, 2024).



Technique	Summary
Eat the frog	Start with the biggest, most challenging and important tasks first (get the difficult tasks out of the way) and then progress down your list of tasks. If tasks are left at the end of the day, they should be the less urgent/easier tasks so there is less pressure/demand
Triage	Sorting jobs into categories that reflect different levels of effort required (e.g. small problems, moderate problems, serious problems) and create a response scheme/strategy for each level e.g. focusing more people on serious issues, dividing work into sub-groups to allocate to best-placed teams. When tasks/workload come in, you triage them into the categories and action the planned response scheme, dealing with the most critical issues first.
Eisenhower matrix	To decide the order of tasks to work on, separate tasks into 4 categories of urgent and important, important but not urgent, urgent but not important and neither important nor urgent. Prioritise the urgent and important tasks and do them first, temporarily ignore the 'neither important nor urgent' tasks, schedule the important but not urgent tasks (so you don't lose sight of them) and delegate the urgent but not important tasks if possible.

Strategies to prevent or reduce information overload were also recommended within the practitioner literature. Suggestions to limit the need for multitasking and task switching as much as possible when creating work schedules were recommended (Garcia, Herrity, Eads & Kellogg Murray, 2024) as well as considering and planning in buffers when planning work schedules to allow for emergencies and protect wellbeing (Aghlamazyan, 2021). Time blocking for emails and calls where possible was also recommended due to the disturbances in workflow that replying to emails can cause. Allocating a time to check and reply to emails and muting notifications outside of this time can aid the prevention of switching, allowing focus and limiting overwhelm (Aghlamazyan, 2021).

Another strategy to prevent or minimise information overload is implementing meeting free days. A trial in 76 companies was run to test the impacts of implementing between 1 and 5 meeting free days per week (Laker, Pereira, Budhwar and Malik, 2022). The case study found an optimum of 3 meeting free days per week, however one and two meeting free days per week also saw some positive impacts. It was noted that part of changing to this pattern would involve changes in communication and connection to replace meetings, not just pushing all meetings to other days of the week which could end up causing overload itself. An understanding of what is feasible or works in unique contexts is also essential for the implementation of meeting free days to be successful.

Breaks were recommended as a good way to protect against the negative impacts of high work demands. Regular breaks away from your desk/workspace to distance from work were recommended for managing the impacts of both cognitive demands and emotional demands, especially during peaks of high demands (Workplace Health & Safety QLD, Department of Justice and Attorney General, 2018; Caba 2024).

As well as some specific examples of techniques people can implement themselves, collections of best practice suggestions and guidance were also identified. Guidance from CIPD (Young, 2024),

Workplace Health & Safety QLD, Department of Justice and Attorney General (2018) and Thrive at Work (2019) recommended general best practices for employers to aim for including task rotation for highly cognitively demanding roles, providing adequate resources to complete tasks (particularly during peak periods), providing good peer and managerial support to employees and needing to provide adequate time for breaks. Recommendations also covered regular reviews of workloads with input from employees (to assist with feelings of job control) and ensuring appropriate training, so staff knowledge and ability levels match the requirements of their job to help them best deal with the cognitive, mental, time and emotional demands of their roles.

For more specific details on the techniques, implementation of them and the higher-level guidance, please refer to the references in appendix 9.

A notable feature of the practitioner literature was an absence of trials and data. Most pieces of work suggested some evidence based or widely used models as potential techniques that could be implemented but lacked examples of utilisation of the techniques and their impacts, only the meeting free day work provided data of implementation. Similarly, many of the techniques and strategies suggested can be implemented by individuals but would need support and commitment from colleagues and the organisation to be implemented well and effective.

## Organisational data collection

Four organisations participated in the Participatory Action Research (PAR). Each organisation set up a committee of employees, dedicated to the research for the duration of the project, known as a PAR committee. PAR committee sizes ranged from 8 to 13 individuals, from a variety of roles, seniority levels, length of service within the organisation, empowered to design an evidence-based intervention to reduce the impact of work demands within the (chosen part of) the organisation. In total 41 employees across the four organisations participated as committee members in the intervention between April and November 2024. Each committee had a dedicated Affinity Health at Work Senior Consultant supporting the committee and organisation throughout the project.

Organisational data was collected using two surveys in each participating organisation, one before the intervention to have a baseline measure as well as prioritise action (T1) and one in October/November to evaluate the impact of the intervention (T2) in the four organisations. The survey at time 1 had 908 responses and at time 2 had 792 responses.

Participating organisations also looked at other available data to help understand the impact of work demands and prioritise action, e.g. opinion survey data, retention and absenteeism data, exit interview topics and performance data.

Further, overall work demand data was collected by Affinity Health at Work from thought-leaders in organisations in a round table session. The data from all three sources has been synthesised in this section of the report.

## Organisational context

Participating organisations came from a range of sectors including the higher education sector, energy and two public sector organisations.

To provide some context of the employee experience in each organisation a brief context is outlined below.



### **Organisation A**

This is a large multi-location organisation in the energy sector, the employees taking part in this research worked in two operational departments with a total of 1,395 employees. Employees are largely desk-based customer-facing energy specialists, as well as team leaders and senior operational leaders, across the board employees in this part of the business experience a high level of work demands.

Over the last year the departments taking part in the research have been going through a large-scale organisational change, impacting them at team level, team leader level and overall departmental level. Team leaders are under a lot of pressure to implement and adapt to the change as well as support their team members with their day-to-day job.

Employees and team leaders have felt under pressure with the amount of information coming in across different communications platforms and were not always sure where to find support or answers to queries.

### **Organisation B**

Organisation B is a healthcare organisation with a total of 389 desk-based employees across two sites taking part in this research. Organisation B has quite a few employees who are new to the job. The experience of work demands in organisation B varies day by day, work demands are unpredictable and heavily impacted by staffing levels. On the whole employees experience a high level of demand and a low level of predictability or control.

Recently employees have felt overwhelmed by the amount of information received, and systems updates and feel they can't see the wood for the trees. In addition, employees in organisation B struggle with their breaks; the allocated time does not always allow them to detach from their job, get some fresh air and have time for lunch.

### **Organisation C**

Organisation C is a busy department within a higher education organisation with 120 employees covering teaching duties and professional services to support delivery of courses, including team leaders for both of these areas. The department is responsible for organising a wide programme of learning and managing the needs of a range of stakeholders, including students and other internal departments. Their experience of work demands suggested a high level of frustration in working with systems and processes perceived to be inefficient, as well as a felt lack of alignment between functions.

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.

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.

## Organisation D

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 of varying levels of seniority and were chosen for their expertise, decision-making authority, and frontline insights, ensuring representation across sub-teams.

The team of focus within Organisation D manages a high volume of complex, urgent tasks, often requiring quick responses and turnarounds. This reactive environment can hinder focus and the ability to complete tasks or meet goals. Frequent task switching, interruptions, and hybrid working contribute to an 'always-on' culture, making it challenging to establish boundaries and take adequate breaks.

Balancing strategic partnership with subject matter expertise leads to high expectations and a fear of judgment for mistakes. Emotional demands are significant, including supporting individuals in distress, managing external pressures, and juggling personal responsibilities such as caregiving or studying.

## Priorities

During the PAR1 meeting, the committees across the four participating organisations engaged in a discussion about work demands, focusing on those seen to most significantly affect employees. They identified several key areas that warranted deeper exploration through this research project. Below is an overview of some of the key areas that came up in discussions across the four participating organisations.

- *High volume, complexity and urgency of work:* overall work demands were very high.
- *Hard to keep up with changes:* It is hard for staff to keep up with changes and updates given the volume of work and lack of downtime.
- *Systems and processes:* Increasing complexity and information overload.
- *Break taking:* The difficulty to find time to take a break and detach from work.

After the PAR 1 meeting (in May 2024) employees were invited to complete a survey measuring **wellbeing outcomes**, **psychosocial hazards** and **work demands**. In total 908 survey responses were received. An overview of the development of the survey, including details on scales used, can be found in appendix 8.

Scores to the survey scales and questions are outlined below, with the colour scheme indicating a risk level in that topic area. **Green** indicates a low risk, **orange** a medium risk and **red** a high risk. The appendix contains a detailed interpretation framework and outlines the scale points for all questions and scales used in the survey.

### Time 1 survey scores for wellbeing outcomes:

Outcome	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
Job stress <i>(scores from 1-5)</i>	2.48	3.21	3.05	3.11
Mental wellbeing <i>(scores from 7-35)</i>	23.83	20.43	21.55	21.51
Burnout <i>(scores from 0-100)</i>	43.59	65.63	51.79	60.94

In the survey we looked at three outcome variables, Stress, Mental Wellbeing and Burnout.

Employees across all organisations reported finding their job moderately stressful (stress scale scores ranging from 2.48-3.21)

Low levels of employee wellbeing were reported across two organisations, moderate levels in one organisation and good levels were reported in one organisation (20.43 to 23.83 out of 35).

Moderate levels of burnout were also reported across all organisations (scores ranging from 43.60-65.63). However, high levels of burnout were reported in two organisations for the item “How often have you felt tired?” and high levels for the item ‘How often have you felt worn out?’ for one organisation.

### Time 1 survey scores for psychosocial hazards:

Psychosocial hazard	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
<b>Job control</b> <i>(e.g. having a say in the way you work, scores from 1-5)</i>	3.28	2.20	3.28	3.85
<b>Manager support</b> <i>(e.g. getting supportive feedback, scores from 1-5)</i>	4.35	3.70	3.66	4.26
<b>Peer support</b> <i>(e.g. getting help from colleagues, scores from 1-5)</i>	4.39	3.95	3.86	4.06
<b>Relationships at work</b> <i>(e.g. bullying at work, scores from 1-5)</i>	1.25	1.49	1.26	1.63
<b>Role clarity</b> <i>(e.g. being clear about responsibilities and objectives, scores from 1-5)</i>	4.53	4.31	4.04	3.94
<b>Change management</b> <i>(e.g. being consulted about change at work, scores from 1-5)</i>	3.82	2.96	2.70	3.07

Generally, across the four organisations, levels of peer support were strong, with low levels of harmful behaviour. Team members were also clear about their roles and responsibilities across the organisations. More mixed findings were found in terms of change management where a moderate risk was found across three organisations, and job control, with a moderate or strong risk across three organisations. Finally, although generally manager support was perceived to be strong, in organisation C, scores were slightly lower.

## Organisational experience of work demands

### Survey data

One of the key things measured in the survey was the experience of work demands which were measured on three parameters: overall work demands, cognitive demands and emotional demands. Overall work demands were measured including questions asking about having unachievable deadlines or unrealistic time pressures. Cognitive demands, such as having to remember lots of things, and emotional demands, such as getting emotionally triggered by work or having to deal with other people's personal problems, were also measured in the survey. Overall scores and scores by question are outlined below split by organisation.

#### Work demands overall and by item:

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
<b>Overall work demands</b>	2.14	2.82	2.64	2.93
I have unachievable deadlines	2.21	2.59	2.38	2.76
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	2.57	2.63	2.69	3.32
I am pressured to work long hours	1.47	2.21	2.47	2.13
I have unrealistic time pressures	1.89	2.68	2.47	2.66
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine	1.94	2.42	2.40	2.95
I have to work very intensively	2.67	3.55	3.29	3.47
I am unable to take sufficient breaks	1.80	2.84	2.53	3.05
I have to work very fast	2.60	3.61	2.91	3.13

The highest work demands were experienced by Organisation D, followed by Organisation B and C, with demands representing a moderate risk. Only in Organisation A were work demands perceived to be a low risk.

A common experience and moderate risk across all four organisations was that many team members felt that they had to neglect tasks because they had too much to do and had to work both fast and intensively. Employees across organisations B, C and D experienced a moderate risk in terms of time pressure and deadlines, as well as a difficulty combining tasks being asked of them and the ability to take sufficient breaks. In organisation A, B and D employees did not experience pressure to work long hours, though there was a moderate risk in organisation C.

### Cognitive demands overall and by item:

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
<b>Cognitive demands overall</b>	<b>65.55</b>	<b>86.60</b>	<b>68.61</b>	<b>78.62</b>
Do you have to keep your eyes on lots of things while you work?	60.52	82.08	67.78	73.03
Does your work require that you remember a lot of things?	70.59	91.11	69.44	84.21

Cognitive demands are a high risk across three organisation (B, C and D) and a moderate risk for organisation A.

A common experience across all organisations is that work requires employees need to remember a lots of things, this is a high-risk level across. Employees also feel they need to keep their eyes on lots of things while working, with a high risk for organisation B, C and D and a moderate risk at organisation A.

### Emotional demands overall and by item:

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
<b>Emotional demands overall</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>4.59</b>
I have to deal with other people's personal problems as part of my work	2.96	4.40	3.77	4.76
I get emotionally involved or triggered by my work	2.86	3.42	3.43	3.89
My work is emotionally demanding	3.18	4.81	3.48	5.11

Overall organisations B, C and D reported a moderate risk in their experience of emotional demands at work, and organisation A a low risk. When asked if work is emotionally demanding all employees experienced a moderate risk and employees in organisation D a high risk. In organisation A employees did not feel too emotionally involved or triggered by their work or like they had to deal with other people's personal problems, where employees in organisation B, C and D experienced a higher risk in these areas.

### Qualitative data

Speaking to organisations the overall feel is that work demands have been increasing for employees year on year. Employees feel their workload is high, that there is too much to do in too little time. Employees struggle with the pressure, leading to an inability to switch off and detach from work in the evening or by taking a break.

There is a general sense that there have been many and rapid technological updates and that employees struggle to make the most of the technology available or even keep up with rapid changes and experience an overload of information.

While attempting to streamline work and optimise efficiency, there is a feel that some of the ‘old and ways of working’ where there is more face-to-face time and value in building relationships at work can get lost. People commented on the value of time as a team to share, time for a manager to coach, time to share best practice with colleagues.

Some employees felt that there was a lack of focus time, too many interruptions during the workday from emails, meetings, training sessions and not enough time to get the work done.

‘I can’t see the wood for the trees’ was a much-shared sentiment in many different conversations. The value of supporting employees to break down tasks into smaller manageable steps was discussed as well as time plans focusing on weekly, monthly, yearly targets clearly broken down.

Another key area for organisations was the sense of ‘always on’ culture, a lack of downtime or detachment from work, difficulty taking breaks and difficulty finding time to focus on bigger tasks that need quiet time and concentration.

## Interventions to address work demands

### *Summary of range of approaches taken*

As part of the PAR research and round table session organisations shared strategies and interventions that they have implemented to try and address work demands directly or to mitigate the impact of work demands on employees. Below is a summary overview of interventions and strategies that were discussed.

#### Work demands interventions

Interventions to address work demands	Interventions to mitigate impact of work demands
<b>Technology</b> to reduce complexity of processes	Tailored <b>psychological support</b> to reduce emotional demands of the job
<b>Email guidelines</b> to reduce email specific demands and out of hours emails	<b>Prioritisation</b> , team level agreement and alignment on priorities to manage overwhelm
<b>Job redesign</b> , job crafting, changing how work is done	<b>Support managers</b> to ‘understand what support looks like’
<b>Additional resources</b> to reduce individual workload	Increase <b>clarity of expectations</b> , daily, weekly, monthly, step by step support
<b>Policy and guidance</b> around processes	Clarity around <b>taking breaks</b> with additional breaks supported for wellbeing
<b>Best practice sharing</b> to surface interventions that have been successful elsewhere in the organisation	Increased <b>autonomy</b> and choice
Individual and team <b>skills training</b> to reduce pressure of work	Regular one to one’s and <b>listening</b> to employees
<b>Risk assessments</b> to identify psychosocial hazards that needed attention and mitigation	<b>Flexible working</b> to allow employees a more tailored approach to times with higher and lower demands

# Interventions conducted to address work demands

## Summary of interventions

### **Organisation A**

In organisation A the committee wanted to make sure they focused on something big and impactful enough to make this research project 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 the intervention would need to support employees across the two business areas as well as team leaders in particular. The intervention identified was:

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

- Support better use of Slack
- Sharing learning profiles of energy specialists with team leaders (team leaders only)
- Learning guide for team leaders (team leaders only)

The committee discussed that the challenge would be to get the intervention content signed off and reach people across different sites. A decision was taken to deliver the Slack sessions in person, a high investment but aiming for a high impact.

### **Organisation B**

The committee on organisation B decided based on the available evidence that the key issue was that **people did not have enough time to digest information, both wellbeing information as well as work updates.**

The intervention for this research therefore focused on:

#### *Offering supportive drop-in sessions to colleagues where key information would be presented, and questions could be answered.*

The focus of the drop-in sessions would be to:

- Provide a safe space away from the desk and phone to discuss any concerns, queries about process or policy and discuss recent key updates.
- Provide a space where wellbeing champions can connect to people and run short sessions on key topics such as taking a good break.

The committee discussed that the challenge would be covering all different shifts. The committee identified it would help to have four champions, two in each location, to ensure coverage and consistency.

The committee were able to secure support from Education to help with running the sessions which allowed them to be run more frequently, and where possible sessions were moved to weekly.



### **Organisation C context**

In Organisation C, the Committee identified four issues that were within the control of the team and widely impactful, and following prioritisation of possible solutions to these decided to focus on:

#### *Improving use of communication tools and improving meeting effectiveness.*

Both were designed to tackle the cognitive demands identified through the survey by reducing incoming information, and free up time with more effective meetings to tackle work pressures created by current ways of working.

Both areas were topics that did have central tools and guidance available in the wider organisation, so it was recognised that the solution needed was to make sure these were adapted to be appropriate to the context of the team and to concentrate on implementing them effectively and encouraging their use.

Drafts of the two documents were shared amongst the committee, with all members able to provide feedback and suggest amendments. Following this, the two documents were shared with the wider team and this was followed up with local conversations on using the tools, with implementation timed at a seasonal period of change when people were more receptive to new ways of working.

### **Organisation D context**

Based on the work demands identified as significantly affecting employees in Organisation D - such as high work volume, complexity, urgency, task switching, and boundary challenges-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.



## Impact of interventions

### Outcome evaluation

Between October and November, a second survey was conducted, measuring Work Demands, Job Resources and Wellbeing outcomes, using the same scales and questions as in the first survey. Questions were added to understand the level of awareness of the intervention within the organisation and to evaluate the reach and effectiveness of the intervention.

*It is worth noting the survey scores at time 2 need to be interpreted in the organisational context over the last few months as well as the short time frame in which the intervention was piloted. As a result, causal conclusions in relation to the work demands intervention cannot be drawn.*

It is not easy in a larger organisation to reach everyone in a short space of time, however around 60% of respondents in Organisation A and 48% of respondents in Organisation B were aware of the work demands intervention when asked in the survey.

The survey data and evaluation data below for Organisation A and B was calculated from those employees who were aware of the intervention only.

### Survey questions evaluating the intervention

Item	% Favourable			
	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
People in the target population are aware of the intervention to reduce work demands	60%	48%	35%	89%
The intervention has been effective in reducing work demands	82%	33%	23%	39%
The intervention has been effective in reducing the impact of work demands	78%	21%	12%	50%
The intervention has been widely adopted across the target population	81%	48%	12%	28%
The intervention has been successfully implemented across the target population	81%	63%	19%	39%
People in the target population will keep using the intervention	81%	60%	31%	44%
The intervention is likely to be rolled out to other parts of the organisation	78%	26%	16%	21%

Awareness of the intervention varied across organisations with a lower proportion of people being aware of the interventions in the larger organisations. Assessments of the effectiveness of the interventions at reducing demands and reducing the impact of work demands also varied.

Most positivity was seen across the organisations when employees were asked whether they felt people in the target population would keep using the work demands intervention with % favourable being close to half of employees or over. This demonstrated that even where employees didn't directly link the intervention with work demands, there was still a sense of wanting to keep using the intervention going forward.

In the verbatim comments employees had the opportunity to comment on what was working well about the intervention and what could work better, providing specific and insightful data to the committee and stakeholders in each organisation to evaluate the intervention.

Some themes of note across the organisations were that the knowledge and best practice sharing element of the intervention and research worked particularly well for employees, and that implementing an intervention in a busy work environment often going through change could lead to some of the focus getting 'lost in the noise'.

## Time 2 survey scores for wellbeing outcomes

	Org A			Org B			Org C			Org D		
	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change
<b>Job Stress</b> <i>(scores from 1-5)</i>	2.48	2.45	<b>-0.03*</b>	3.21	3.20	<b>-0.01</b>	3.05	2.96	<b>-0.09</b>	3.11	3.11	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Mental Wellbeing</b> <i>(scores from 7-35)</i>	23.83 <i>(51<sup>st</sup>-75<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	25.04 <i>(51<sup>st</sup>-75<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	<b>+1.21*</b>	20.43 <i>(lowest 25<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	20.96 <i>(lowest 25<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	<b>+0.53</b>	21.55 <i>(26<sup>th</sup>-50<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	22.50 <i>(26<sup>th</sup>-50<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	<b>+0.95</b>	21.51 <i>(lowest 25<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	21.83 <i>(26<sup>th</sup>-50<sup>th</sup> percentile)</i>	<b>+0.32</b>
<b>Burnout</b> <i>(scores from 0-100)</i>	43.59	37.88	<b>-5.71*</b>	65.63	62.20	<b>-3.43</b>	51.79	49.77	<b>-2.02</b>	60.94	65.97	<b>+5.03</b>

Statistically significant changes are indicated using \*

### Outcomes

Although at time two, **job stress** remained moderately high for all organisations, three of the 4 organisations experienced reduced stress, one significantly so.

While the risk levels for **mental wellbeing** remained the same across 3 of the 4 organisations (A, B and C), levels of wellbeing improved for all organisations, with organisation A significantly so. In organisations D wellbeing moved from a high risk-level to a moderate risk level.

**Burnout** scores remained at moderate risk level for all organisations. Improvements were seen across organisation A, B and C while for organisation D burnout scores increased.

## Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards were measured again at time 2, and across all psychosocial hazards (job control, manager support, peer support, role clarity, change management and relationships at work), overall risk levels remained unchanged from the survey scores at time 1 except in organisation C where Manager support changed from moderate to low risk. All hazards were reported as either low or moderate risk except for job control in organisation B which was reported as high risk.

For organisations A and C, all hazards saw improvements. In organisation B, all but one (relationships at work) saw improvements. Organisation D saw more of a mixed picture with improvements for change management, relationships at work and peer support but slight worsening for job control, manager support and role clarity. For an overview of the scores on psychosocial hazards, please refer to the table in appendix 6.

## Work demands:

Demands	Org A			Org B			Org C			Org D		
	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change	T1	T2	Change
<b>Work demands</b> <i>(scores from 1-5)</i>	2.14	1.97	<b>-0.17*</b>	2.82	2.73	<b>-0.09</b>	2.64	2.88	<b>+0.24</b>	2.93	2.81	<b>-0.12</b>
<b>Cognitive demands</b> <i>(scores from 0-100)</i>	65.55	64.89	<b>-0.66</b>	86.60	85.67	<b>-0.93</b>	68.61	72.32	<b>+3.71</b>	78.62	79.17	<b>+0.55</b>
<b>Emotional demands</b> <i>(scores from 1-7)</i>	3.00	2.72	<b>-0.28*</b>	4.21	4.17	<b>-0.04</b>	3.56	3.45	<b>-0.11</b>	4.59	4.70	<b>+0.11</b>

*Statistically significant changes are indicated using*

Across cognitive demands, emotional demands and work demands the risk levels stayed the same for all organisations. In organisation A and B employees experienced lower demands, with a significant improvement on work demands and emotional demands in organisation A. In organisation C employees experienced more work demands and cognitive demands at time 2. In organisation D employees reported more cognitive demands and emotional demands at time two but a slight improvement in work demands.

### **Work demands**

In three organisations (A, B and D) employees experienced fewer work demands and reported fewer unachievable deadlines and less pressure to neglect certain tasks or pressure to work longer hours. In organisation C employees experienced a higher pressure of work demands, though risk levels remained moderate across all areas measured.

Employees in organisation B, C and D experienced slightly higher time pressures, while employees in organisation A experienced slightly lower time pressure.

Having to work very fast remains a focus area across all organisations, and at moderate risk levels with organisation B changing to a high risk-level.

### **Cognitive demands**

Cognitive demands remain a moderate to high risk and focus area across all organisations. Some change was measured between time 1 and 2 though none significant, and overall, Employees feel they need to keep their eyes on a lot of things while they work and need to remember a lot of things.

### **Emotional demands**

While risk levels remained the same for all organisations at time 2 (low for organisation A and moderate for organisations B, C and D), slight improvements were seen in organisations A, B and C with the improvement seen in organisation A being statistically significant. Organisation D saw a slight worsening; however, this was not statistically significant.

Employees across all organisations felt less emotionally triggered by their work, while employees in organisations B and D felt work was more emotionally demanding and they had to deal with other people's problems more. In organisation B the risk level went from moderate to high in relation to work being emotionally demanding.

## Process evaluation

As well as evaluating the intervention and possible impact on psychosocial hazards and wellbeing, the committees also evaluated the process of the participatory action research. The RE-AIM framework (Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance of the intervention), often used for the evaluation of public health interventions and helps translate research into practice, was used to evaluate the findings.

Below is a summary table of the key themes discussed in the PAR4 committee meetings across the four organisations for each of the implementation phases.

### Process evaluation of work demands intervention

RE-AIM	Reach	Effectiveness	Adoption	Implementation	Maintenance
Org A	Great to reach such a large part of employees, now focus on further roll out to groups not yet reached or included in the pilot	High effort, high impact with face-to-face sessions, need to know existing initiatives to be able to feed into these	Team leaders were instrumental to implementation and adoption	Easy to identify issues, harder to translate into action, more time needed to roll out consistently	Champions at each location needed to support maintenance, as well as inclusion in training and leadership development
Org B	Good reach across two sites and great project to experience level of best practice sharing	Participants indicated after sessions they would use the information daily. Team leaders' input needed to continue session effectiveness	Sessions widely adopted, work with specialists to prepare topic list for future relevance and adoption	Dedicated support from education team was crucial to the planning and implementation success and will be to continue	Identify an owner, plan ahead and communicate regularly
Org C	Reach was limited by the use of an e-newsletter for distribution which received less engagement. Greater variety of tools needed.	Survey comments suggest the tools have had an effect for some, including reduced email traffic and greater use of other tools.	Survey results suggest low awareness have hampered adoption, as well as continued impact of personal preferences on behaviour.	Planned training had to be rescheduled which lessened the impact of the intervention as capability remains a barrier for some.	Adding a topic to regular meeting agendas to maintain momentum and continue to share best practice.
Org D	Communication efforts succeeded with strong awareness; future interventions should add dialogue-focused methods and engaging formats.	Intervention improved awareness but had mixed impact; share success stories and explore tailored solutions for frontline roles.	Adoption was limited due to competing demands and variation in line manager buy-in; investigate success factors and barriers for frontline roles.	Strong collaboration and leadership buy-in drove success; address consultation gaps and refine future implementations.	Positive feedback highlights sustained benefits; scale intervention, gather feedback, and empower teams with PAR resources.

## Barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands

Barriers and facilitators influence the effectiveness and adoption of any organisational intervention, it was helpful to review these with the four participating organisations during the PAR 3 and PAR 4 committee meetings. In our round table conversations, we also discussed barriers and facilitators to addressing work demands, offering valuable insights from across sectors and organisations.

Below is a summary table with barriers and facilitators clustered by organisational levels, Individual, Group, Leader and Organisation (Igloo).

**Summary table of barriers and facilitators across organisations**

IGLOo levels	Barriers	Facilitators
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of feedback</li> <li>• Different individual expectations (psychological contract)</li> <li>• Young or inexperienced staff</li> <li>• Lack of autonomy and flexibility in the role</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of organisational level interventions</li> <li>• Workload</li> <li>• Hard to change habits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Clarity and simplicity</li> <li>• Choice</li> <li>• Small manageable steps</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Autonomy</li> <li>• Passion</li> </ul>
<b>Group/Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritisation</li> <li>• Timescale</li> <li>• Control</li> <li>• Shift patterns</li> <li>• Resource constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular weekly communications</li> <li>• Supportive team</li> <li>• Training and awareness</li> <li>• Consultation</li> <li>• Shared success stories</li> <li>• Network</li> </ul>
<b>Leader/Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of the importance of management style</li> <li>• Lack of buy in</li> <li>• Lack of support</li> <li>• Workload</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key stakeholders buy in and active support</li> <li>• Line manager support and buy in</li> <li>• Openness to challenge</li> <li>• Senior Leader buy-in</li> <li>• Clear daily/weekly/monthly expectations</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of integration between systems</li> <li>• Not the priority in busy and ever-changing climate</li> <li>• Lots of initiatives going on at the same time (never a good time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared mental model and vision</li> <li>• Collective understanding Champion role (e.g. wellbeing champion)</li> </ul>

## Individual level barriers and facilitators

- There was a consensus across organisations that the onus to address work demands should not be on the individual. That said, barriers and facilitators to support at an individual level were identified to consider when designing interventions.
- Regular and quality two-way feedback and evidence was seen as an important facilitator to successful interventions. Finding out about the employee experience as well as regular communications to keep employees in the loop and on board with change was seen as crucial.
- The experience of work demands was impacted by individual factors such as level of experience, length of service and age as these closely link to perceptions of autonomy and flexibility in dealing with work demands.
- Individual workload was seen as an overall barrier to the implementation, participation and therefore success of any intervention. Steps to mitigate could include clarity around the intervention and its purpose, and breaking tasks and interventions down into small manageable steps.

## Group level barriers and facilitators

- Regular communication was seen as the key factor to successful implementation of work demands initiatives at the group level, including the sharing of success stories and best practice. Consensus around timescale, resources and priorities were important factors discussed.
- Committee members talked about the importance of consultation and awareness, followed by upskilling employees and champions through training and development.
- It is important to note that resource constraints and shift patterns impact at a group level, but that employees may not have any control over these factors.

## Leader level barriers and facilitators

- Leader buy-in and support were seen as crucial to the success of any intervention to address work demands, with leaders described as the key stakeholder, supporters and gatekeepers of the intervention.
- Leaders also act as role models to employees, which includes their openness to challenge and change as well as the way they deal with work demands themselves and adopt interventions to support addressing work demands (e.g. sending out of hours emails, taking breaks).
- It is important to note that leaders in organisations were seen as the group with the highest workload and it was recommended that this group be supported with clear daily, weekly and monthly expectations.

## Organisational level barriers and facilitators

- At the overall organisational level work demands are often not considered to be the priority, with an ever-changing organisational climate and a lot of initiatives ongoing at any one time.
- The success of work demands interventions depend on the business case for wellbeing of employees, and a collective understanding of the impact of ever-increasing work demands. With a better integration between systems and processes, a shared mental model and vision, a more sustainable business model is possible with a better working life for all.



## OVERALL SUMMARY AND LEARNINGS

### Strengths and limitations of this work

This research has been comprehensive in its' multi-faceted nature, including a review of academic and practitioner literature, empirical research across four organisations in four different sectors, supplemented with expert views from round table conversations.

This research contributes to generating new knowledge in the under researched field of work demands. This research adopted a unique approach by piloting a collaborative research methodology to reduce (the impact of) work demands.

As with all research in organisations we recognise there were limitations. The research took place in an environment that was constantly changing, with many factors outside of the committee's or the researchers control impacting on employees and their experience of work demands and their wellbeing.

For pragmatic reasons the PAR research took place in a relatively short time. It is recognised that research using the PAR methodology would more commonly take a longitudinal approach often spanning a number of years.

We recognise that we cannot draw causal conclusions about the impact of specific interventions on work demands and wellbeing outcomes. We can however conclude that Participatory Action Research offers a promising methodology for reducing (the impact of) work demands and feel our findings and learnings can support organisations as well as inform future research in this area.

### Conclusions and observations

Despite the recognition of the issue of work demands, and the need for interventions to focus on reducing work demands, or the impact of them, our review found little attention has been paid to how organisations can implement and achieve this. With this research, we are able to contribute to building a body of evidence, providing both a promising methodology for use in organisations to tackle this issue, along with four multi-sector case studies.

In organisations experiencing high workload, pressure and change, it was challenging to find the time to take part in this research, for the committee, for leaders and for employees. That said, despite high workload, organisational change and tight timelines, we were humbled by the real dedication and motivation towards the research, the intervention and ultimately to achieving change.

In a relatively short time, the results of the interventions were promising, seeing perceptions of psychosocial hazards improve (especially change management and peer support) and wellbeing outcomes increase across all organisations. There was some improvement in the experience of work demands and emotional demands, though the experience of cognitive demands appears harder to reduce significantly in a short space of time and would benefit from a longitudinal approach.

A further success of this research relates to what may happen as a result and the use of the methodology as a 'lightening rod for change and action' and as a tool for wider organisational

learning and skill development. Feedback from employees and committee members on being part of the work demands research and taking a participatory action research approach is encouraging. The interventions designed as part of this research were well received, and over a third of employees indicated they thought the intervention would be continued. There was a real interest from Committee members and senior stakeholders to continue to work both collaboratively and in a more evidence-based way of working to problem solve.

Through this research - incorporating a comprehensive review of academic and practitioner literature, organisational case studies, and insights from expert roundtables - we aim to provide broader benefits to other organisations and employers, encouraging further exploration of preventative wellbeing approaches.

Our final key recommendations for organisations seeking to address work demands are as follows:

- **Avoid individualising the challenge:** Focus on creating systemic change rather than expecting individuals to adapt or cope within the environment.
- **Understand your unique context:** Take the time to explore and appreciate how issues may vary across departments and locations.
- **Encourage collective problem-solving:** Leverage the power of bringing people together to reflect, share insights, and collaboratively address challenges.
- **Take a collaborative approach:** Involve and gain input from those most affected by the intervention to ensure relevance and buy-in.
- **Secure leadership support:** Engage senior leaders and managers to champion the initiative and drive cultural alignment.
- **Allocate resources:** Establish a dedicated committee or resource to maintain momentum and ensure the intervention's longevity.
- **Start small and manageable:** Recognise that meaningful change can begin with small, achievable steps.
- **Embrace continual learning:** View setbacks as learning opportunities and remain open to experimenting with new ways of working.

## APPENDICES

### 1. About Affinity Health at Work

**Affinity Health at Work** is a multi-award-winning consultancy and research organization, specializing in evidence-based wellbeing at work. Founded in 2006, our mission is to improve the working lives of all.

Affinity Health at Work is led by Professor Jo Yarker and Dr Rachel Lewis. Together, their work aims to improve work, engagement, health and wellbeing. They also hold posts at Birkbeck, University of London having launched and led a thriving professional doctorate programme to advance professional practice and research in occupational psychology and human resource practices.

#### What we do

Working internationally and across sectors, we work in four ways:



#### What makes us different

- Our clients get a better return on their investment because our solutions are supported by cutting-edge research and we know what works (and what doesn't).
- Our clients can be sure that the solutions we recommend are best practice and compliant with legislation because we are the people who professional bodies, institutions and policy makers choose to work with when they set wellbeing standards.

**For further information and examples of our work and research**, please see <http://affinityhealthatwork.com>.

## 2. About the Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium

The Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium is a network of researchers, policy makers and employers who come together to improve the health and wellbeing of employees; and support organisations in their efforts to do so. Through the Consortium we aim to:

- Strengthen the evidence base for work, health and wellbeing;
- Share evidence, knowledge and best practice; and
- Bring together multi-disciplinary perspectives to prevent ill-health and promote and support health and wellbeing at work.

Now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year, through the Research Consortium, we have conducted ground-breaking and multi award-winning research relating to workplace health, wellbeing and engagement. Every year members set the research agenda for the coming year. Accomplishments of the Research Consortium include:

- Development of management competencies for preventing and reducing work stress ([CIPD](#) resource).
- Research on organisational wellbeing approaches during the pandemic. Read our report shared by [IOSH](#).
- Creation of the [Working Well Maturity Framework](#)
- Insights into supporting employees with non-pay offers through the cost-of-living crisis. Read our research report [here](#).

## 3. Search terms for Academic Rapid Evidence Review

### Search terms:

Work Demands	Interventions
Demands	Intervention*
Workload	Program*
Working hours	Train*
Job demands	Develop*
Work schedule	Manage*
Time demand	
Conflicting demands	
Work life conflict	
Employment related demands	
Work load	

### Search strings

- Demands OR Workload OR “Working hours” OR “Job demands” OR “Work schedule” OR “Time demand” OR “Conflicting demands” OR “Work life conflict” OR “Employment related demands” OR “Work load”
- Intervention\* OR Program\* OR Train\* OR Develop\* OR Manage\*
- S1 AND S2
- Any further restrictions if we get too much

## 4. Inclusion/exclusion criteria for Academic Rapid Evidence Review

### Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Participant population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees in any location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student populations</li> <li>People not in work</li> </ul>
Phenomenon of Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How (describe the intervention)</li> <li>What (Work demands – and all related search terms)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job demands as a sapping energy model</li> </ul>
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminate/mitigate/reduce demands</li> </ul>	
Study design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intervention study</li> <li>in English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articles reporting expert opinions, practice or procedure guidelines, case reports, case series</li> <li>Conference abstracts</li> <li>Books chapters</li> </ul>

## 5. Results interpretation framework

**Job stress** was measured using a single-item 6-point scale.

Question response	Not at all stressful	Mildly stressful	Moderately stressful	Very stressful	Extremely stressful	Prefer not to say
Numerical value	1	2	3	4	5	0

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the mean scores have been banded and converted to enable an interpretative framework. Mean score was calculated ignoring the prefer not to say option. For the 6-point scale scored out of 5:

Range	Low risk	Moderate risk	High risk
Mean score for job stress item	1.00 – 2.33	2.34-3.66	3.67-5.00

**Burnout** was measured using a 5-point scale but scored out of 100:

Question response	All of the time	A large part of the time	Part of the time	A small part of the time	Not at all
Numerical value	100	75	50	25	0

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the mean scores have been banded and converted to enable an interpretative framework. For the 5-point scale scored out of 100:

Range	Low levels	Moderate levels	High levels
Mean score for burnout items. A low score is good.	0-33.33	33.34-66.66	66.67-100

**Mental Wellbeing** was measured using a 5-point scale.

Question response	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
Numerical value	1	2	3	4	5

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the scores for each item have been added together to a maximum score of 35, converted using the appropriate conversion and then banded based on percentile norm data. For the Mental wellbeing scale:

Question response	Lowest 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	26 <sup>th</sup> -50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	51 <sup>st</sup> -75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	76 <sup>th</sup> -100 <sup>th</sup> percentile
Numerical value	7-21.540	21.541-23.210	23.211-26.020	26.021-35.00

**Emotional demands** were measured using a 7-point scale:

Question response	Never	Rarely	Once in a while	Some of the time	Fairly often	Often	Always
Numerical value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the mean scores have been banded and converted to enable an interpretative framework. For the 7-point scale:

Range	Low risk	Moderate risk	High risk
Mean score for negatively worded questions such as “I have to deal with other people's personal problems as part of my work”. A low score is good.	1.00 – 3.00	3.01 – 4.99	5.00 – 7.00

**Cognitive demands** were measured using a 5-point scale but scored out of 100:

Question response	Never/hardly ever	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Numerical value	0	25	50	75	100

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the mean scores have been banded and converted to enable an interpretative framework. For the 5-point scale scored out of 100:

Range	Low risk	Moderate risk	High risk
Mean score for negatively worded questions such as “Do you have to keep your eyes on lots of things while you work?”. A low score is good.	0-33.33	33.34-66.66	66.67-100

Work demands, Job control, Manager support, Peer support, Relationships at work, Role clarity and Change management were measured using a 5-point scale.

Question response	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Numerical value	1	2	3	4	5

Based on both data and convention and for ease of interpretation, the mean scores have been banded and converted to enable an interpretative framework. For a 5-point scale:

Range	Low risk	Moderate risk	High risk
Mean score for negatively worded questions such as “I have unachievable deadlines”. A low score is good. (applies to work demands and relationships at work)	1.00 – 2.33	2.34-3.66	3.67-5.00
Mean score for positively worded questions such as “I know what is expected of me at work”. A high score is good. (applies to job control, manager support, peer support, role clarity and change management)	3.67-5.00	2.34-3.66	1.00 – 2.33

## 6. Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards (all hazards in this table are scored between 1-5):

Psychosocial hazard	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
Job control T1 (scores from 1-5)	3.28	2.20	3.28	3.85
Job control T2 (scores from 1-5)	3.44	2.26	3.29	3.83
Change	<b>+0.16*</b>	<b>+0.06</b>	<b>+0.01</b>	<b>-0.02</b>
Manager support T1 (scores from 1-5)	4.35	3.70	3.66	4.26
Manager support T2 (scores from 1-5)	4.49	4.03	3.83	4.22
Change	<b>+0.14*</b>	<b>+0.33*</b>	<b>+0.17</b>	<b>-0.04</b>
Peer support T1 (scores from 1-5)	4.39	3.95	3.86	4.06
Peer support T2 (scores from 1-5)	4.49	4.27	3.87	4.22
Change	<b>+0.10*</b>	<b>+0.32*</b>	<b>+0.01</b>	<b>+0.16</b>
Relationships at work T1 (scores from 1-5)	1.25	1.49	1.26	1.63
Relationships at work T2 (scores from 1-5)	1.14	1.49	1.15	1.33
Change	<b>-0.11*</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	<b>-0.30</b>
Role clarity T1 (scores from 1-5)	4.53	4.31	4.04	3.94
Role clarity T2 (scores from 1-5)	4.66	4.54	4.10	3.93
Change	<b>+0.13*</b>	<b>+0.24</b>	<b>+0.06</b>	<b>-0.01</b>
Change management T1 (scores from 1-5)	3.82	2.96	2.70	3.07
Change management T2 (scores from 1-5)	4.02	3.16	2.81	3.25
Change	<b>+0.20*</b>	<b>+0.21</b>	<b>+0.11</b>	<b>+0.18</b>



## 7. Demands item by item

Work demands item by item (all items in this table are scores between 1-5):

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
I have unachievable deadlines T1	2.21	2.59	2.38	2.76
I have unachievable deadlines T2	2.13	2.40	2.39	2.72
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.08</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>+0.01</b>	<b>-0.04</b>
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do T1	2.57	2.63	2.69	3.32
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do T2	2.47	2.28	2.86	3.11
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>-0.35</b>	<b>+0.17</b>	<b>-0.21</b>
I am pressured to work long hours T1	1.47	2.21	2.47	2.13
I am pressured to work long hours T2	1.26	2.00	2.68	1.56
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>+0.21</b>	<b>-0.58</b>
I have unrealistic time pressures T1	1.89	2.68	2.47	2.66
I have unrealistic time pressures T2	1.67	2.83	2.50	2.67
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.22</b>	<b>+0.14</b>	<b>+0.03</b>	<b>+0.01</b>
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine T1	1.94	2.42	2.40	2.95
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine T2	1.78	2.15	2.64	2.89
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>+0.24</b>	<b>-0.06</b>
I have to work very intensively T1	2.67	3.55	3.29	3.47
I have to work very intensively T2	2.46	3.53	3.64	3.50
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>+0.35</b>	<b>+0.03</b>
I am unable to take sufficient breaks T1	1.80	2.84	2.53	3.05
I am unable to take sufficient breaks T2	1.56	2.80	3.00	2.78
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.24</b>	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>+0.47</b>	<b>-0.27</b>
I have to work very fast T1	2.60	3.61	2.91	3.13
I have to work very fast T2	2.40	3.90	3.32	3.22
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.20</b>	<b>+0.29</b>	<b>+0.41</b>	<b>+0.09</b>

**Cognitive demands item by item (all items in this table are scores between 0-100):**

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
Do you have to keep your eyes on lots of things while you work? T1	60.52	82.08	67.78	73.03
Do you have to keep your eyes on lots of things while you work? T2	59.81	78.66	69.64	75.00
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.71</b>	<b>-3.42</b>	<b>+1.86</b>	<b>+1.97</b>
Does your work require that you remember a lot of things? T1	70.59	91.11	69.44	84.21
Does your work require that you remember a lot of things? T2	69.99	92.68	75.00	83.33
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.60</b>	<b>+1.57</b>	<b>+5.56</b>	<b>-0.88</b>

**Emotional demands by item (all items in this table are scores between 1-7):**

Item	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D
I have to deal with other people's personal problems as part of my work T1	2.96	4.40	3.77	4.76
I have to deal with other people's personal problems as part of my work T2	2.71	4.49	3.61	5.44
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.25</b>	<b>+0.09</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>+0.68</b>
I get emotionally involved or triggered by my work T1	2.86	3.42	3.43	3.89
I get emotionally involved or triggered by my work T2	2.57	3.02	3.11	3.39
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>-0.40</b>	<b>-0.32</b>	<b>-0.50</b>
My work is emotionally demanding T1	3.18	4.81	3.48	5.11
My work is emotionally demanding T2	2.86	5.00	3.64	5.28
<b>Change</b>	<b>-0.32</b>	<b>+0.19</b>	<b>+0.16</b>	<b>+0.17</b>

## 8. Survey items and provenance

Domain	Item	Provenance
Work Demands	I have unachievable deadlines	HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool (full version)
	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	
	I am pressured to work long hours	
	I have unrealistic time pressures	
	Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine	
	I have to work very intensively	
	I am unable to take sufficient breaks	
	I have to work very fast	
Cognitive demands	Do you have to keep your eyes on lots of things while you work?	COPSOQ III
	Does your work require that you remember a lot of things?	
Emotional demands	I have to deal with other people's personal problems as part of my work	COPSOQ III
	I get emotionally involved or triggered by my work	
	My work is emotionally demanding	People at Work
Job control	I have a say in my own work speed	HSE Brief Management Standards Indicator Tool
	I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	
	I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	
	I have some say over the way I work	
Manager support	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	HSE Brief Management Standards Indicator Tool
	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	
	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	
	I am supported through emotionally demanding work	
	My line manager encourages me at work	
Peer support	If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	HSE Brief Management Standards Indicator Tool
	I get help and support I need from colleagues	
	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	
	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	
Relationships at work	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour	HSE Brief Management Standards Indicator Tool
	I am subject to bullying at work	
Role clarity	I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	HSE Brief Management Standards Indicator Tool
	I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department	
	I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organization	
Change management	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	HSE Brief Management

	Staff are always consulted about change at work	Standards Indicator Tool
	When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice	
Stress	In general, how do you find your job?	Job stress, PHE scale
Mental wellbeing (in the last 2 weeks)	I've been feeling optimistic about the future	Shortened version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)
	I've been feeling useful	
	I've been feeling relaxed	
	I've been dealing with problems well	
	I've been thinking clearly	
	I've been feeling close to other people	
	I've been able to make up my own mind about things	
Burnout (in the last 4 weeks)	How often have you felt worn out?	COPSOQ III
	How often have you been physically exhausted?	
	How often have you been emotionally exhausted?	
	How often have you felt tired?	

## REFERENCES

- Aghlamazyan, A. (2021). *9 Smart Strategies for Personal Workload Management*. Teamly.com. Retrieved December 16, 2024 from <https://www.teamly.com/blog/personal-workload-management-strategies/>
- Ângelo, R-P., & Chambel, M-J. (2013). An intervention with firefighters to promote psychological occupational health according to the Job Demands-Resources model. *International Journal of Social Psychology*, 28(2), 197-210. <https://doi.org/10.1174/021347413806196753>
- Bond, F. W., & Bunce, D. (2001). Job control mediates change in a work reorganization intervention for stress reduction. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 6(4), 290–302. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.6.4.290>
- Bregman, P. (2014). A practical plan when you feel overwhelmed. *HBR guide to managing stress at work* (pp. 27-50). Harvard Business Review Press. As cited and linked in section 7 of Sutton 2021.
- Caba. (2024). *Struggling to manage your workload? Here's what you can do*. Caba.org.uk. Retrieved December 16, 2024 from <https://www.caba.org.uk/your-health/your-mental-health/coping-with-stress/struggling-to-manage-your-workload.html>
- Ceta, N. (2024, May 12). *Workload Management: Complete Guide w/ Effective Strategies*. Workfowautomation.net. <https://workflowautomation.net/blog/workload-management>
- Churchill, F. (2021, August 10). *Half of professionals working longer hours at home, poll finds*. PeopleManagement.co.uk. Retrieved December 18, 2024 from <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1745150/half-professionals-working-longer-hours-at-home-poll-finds#:~:text=The%20survey%20of%208%2C301%20professionals%20and%20employers%20conducted,longer%20hours%20when%20working%20remotely%20than%20before%20Covid>
- CIPD (2022). *Health and Wellbeing at work report 2022*. CIPD.org. [https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/comms/news/health-wellbeing-work-report-2022\\_tcm18-108440.pdf?hsmi=65472194&hsenc=p2ANqtz--jdXDftx1cOLTm1QQIs8iXxo6HChVAAtKGoWJv3CUgm4zH5iC611sIOd-VNThtUBvGJwxcNSINcWp5Z-Ghoq7Qn-QC-ye-CjDQQUmLFsF6Ws5QLEY](https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/comms/news/health-wellbeing-work-report-2022_tcm18-108440.pdf?hsmi=65472194&hsenc=p2ANqtz--jdXDftx1cOLTm1QQIs8iXxo6HChVAAtKGoWJv3CUgm4zH5iC611sIOd-VNThtUBvGJwxcNSINcWp5Z-Ghoq7Qn-QC-ye-CjDQQUmLFsF6Ws5QLEY)
- Deloitte, (2022, March 30). *Mental health and employers*. Deloitte.com. <https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/services/consulting/analysis/mental-health-and-employers-the-case-for-investment.html>
- Fleming, W. J. (2023). Employee well-being outcomes from individual-level mental health interventions: Cross-sectional evidence from the United Kingdom. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12418>
- Garcia, R., Herrity, J., Eads, A., & Kellogg Murray, J. (2024, July 30). *A guide to managing a heavy workload (With advice and tips)*. Indeed.com. <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/managing-workload#:~:text=How%20to%20manage%20a%20heavy%20workload%20effectively%201,8%208.%20Set%20SMART%20goals%20...%20More%20items>

- George, M. (2010, February 26). *Using Triage to Manage Process Workloads in Services*. Isixsigma.com. <https://www.isixsigma.com/business-process-management-bpm/using-triage-manage-process-workloads-services/>
- ILO (2020). *Managing work-related psychosocial risks during the COVID-19 pandemic*. ILO.org. [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_protect/@protrav/@safework/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_748638.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@safework/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_748638.pdf)
- ILO, WHO (2022). *Mental health at work: Policy brief*. ILO.org. [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_protect/%40protrav/%40safework/documents/publication/wcms\\_856976.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40protrav/%40safework/documents/publication/wcms_856976.pdf)
- Jain, A., Torres, L., Teoh, K., & Leka, S. (2022). The impact of national legislation on psychosocial risks on organisational action plans, psychosocial working conditions, and employee work-related stress in Europe, *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 302 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114987>
- Kim, S., Park, Y.A., & Niu, Q. (2016). Micro-break activities at work to recover from daily work demands. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 38(1), 28-44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2109>
- Laker, B., Pereira, V., Budhwar, P., & Malik, A. (2022, January 18). *The Surprising Impact of Meeting-Free Days*. MIT Sloan Management Review. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-surprising-impact-of-meeting-free-days/>
- Macaulay, A., (2017). Participatory research: What is the history? Has the purpose changed? *Family Practice*, 34(1), 256–258. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fampra/cmw117>
- McVicar, A., Munn-Giddings, C., Seebohm, P. (2013). Workplace Stress Interventions Using Participatory Action Research Designs. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 6(1), 18-37. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538351311312303>
- Mellner, C., Osika, W., & Niemi, M. (2022). Mindfulness practice improves managers' job demands-resources, psychological detachment, work-nonwork boundary control, and work-life balance- a randomized control trial. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 15(4), 493-514. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-07-2021-0146>
- Mental Health First Aid England (2023, September 4). *Ten workplace mental health statistics for 2023*. MFHAEngland.org. Retrieved December 18, 2024 from <https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/blog/ten-workplace-mental-health-statistics-for-2023/>
- Moreno-Jiménez, J.E., del Carmen Yeo-Ayala, M., Palomera, A., Blanco-Donoso, L.M., Rodríguez-Carvajal, R., Garrosa, E., & Moreno-Jiménez, B. (2020). Pilot study of a brief psychological intervention for reducing emotional exhaustion and secondary traumatic stress among physicians of intensive care units in Mexico. *Salud Mental*, 43(5), 219-226. <https://doi.org/10.17711/SM.0185-3325.2020.030>
- Nylen, E.C., Lindfors, P., Ishäll, L., Göransson, S., Aronsson, G., Kylin, C., & Sverke, M. (2016). A pilot-study of a worksite based participatory intervention program: Its acceptability and short-term effects on work climate and attitudes in human service employees. *IOS Press*, 56(4), 625-636. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-172522>
- Nylen, E.C., Lindfors, P., Le Blanc, P., Aronsson, G., & Sverke, M. (2017). Can a managerial intervention focusing on job demands, job resources, and personal resources improve the work situation of employees? *Nordic Psychology*, 70(3), 179-197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2017.1381037>

Schulte, P.A., Streit, J.M.K., Sheriff, F., Delclos, G., Felknor, S.A., Tamers, S.L., Fendinger, S., Grosch, J., & Sala, R. (2020). Potential scenarios and hazards in the work of the future: a systematic review of the peer-reviewed and gray literatures. *Annals of Work Exposures and Health*, 64(8), 789-816. <https://doi.org/10.1093/annweh/wxaa051>

Page, M. (2024). *How to manage workload in eight key steps*. Michael Page. Retrieved December 12, 2024 from <https://www.michaelpage.co.uk/advice/career-advice/being-happy-work/how-manage-workload-eight-key-steps>

Rantanen J, Lyyra P, Feldt T, Villi M and Parviainen T (2021) Intensified Job Demands and Cognitive Stress Symptoms: The Moderator Role of Individual Characteristics. *Front. Psychol.* 12:607172.

Scheepers, RA., Smeulders, I.M., & van den Broek, T. (2020). The impact of an additional nurse assistant during evening shifts on nurses' perceptions of job demands, job resources and well-being. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 77, 1013-1016. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14698>

Sutton, J. (2021, September 7). *16 Causes of Workplace Stress & How to Prevent Its Effects*. PositivePsychology.com <https://positivepsychology.com/workplace-stress/#manage>

Thrive at Work (2019). *Ensure Tolerable Job Demands*. Thriveatwork.org.au. Retrieved December 12, 2024 from <https://www.thriveatwork.org.au/framework/prevent/ensure-tolerable-demands/>

van Wingerden, J., Bakker, A.B., & Derks, D., (2017) The longitudinal impact of a job crafting intervention, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(1), 107-119, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2016.1224233>

van Woerkom, M., Bakker, A.B., & Nishii, L.H. (2016). Accumulative job demands and support for strength use: Fine-tuning the Job Demands-Resources model using Conservation of Resources theory. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(1), 141-150. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000033>

Workplace Health & Safety QLD, Department of Justice and Attorney General. (2018, September 19). *Work demands and work-related stress: Tip Sheet 5*. SafeWork NSW Government. <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/mental-health/mental-health-strategy-research/stress-tip-sheets/work-demands-and-work-related-stress-tip-sheet-5>

Young, J. (2024) *CIPD Good Work Index 2024: Summary report*. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Retrieved December 12, 2024 from <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2024-pdfs/8625-good-work-index-2024-summary-report-web.pdf>

End of report