



How and why should you tackle the growing issues of stress, burnout and sleep deprivation in staff?

“There is a growing risk that companies’ perceptions of their employees’ spare capacity are disconnected from the true position.”

Conrad Schmidt, Global Research Officer, CEB

About this white paper

After 4 years of austerity it is perhaps no surprise that stress has displaced chronic illness and musculo-skeletal aches and pains as the number one cause of long-term sickness in the UK. Difficult economic times mean increased anxiety and stress around workload, job security and money worries.

There has been an increase in reported mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression among employees (44% in 2012)¹. This recent rise in stress and anxiety has been mirrored by a rise in sleeplessness. IKEA’s 2011 survey of 3,000 UK adults revealed that 70% of adults do not feel as though they get enough sleep with 57% kept awake by worries about work and finances.

There have been numerous high profile examples of senior business personnel (and politicians) taking time off due to stress and fatigue. Most notably, in the UK, was the two months Lloyds Banking Chief Executive Antonio Horta-Osario took off work due to a stress-related sleep disorder in 2011.

It is not a coincidence that stress and sleep deprivation are simultaneously rising at alarming levels. They’re like inseparable friends – or should that be mortal enemies – never far from each other. When stressed we find it more difficult to get to sleep, to stay asleep and return to sleep after waking. When we’re tired we become more irritable, find it more difficult to cope and become more easily stressed.

In this paper we will examine the benefits of running a programme that tackles two of the greatest health and wellbeing challenges currently affecting organisations – sleep deprivation and stress.

¹(39% 2011) The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 2012 Absence Management Survey.



Let's start with some stats

One of the most comprehensive surveys of the UK working population is undertaken annually by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Their findings have been backed up by other recent surveys. So what are the top level facts and figures?

In the last 12 months 40% of workers have reported an increase in stress levels. The most common reasons for an increase were given as:

- Workload
- Management style
- Non-work stresses and relationships
- Relationships at work.

What was particularly interesting is that whilst workload has topped the list for a number of years now, there was a significant increase in the number of employees reporting it as a problem – 57% in 2012 up from 48% in 2011.

This looks set to get worse if results of a survey of 2,000 employers by business advisory firm CEB back in November are correct. They found that business managers are aiming to increase business by an average of 20% in the coming year, yet only 32% plan on increasing headcount.

As we have mentioned stress is now the leading cause of long term (over 4 weeks) absence in the UK. It is a 'top 5' cause of long term absence in 60% of manual workers and 66% of non-manual workers. But that does not tell the full story because stress is a 'top 5' cause of short term (up to 7 days) absence – 48% manual and 56% non-manual workers.

Two other recent studies from professional services firm Towers Watson and CEB paint a similar picture to the findings from the CIPD.

Towers Watson's survey of 32,000 staff across 1,606 organisations found that 34% of workers are frequently affected by excessive workplace pressure. With widespread job cuts 22% of employees say that what they are now asked to do is unreasonable and 58% say they have been working more than they usually would over the last 3 years.



Worryingly 47% feel that stress levels are no longer manageable. This figure is higher in the CEB survey where 55% of employees say they cannot handle the stress of their job much longer. The CEB survey also revealed that 80% of employees say their workload has increased.

According to the Towers Watson study 47% of staff do not foresee a change in the next 3 years.

So where does sleep deprivation come in to this?

So we've laid bare the statistics on the extent of stress in the UK [Note: this will be mirrored in other developed, and increasingly also developing, nations]. But where does sleep deprivation fit in?

Let me start by painting a picture.

I'm sure we can all recall a time when we've been tired and we've snapped too easily.

- Was it at your partner because they're not telepathic and 'forgot' to do something
- Was it at your child who wanted your attention at the 'wrong' time
- Perhaps your boss gave an unfair critique of the work you had been up half the night completing
- Or did one of your staff present a piece of work (above their pay grade) but less than perfect.

It is human nature. When tired we become increasingly irritable. At the heart of this is a loss of coping skills – we find it more difficult to maintain perspective. What would normally be trivial is suddenly elevated in importance. Logic and reason up and leave and in their place comes irrationality.

We also are more likely to feel threatened. A case study from policing the Montreal tuition fee riots suggested this was the case in officers who had been on duty for extended periods. The case study also suggested officers found it more difficult to control their emotions, deal with conflict, perceive what was happening around them and respond appropriately.



We are worse at work when we're tired (even taking into account increased irritability):

- We lose concentration and our attention span shortens
- Creative thinking and trouble-shooting diminish
- We have no motivation to undertake new or more complex tasks.

Studies on soldiers and gamblers have shown that we take more risks when we're tired. From traders to roofers it's easy to see why this is a concern.

A number of studies have shown that our communication skills suffer when we're tired. Part of this is the reduction in our vocabulary. As a result you might lose pitches you would previously win. You become more threatened when you can't find the words to explain your actions. You find it more difficult to express yourself subtly or sensitively.

In essence our ability to deal cordially with (all) those around us is diminished and we are unable to perform our roles to our full ability. Over time this builds and compounds stress and resentment.

Think too about the effect on work-life balance and employee engagement.

Work-life balance requires that we can make a full contribution in all aspects of our life. Without sufficient good quality sleep we will not have the personal energy to do so. This means something suffers. Whether relationships, work, personal or social life this is going to lead to increased stress. This will translate into lower levels of employee engagement as we become resentful of the causes.



What evidence is there for the link between sleep deprivation and stress?

Not now, but when you get a moment later, take a look at the CIPD's 'Stress and Mental Health at Work' factsheet. Take a look at their 'signs of stress.' Then imagine you've just opened up a different factsheet entitled 'signs of sleep deprivation.' It is almost a carbon copy. This suggests a link between sleep deprivation and stress. But I'll not rest my case just yet.

Back in 2008 The Sleep Council released the results of a survey revealing that over half of us regularly feel so tired at work we'd rather go home. One in eight feel this way 3 to 4 times a week. Around the same time a Samaritans survey showed that:

- 1 in 3 people are so wound up by their job they cannot sleep properly
- 5 million Brits are extremely stressed by their work; and
- For 500,000 of us work-related stress has made us physically sick.

In March 2010 we ran our online assessment for 209 respondents at the Vitality Show. Our assessment showed that 45% of respondents experience daytime fatigue at least a few days each week and for 27% fatigue interfered with their work at least a few times a week.

We also found that whilst average sleep duration was an acceptable 7 hours and 15 minutes a night 76% of those surveyed did not feel as though they achieve enough sleep. This points to poor sleep quality. The main reasons for not achieving enough sleep were: personal worries and stresses (62% - of the 76%), work worries (50%) and not enough time available to sleep (48%). This is similar to the IKEA survey we mentioned at the start of the paper.

According to the 2011 Aviva Health of the Workforce survey of 2,000 companies in September 2011 23% of employees said they are tired all the time (TATT) and 20% said the current economic climate is making them more stressed.

Our survey, IKEA's and Aviva's all paint a consistent picture of tiredness and stress in the workforce.



What is the cost of stress?

In truth this is difficult to gauge but the following estimates come from The Centre for Mental Health, are repeated on the website of the charity Mind and were included in the Sainsbury Centre policy Paper ‘Mental Health at Work: Developing the business case’. The figures come from 2006 and so, if accurate, are likely to significantly underestimate the current problem and costs.

At any one time it is estimated that 1 in 6 British workers will be experiencing mental distress, depression or problems relating to stress. This means that the vast majority of businesses are affected.

The total cost of mental health problems to UK employers is estimated at £26 billion per annum.

This figure breaks down as follows:

- £8.4bn (32%) relates to sickness absence. On average 7 days per employee are lost to sickness in the UK every year. 40% of this relates to mental health problems. This results in 70 million lost working days a year at a cost of £120 per lost day (which seems reasonable). The Centre for Mental Health maintains that one in seven (10 million) days are lost as a direct result of a person’s work or working conditions.
- £16.1bn (62%) relates to reduced productivity. The estimate suggests that ‘Presenteeism’ accounts for 1.5 times as much as sickness absence in lost working time but is compounded by higher rates of presenteeism in high paid jobs.
- Finally £2.4bn is lost in staff turnover. This figure relates to the costs of replacing staff who leave because of mental ill health.

The equivalent cost is £1,035 for every employee every year!



So, in conclusion, why should you combine a programme that tackles two of the greatest health and wellbeing challenges currently facing organisations – stress and sleep deprivation?

Hopefully we provided sufficient statistical and logical evidence to establish the symbiotic interdependence between sleep deprivation and stress. We're not saying that all stress is caused by sleep deprivation or that all sleep deprivation is caused by stress. That would be wrong.

What we do ascertain is programmes that help employees achieve sufficient good quality sleep will be extremely valuable in helping to prevent stress and prevent otherwise trivial causes of short term stress spiralling into longer term resentment and more ingrained stress.

What else can be done to tackle stress?

The Centre for Mental Health also recommends:

- Awareness training for line managers to improve knowledge of mental health issues and help them understand how to respond appropriately and in a timely fashion to colleagues in distress
- Prevention of mental health problems through provision of mentally healthy working conditions
- Better access to help for employees which, where possible, allows them to continue working
- Effective Rehabilitation for those who do need to take time off, including regular contact.

A programme to tackle sleep deprivation and stress will have a multi-fold benefit. To understand more about the benefits of tackling sleep deprivation and Employee Energy you may like to read our “Why you should put Employee Energy at the forefront of your health and wellbeing strategy” white paper. If you haven't already done so please feel free to [download it here](#).



About Third Pillar of Health

At Third Pillar of Health we are passionate about enhancing Employee Energy and managing fatigue across organisations. We can offer a range of interventions either directly or through trusted partners. Here are just some of the interventions we can offer:

- Online or paper-based assessment with individual and organisational reports
- Online training programmes with generic and specific modules (depending on job roles)
- Sleep disorder screening with advice for staff and occupational health personnel
- Face-to-face workshops – with an interactive element and tailored to the audience
- Train-the-trainer programmes with supporting (regularly updated) literature
- A comprehensive programme of continuing education (Emails, posters, articles, intranet etc)
- A thorough review of current policies and procedures in respect of tiredness and fatigue
- Dissemination of new / revised guidelines to managers
- Follow up surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions to ascertain progress and results
- Introduction of technological interventions to monitor fatigue and report to managers.



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We're always happy to have a chat to discuss your situation.

No obligation. No pushy sales people.



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