



Why should you put
Employee Energy at
the forefront of your staff
health and wellbeing
strategy?

By

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“Managing your energy is more important than managing your time.”

A.G. Lafely (during his time as CEO of Procter & Gamble)

About this white paper

Whilst a great many organisations now run excellent (occupational) health and wellbeing programmes for their staff; the elephant slumped in the corner of the room is Employee Energy. More simply put – your staff are too tired to do their jobs safely and productively but neither you nor they know it.

Tiredness, particularly as a result of sleep deprivation, is becoming so common that the (US) Centres for Disease Control said in August that it is becoming ‘a public health epidemic.’

It is estimated that 20% of the developed world population are suffering from sleep problems at any one time. Astonishingly recent research from Warwick University showed that 17% of the population in developing Asian and African nations are also suffering sleep problems.

You may have seen the recent press coverage about staff at P&O ferries being tired and stressed. I would strongly argue that this is a positive outcome as they can now address a problem that has lurked below the surface for many years and still does in many organisations.

The issue is that we are very poor judges of our own sleep induced performance impairment. Here are just a few reasons why you should make Employee Energy the foundation stone of your staff health and wellbeing programme.



Let's start with some stats

The International Journal of Workplace Health Management* published a multi-employer study examining 300,000 pharmacy claims, 120,000 medical claims and 15,000 employees' health-related productivity costs (in 2008). They found the top ten health conditions by cost category were:

Productivity	Medical & Pharmacy	Total Costs
1. Fatigue	1. Cancer	1. Back / neck pain
2. Depression	2. Back / neck pain	2. Depression
3. Back / neck pain	3. Coronary heart disease	3. Fatigue
4. Sleeping problems	4. Chronic pain	4. Chronic Pain
5. Chronic pain	5. High cholesterol	5. Sleeping problems
6. Arthritis	6. GERD	6. High cholesterol
7. Hypertension	7. Diabetes	7. Arthritis
8. Obesity	8. Sleeping Problems	8. Hypertension
9. High Cholesterol	9. Hypertension	9. Obesity
10. Anxiety	10. Arthritis	10. Anxiety

From a purely productivity perspective it is clear that sleep deprivation and fatigue are amongst the greatest costs to organisations. There have been numerous studies linking poor sleep to depression, stress, anxiety, obesity and hypertension. This means the likely cost is higher than perhaps suggested here.

*Vol. 1 No. 2, 2008. Study conducted by The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and the Integrated benefits Institute.



So why exactly does poor sleep negatively impact productivity?

When we are tired and drained of all personal energy we tend to find it difficult to maintain our motivation. We are even less likely to want to undertake new or more challenging tasks. In brief we are worse at what we always do and there's no chance of any creativity or innovation.

We are more susceptible to ill health. Sleep deprivation has long been linked to increased risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes and certain cancers. Alongside that we are also more susceptible to minor illnesses such as coughs and colds. So if we're actually in work we're going to be feeling run down.

Stress and fatigue are common companions. When we are stressed we suffer from poor sleep and when sleep deprived we become more easily stressed. We've all seen the sleep-deprived toddler having a paddy but we suffer too (normally with fewer histrionics – though not always). It can easily become a downward cycle leading to greater stress and more sleep deprivation.



Our work-life balance will also suffer. Employees with low personal energy will not be able to make a full contribution in all aspects of their lives. Professional and personal relationships start to suffer and they become resentful of the causes. This in turn leads to lower levels of employee engagement – more especially when work is considered the cause of the decline in their work-life balance.

Take a moment to think for yourself – What begins to suffer when you are tired?

- Is it your typing – slower, more errors, deleting whole sentences / paragraphs and re-doing it?
- Is it your vocabulary – do you find it more difficult to find the words to communicate clearly?
- Do you day-dream – you have to re-read the last few pages of a document?
- Team drinks – can't think of anything worse than going out and socialising with colleagues?
- Steer clear of brainstorming – you're not in the mood to be creative?

Tiredness affects our productivity in many ways. Our judgement, decision making and perceptions are also impaired. We lose co-ordination and our motor skills suffer. We become much less safe.

The bottom line is when we are alert and energetic we make a better contribution at work. We are more productive, less costly and safer. This translates into a healthier bottom line.

What evidence is there that poor sleep is a problem and is actually costing my business?

What does research say about tiredness and fatigue in the developed world?

General practitioner Keith Hopcroft stated that GPs now say 1 in 3 patients they see are complaining of feeling tired all the time. Professor Russell Foster of Oxford University has said Britain is turning into a "Zombie Nation." Other academics are wondering if sleeping problems will become the next global health crisis.

The US National Sleep Foundation found that those getting less than (the recommended) 7 hours of sleep a night rose from 34% to 46% of the population even in the brief period between 1999 and 2010. A recent Travelodge survey found that Brits only average 6 hours and 21 minutes of sleep a night. Below 7 hours of sleep our alertness and productivity can be affected the next day.



Women are particularly affected. A recent poll of 2,000 women by Actimel and Top Sante found that 85% of 30-something women frequently feel tired and of those 59% feel tired all the time.

The Sleep Council also found that more than half of us regularly feel so tired at work that we'd rather go home and 1 in 8 feel this way 3 to 4 times a week.

The statistics on poor sleep in the UK and across the developed world are endless. The bottom line is sleep deprivation is a serious problem and it is severely impacting Employee Energy!

What are the cost implications?

Cranfield Management School estimate that 520 hours per employee per annum are lost simply by failing to manage their energy correctly.

Dame Carole Black in her Health, Work and Wellbeing Initiative estimates that presenteeism (being at work but unproductive) costs the UK economy £15bn per annum. Other costs have emerged looking specifically at sleep deprivation.

The Swedish National Institute of Working Life estimates that lost productivity through a lack of sleep costs the world economy a staggering \$350bn (£220bn) each year. In 2011 the UK Mental Health Foundation estimated that the cost of sleep deprivation in the UK was £1.6bn a year.

Research by Harvard Medical School estimated that lost sleep costs the average US worker 11.3 days or \$2,250 (£1,415) and the US economy \$63.2bn (£40bn) in lost productivity every year.

How big is your workforce?

Now imagine you are (conservatively) losing £142,000 [based on a £125 a day labour rate] for every 100 employees every year unnecessarily.



So where are we going wrong with our current employee health and wellbeing programmes?

It's my view that any programme undertaken by an organisation for the benefit of their staff's health and wellbeing should be welcomed. That said budgets will always be finite. This is especially the case at the moment. So budgets should always be directed to the areas of greatest need.

When I speak to present and prospective customers the main areas of activity are typically around exercise, nutrition, stress, resilience and musculo-skeletal problems. Other common initiatives include working at heights, smoking cessation and "Know your numbers" initiatives.

All good. BUT, are budgets being directed to the areas of greatest need?

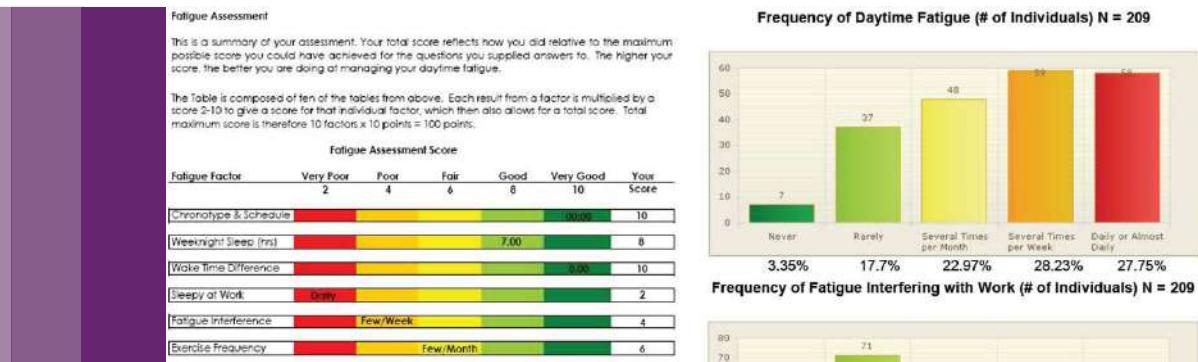
Looking back at the table on page 2, the top 5 total costs to organisations were: Back / neck pain, depression, fatigue, chronic pain and sleeping problems. Fatigue and sleeping problems can be directly tackled with a programme aimed at Employee Energy.

In 6th place was high cholesterol, 8th place hypertension and 9th place obesity. These costs would be more directly associated with unhealthy eating and low levels of exercise. It's true that you can make an indirect case for just about any ill being caused by a certain action or inaction but in this case we want to concentrate on the direct effects. This will lead to more immediate positive outcomes.

What is clear from the table is that programmes to help ease the burden of back and neck pain as well as stress and depression will pay dividends quickly – if sufficiently thorough.

As I said earlier, many organisations already tackle these issues fairly comprehensively. In my time in the corporate world I sat on a £1,500 chair and undertook a seating and desk self-evaluation annually.

So the next area to concentrate budget, based on the evidence, to achieve the best returns on investment is Employee Energy – which encompasses fatigue and sleeping problems.



So I understand the need to tackle Employee Energy – where do I start?

As with all potential business issues the key to tackling them is to first understand the extent of the problem.

To this end you should run a comprehensive assessment of the workforce that you would like to evaluate. This can be done online or through a paper-based assessment. The assessment should have a two-fold result. Firstly the individual should be able to see their results clearly and concisely and receive specific advice on key areas. Secondly the organisation needs to be able to see the composite results (clearly no individual data).

Once the results are in the next stage is to determine the extent of the problem. The composite results should tell you the extent, impact and causes of tiredness and fatigue. When addressing Employee Energy and fatigue you need to determine the impact of sleep quality, quantity and working hours.

Where do we go from there?

This will then give you the foundations on which to build the interventions. These might include:

- Online training programmes with generic and specific modules (depending on job roles)
- Face-to-face workshops – ideally with an interactive element and tailored to the audience
- 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.

The interventions you choose to follow will be dictated by the results of the initial assessment, your allocated budget and any potential cost savings you can identify. Budgets may be larger in industries where tiredness and fatigue have clearer health, safety and cost implications. However, creative roles will also benefit from an alert workforce with the energy to come up with new ideas.



Also consider the return on your previous wellbeing investments?

If you are one of the many organisations who have already run programmes looking at exercise, nutrition, smoking cessation or any number of other programmes you may not be benefitting from the full return on those investments if your staff are tired and fatigued.

I know myself, if I am tired I am more likely to pop into the supermarket to pick up a ready meal than I am to make a healthy evening meal. It's also pretty certain that I'll postpone my trip to the gym. I say postpone – I actually mean shelve / cancel.

It has also been shown that we find it harder to cope with addictions when we are tired. We simply don't have the energy to fight them. Will power dies. A hard day at work, you've given up smoking for a week – where's the harm in a quick puff. Ooops – back on 20-a-day by the end of the week. The same goes for alcohol. You'll open a bottle and next thing you know your half way through it.

Conclusion

We hope that we have given you some food for thought as you start planning your health and wellbeing programmes next year. We hope that you now see the benefits that a programme focusing on Employee Energy will deliver.

Look out for our next blog post when we take a more detailed look at the research pointing towards the issue of tiredness and fatigue in developed-world workforces.

About Third Pillar of Health Ltd

At Third Pillar of Health we are passionate about enhancing Employee Energy and managing fatigue across organisations. We can offer all of the interventions we mentioned above either directly or through trusted partners.



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Request a call back:

Feel free to email us at the above address and request that we call you back

Twitter: @3rdPillarHealth

LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Employee-Energy-4644422?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

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

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Enhancing Employee Energy and Managing Fatigue