Hazards Conference, Keele July 2013

Stress Network Excessive Workloads Workshop Report

The Network facilitated two workshop sessions on the Saturday of this year's Hazards Conference. Some 40 delegates in all participated.

The sessions focused on workload problems specifically in the last four years examining the extent to which the post-recession and austerity measures have played a significant part in increasing pressures in many work sectors. The sessions commenced with an opportunity for delegates in pairs to examine a range of 10 statements and indicate on the wall charts the extent to which their experiences showed the impact of these statements on the workforce.

The workshop then proceeded to discuss the effects of workload and itemise specific factors and then moved on in conclusion to considering strategies that could be applied in different sectors and workplaces.

This report sets out a combined picture from the two sessions.

Wall statements and responses:-

Statement	AM workshop responses	PM workshop responses
In the past 4 yrs, workers have had much less control over their workload and work-rate	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, management has tried to find ways to spread increased workload fairly	Agree ◢ Disagree	Agree ◢ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, work demand has increased where the workforce has shrunk	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree

In the past 4 yrs, there have been increased redundancies and restructuring	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, the approach to performance management and work measurement has become more aggressive	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, levels of sickness absence have increased significantly	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, levels of attendance at work have included those who are unable to function effectively (= presenteeism)	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, many people have taken leave days to avoid sickness absence monitoring procedures	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the last 4 yrs, Health & safety issues in my workplace have been given lower priority	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree
In the past 4 yrs, my own Trade Union caseload and that of other local Stewards has increased	Agree ◣ Disagree	Agree ◣ Disagree

The length of the pointer indicates the extent to which agreement was noted, and the height of the apex indicates the extent to which numbers of delegates agreed or disagreed.

Following detailed discussion and group reporting, after conclusion of the wall exercise, the following tabled key factors emerged from the two groups.

We would like to thank everyone for their active participation in the workshop sessions.

Ian Draper, Vaughan Skirrey,

WorkStress.net

Morning Group		Afternoon Group	
Direct experiences reported	*Tackling the problem - What Works?*	*Direct experiences reported*	*Tackling the problem - What Works?*
Cultures of Fear being created	Obtain regular reports from work groups and areas – prove that there is a indeed a problem	Effective management understanding of the nature of the problem means that stress levels go down!	Making the business case to reduce, spread and modify workloads
'You're lucky to have a job'	Make good business case for reduction of stress levels	Staffing cuts create many problems with fewer 'reserve' staff available to cover absentees, whilst their own workload continues or increases	Management being more visible in constructive and supportive ways; 'walkabout on the shop floor' but not spying
Concealment of sickness and absence	Could work be better managed and are workers consulted about work design?	Aggressive target driven cultures – you are always on the 'Amber light'	Better use of technologies, gathering and sharing information thus reducing burdens
Restructuring but no reinvestment of profits into workforce	For Reps/Stewards ensure access to meaningful training and education to enable effective argument of case in credible ways	Artificial competition setting the workplace on a collision course with divide and rule	Making better use of client feedback to construct supportive cases through understanding concerns raised
Performance Management outcomes used in redundancy selection processes	Remembering that H&S is still protected under legislation – it hasn't been killed off yet!	Staff required to take on new roles and work, often with minimal/nil training	Progress is only possible where there is mutual agreement that a problem exists
Managers themselves under pressures and cascade bullying downwards	Make good use of Best Practice discovered through working with other Reps and via Networking	Toxic environments – cultures of fear	Positive feedback given and received enables better progress to be made
More responsibilities but with less recognition/reward	Broad spread of awareness raising to that employees can recognise the problems, symptoms and effects and	Psychological shifts in the workplace, 'survivors' guilt' following redundancies; fewer	Relevant and effective management training in personnel issues and on stress recognition and awareness,

	understand what is happening	staff left become easier to target; impact on TU stewards and levels of representation	and in works time not their own!
Effects of lack of training, mentoring and supervision – damaging staff morale	Persuasion that palliative measures are not the only solution	Exodus of experienced staff = loss of 'the knowledge of the job'; insufficient and mediocre mentoring of new staff, often over-promoted	Proper reliable mechanisms for reporting and recording issues, and then analysis of material to ensure identification of problems
Lack of support from within the TU membership for fear of redundancy and unwillingness to speak out; succession planning almost impossible	Better management training and understanding of the problem with recognition of its existence	Isolation and destabilisation of workers – moving them about between work bases; hot-desking and lack of communal spaces and activities; reduction in break-times	Regular TU input into staff induction and effective training processes.
Maintain a strong union presence very difficult		Tyranny by technology – 24/7 availability becoming assumed via mobile phones and email channels	Approach management armed with hard facts information gathered from members/the workforce
			Regular cyclical Audit – Review – Implement – Feedback – Further Review