

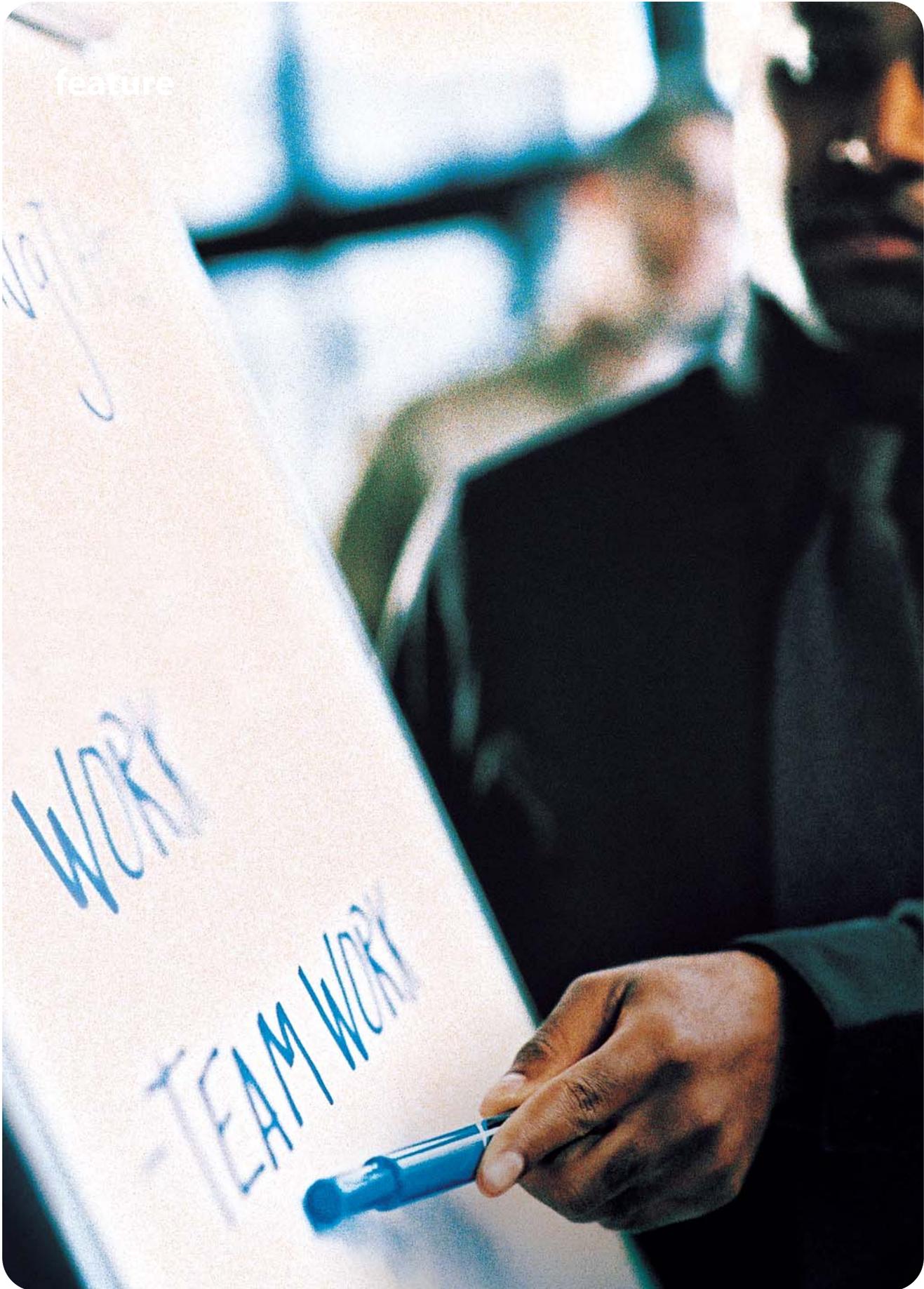
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The team approach to *tackling overwork*

By Diane Burrus, WFD Consulting

escalating work hours, job pressure and stress levels are eroding employee morale, well-being and productivity. But despite huge organizational and personal costs, the problem of overwork is difficult to raise and address because of the common belief that long work hours are the price of success and proof of commitment to the job.

Most employers know that overwork is a problem, but don't know how to address it. A recent WFD Consulting poll invited employers to rate themselves on a range of factors that drive organizational health and resilience. (See Figure 1 on page 24.) Respondents rated their organizations lowest on "addressing workload," with only one in 10 stating that their companies were doing a good job. But by addressing workload issues at the team level, work-life professionals can help companies increase employee satisfaction, motivation and work-life effectiveness, which in turn affects the bottom line.

The Team Approach

A number of companies are finding that they can indeed reduce workload and work stress while maintaining or

increasing productivity by addressing workload at the team level. Companies including IBM, Deloitte & Touche USA LLP, Texas Instruments and Marriott International have all used variations of the Team Effectiveness Process to empower work groups to find practical solutions to the problem of overwork.

The process begins with an on-line assessment taken by each team member, which helps them identify and target the practices and work processes that contribute to inefficiency, excessive workload and work-life conflicts. The team then works on action plans to address the priority issues by establishing team operating principles which promote more flexible, effective ways of working. The team manager is charged with on-line monitoring and tracking of progress and results.

Harnessing the Energy of Teams

The very process of coming together and defining what is in their power to control is a positive experience for team members. But the process must be streamlined, easy for managers to implement and should yield concrete results with a small investment of time.

IBM is using a variation of WFD’s team-based process they call the People Oriented Work Redesign (POWR) as a critical management tool to address workload and reduce low value work. A POWR Facilitation Guide is available to IBM managers worldwide on the IBM Management Development Web Site, which guides managers through a practical, easy to implement work evaluation and action planning process with their teams that has resulted in less time spent on administrative tasks and more profitable time spent with clients.

Rooting Out Low Value and Frustrating Work

In 2000, WFD cross-company research found that employees report spending on average 20 percent of their time on “low-value, inefficient and frustrating work.” And more recent studies indicate the trend is continuing. At Marriott, a culture of long work hours with 24/7 operations was taking a toll on managers. It was increasingly difficult to recruit talented people and some of their best managers were leaving. WFD Consulting and three Marriott worksites developed and implemented a team process with the goals of improving work-life balance for managers while maintaining the quality of customer service.

Over the course of six months, managers’ work hours were reduced by five hours per week and the time managers spent on “low-value work” decreased by 50 percent per week. There was no negative cost or organizational impact on hotel operations, and the ability to manage work and personal commitments improved as well. Before the pilot, 77 percent of managers felt that their jobs were so demanding that they couldn’t take

care of their personal and family responsibilities. At the end of the process, that number had dropped to 36 percent.

Maintaining a Dual Focus

The danger of any work redesign process is that it becomes all about advantage to the company. To be successful, there has to be something in it for the team members. Otherwise, change is difficult to sustain. The key to a sustainable plan is a dual focus that benefits both the company and the individual.

Texas Instruments uses a team dialogue process with work-groups to create their own work-life effectiveness charter as an integral part of workload management. Each team identifies ways to “affirm people’s right to have personal lives” while also meeting business goals. Team charters typically include such things as: respecting each other’s time, communicating expectations clearly and early in a project, building personal commitments into project planning, evaluating others based on results, supporting each other in taking vacation and other time off, and avoiding unnecessary interruptions.

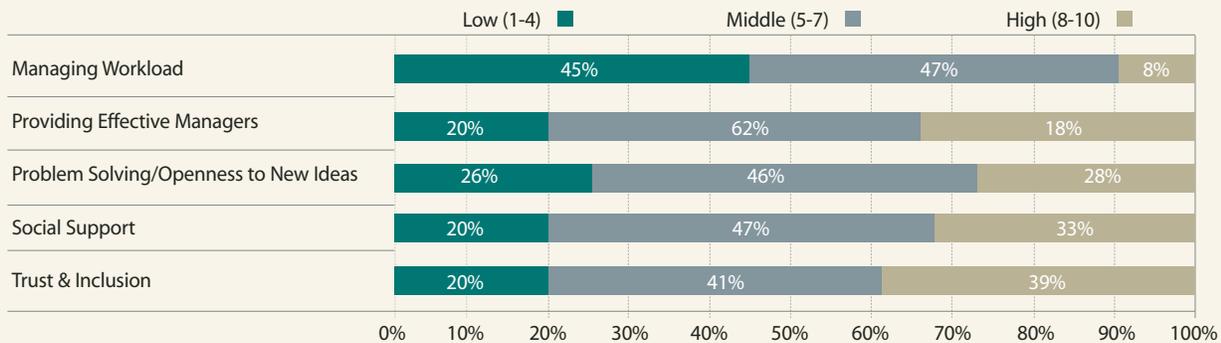
Integrating a Team Approach Into Established Business Processes

Far from undermining productivity, tackling workload produces results that are gratifying to managers, team members and customers.

Deloitte & Touche identified three client engagement teams to utilize WFD’s Team Effectiveness Process in order to promote flexible and more effective ways of managing

FIGURE 1: Are Organizations Addressing Overwork?

Few organizations say they are doing well...



Participants rated their mid-size and large, for-profit organizations on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high) on each factor. The responses from participants have been collapsed into “high” (ratings from 8 to 10), “middle” (ratings from 5 to 7), and “low” (ratings from 1 to 4) and are displayed above.

Source: Data provided by WFD Consulting

workload, client, team and personal commitments. As a result, teams established better team and client management and communication plans to clarify expectations and project timelines. In addition, the teams developed operating principles and ground rules to encourage more flexible and innovative ways of working, and integrated personal priorities into project planning.

At the end of the pilot, teams reported improvements in team effectiveness, communication, morale, satisfaction and flexibility to manage work and personal commitments. This in turn led to enhanced productivity and quality of client service and reduced turnover on engagements.

The Keys to Success

To have a widespread and lasting impact on the culture, people's lives and the way work is done, takes sustained effort and commitment. The following factors help to ensure success:

- **Senior management commitment to the process and accountability for results is critical.** Engage senior and line management in establishing desired business outcomes, addressing more systemic issues that are outside the team's control and looking at trends, actions, best practices and results.
 - **A partnership between HR/work-life leaders and line management helps ensure success.** Implementing a team-based effectiveness process within line business can be a powerful way for human resources and work-life leaders to add real value to the business and impact the lives of employees.
 - **Cross-functional communication of issues and best practices builds momentum.** Build on team successes and results by sharing the drivers of workload and inefficiency and creative solutions generated by other teams.
 - **Managers need to be guided and supported through the process.** HR/work-life leaders play an important role with line managers, by providing coaching and assistance to them at critical points in the process
- Reducing inefficiencies and low-value work and integrating flexibility and work-life effectiveness principles into day-to-day work practices at the team or workgroup level is a key to changing the culture and enhancing individual, team and business success — one team at a time. ■

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