

# WORKLOAD BRIEFING

Escalating workload, long work hours and the pressure to do more with less are taking a toll on employees and organizational effectiveness and success. To make matters worse, employees report spending almost 20% of their work time on low-value, inefficient and frustrating work. For an overworked workforce this is truly the “tipping point,” posing a threat to organizations in terms of reduced employee engagement and productivity, and unwanted turnover. Most employers know that workload is a problem but don't know how to address it. In a recent WFD poll of mid-sized and large companies, only 1 in 10 said that their companies are doing a good job of managing workload. In today's competitive and challenging business environment, organizations can't afford to ignore the workload issue. Identifying causes of low-value work and inefficiencies and developing solutions at the organizational and team level can help increase employee retention and performance which are critical for success.

WFD has worked with a number of companies which have found that by addressing workload at the team level, inefficiencies causing overwork can be reduced and productivity and engagement improved. Utilizing WFD's [Team Effectiveness Process \(TEP\)](#), workgroups are able to zero in on the key practices and processes that drive unnecessary work and inefficiency. When teams identify how to improve the way work is done within the context and realities of their particular work environment, not only do they fix inefficient work practices, but they implement creative and effective solutions that increase performance, team effectiveness, innovation, engagement and work-life effectiveness. The majority of employees who have participated in WFD's TEP report that productivity has improved. Some examples of teams using WFD's TEP process to address workload include:

## CASE STUDY ONE

An audit engagement team in a leading professional services firm utilized TEP as part of the audit planning process with an important new client. They identified critical client management issues that led to breakdowns in communication, crises around deadlines, and long hours and overwork for the team. An implementation plan was developed that included establishing a more formal communication process with the client and project timeline for the team. As a result, team members reported the following improvements:

- o 90% reported improvement in project planning, management and efficiency
- o 89% in team effectiveness and work product quality
- o 80% in ability to manage workload
- o 70% in team morale and communication
- o 60% in level of client service

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## CASE STUDY TWO

A corporate communications team in a pharmaceutical company was struggling with heavy workload, pressure and stress caused by increasing internal client demands, lack of adequate staffing, information overload (e-mail), and too many meetings. The team implemented effective solutions including a plan to handle last minute requests, team work-life effectiveness operating principles/agreements, e-mail and meeting management protocols, and clarification of priorities. As a result, the team reduced their hours spent on low-value work by 21%. In addition, their scores on measures of work-life and team effectiveness, flexibility, and ability to manage the pressures of their work increased significantly; their confidence in keeping up with the pace of work increased by 28%; and perceptions of workload improved by 89%.

## CASE STUDY THREE

Several management teams from large, full service hotels went through the TEP process and identified key drivers of non-value added work and inefficiencies which were having a negative impact on engagement and performance. They addressed issues that the teams felt they had some control over, such as unreasonable deadlines, evaluation based on face time rather than results, information overload, poor communication practices, lack of adequate planning, and too many inefficiently run meetings. Through a structured dialogue and planning process the management teams developed and implemented work innovations such as:

- Reducing the amount of e-mail through creation of a centralized e-mail portal and e-mail protocol
- Enhancing cross-functional communication and collaboration through team building and information sharing events and reconfiguration of office space
- Reducing the number of meetings convened by the leadership team and enhancing meeting effectiveness through meeting guidelines and agreements
- Implementing team operating principles and practices to avoid personal time interruptions and encourage flexible ways of working

As a result of the process and implementation of work innovations, employees reported across the board improvements:

- 81% reported improvement in team communication
- 78% in morale
- 71% in team effectiveness
- 71% in level of customer/client service
- 68% in access to flexibility
- 62% in support for work-life
- 61% in ability to manage workload

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A systemic, organizational approach to addressing workload is needed to ensure sustainable results. WFD partners with companies to create targeted [Workload Solutions](#) at the individual, team, and organizational level. To begin tackling the workload dilemma and enhance employee productivity and engagement, WFD recommends that organizations:

- Conduct an internal assessment to determine how much time is spent on low-value work and identify factors in the work environment, work practices and processes that contribute to overwork, stress, and burnout
- Put metrics in place to measure the reduction in unnecessary work, productivity, quality, employee engagement, and work-life effectiveness
- Establish strategies to reduce low-value work and inefficiencies and increase work-life effectiveness
- Provide programs for managers and employees to foster individual and organizational resilience
- Encourage managers to have team effectiveness dialogues with their teams to:
  - o Discuss what work-life effectiveness means to team members
  - o Determine the characteristics of their desired work environment
  - o Establish team work-life effectiveness operating principles and agreements
  - o Identify key causes of low-value work and inefficiencies and determine how to address them

WFD Consulting is a work-life and talent management consulting firm that partners with clients to reach action-oriented solutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. WFD maintains an extensive database of workforce and workplace measures used to benchmark clients with other comparable firms. To learn more about workplace and workload solutions, contact Youme Yai ([youme.yai@wfd.com](mailto:youme.yai@wfd.com), 617-219-8736).

