Health and Performance Essentials

Tips, Tricks, and Strategies for Managing Workload for Teams and Individuals

Contents

Introduction

Workload is cited as a major stressor by employers and employees. It can be exhausting, frustrating, and time consuming, especially when the tasks pile up and the to-do lists grow, and resources dwindle.

In many cases, a high workload can contribute to a variety of physical and psychological health challenges, such as insomnia, burnout, and depression. [1] This can severely impede employee well-being and performance, which can result in decreased workplace performance as well.[2]

How to Use This Guide

This workbook guide includes practical tips for effective workload management. We encourage you to find the ones that work best for you and use them often. There are questions included throughout the guide for brainstorming and reflection.

There are three different sections included in this resource:

   1) Managing Individual Workload
   2) Individual Organization
   3) Strategies for the Your Team or Organization

This workbook is designed for employees, and both formal and informal leaders. If you are a not a formal leader, but would like to be an ambassador of change, use it to brainstorm tactics that can support your colleagues and share them with your supervisor.

How is your current workload affecting you or your team's health and performance?

To avoid the negative effects of being overworked, it is critical to have a repertoire of strategies that can make overwhelming workloads more manageable. Here is a list of practical techniques and tools that can be useful for individuals and workplaces.

Managing Individual Workload

As a member of an organization, it may feel uncomfortable to put your own needs before your work, especially in times of intense pressure and stress. However, taking care of yourself is central to your performance and well-being as an employee.

This could include:

- Getting regular exercise.[3]
- Staying hydrated and eating nutrition foods.[4]
- Getting at least 7-9 hours of sleep every night (depending on your age bracket).[5]
- Connect with your colleagues, friends, and loved ones.[6]

Know that by taking care of yourself, you are increasing your ability to be more focused and productive while at work.

What helps you to stay healthy and well?

What strategies do you use to maintain your work-life integration?

Know Your Strengths, Recognize Areas of Improvement

Having a good understanding of your strengths and your struggles is crucial for success in the workplace.[7] By knowing your skills, abilities, and interests, this will guide you to use them to make meaningful contributions you make to your organization. Similarly, having an awareness of your shortcomings can be important for making improvements and developing new skills.

What are your strengths when managing a high workload?
What skills could you improve?

Taking Small Breaks Regularly

Having time to rest and recharge throughout the day can help to renew your mental clarity, motivation, and creativity.[8]

According to research, the most productive workers take 17-minute breaks after 52 minutes of work.[9] While this may not be feasible for every organization, it is important to understand that breaks are essential for quality work.

With this in mind, employers should encourage employees to take breaks through the day and provide some flexibility under the condition that they are fulfilling their work obligations in an efficient and effective manner.[10]

When taking a break, be intentional with how you spend your time. Research reveals that choosing activities that you find restorative and allow you to detach from your work briefly.[11] Some great options include meditation, learning something new, or getting a small dose of physical activity.[12]

List some meaningful break-time activities that you like to do.

Say "Yes" to Saying "No"

Accepting more work responsibilities and invitations can be a terrific professional opportunity, but can also result in higher stress levels, decreased productivity, and poorer quality outcomes. Be mindful, self-aware, and use your judgement when you are presented with new projects and opportunities. Declining additional responsibilities and opportunities can allow you to have more time and energy to devote to the tasks you already have and prevent the build-up of additional stress.[13]

Saying "no" to your managers and co-workers can sometimes be awkward and stressful. What strategies can you use for communicating your choices (e.g., respectfully share your current commitments and time constraints)?

Be Open with Your Co-Workers

It can be uncomfortable to share your thoughts and feelings with your co-workers, especially when you are experiencing challenges in or away from the workplace. However, being open can lead to many positive outcomes, including task clarification, encouragement, innovation, and a more psychologically safe workplace for everyone.[14]

Have a friend or mentor in the office that you can confide in. If you are struggling to complete your tasks, discuss this with a supervisor or manager to find potential solutions.

What methods could you use to promote a trusting environment in your workplace?

**What can you do to better support your co-workers if/when they seek your guidance and advice?**

Individual Organization

Make a To-Do List Ahead of Time
Creating a daily to-do list before you start your workday will allow you to take note of everything that must be accomplished that day.[15] It will also help you to weigh each task's importance and to schedule your time accordingly. It can also be helpful to make a not-to-do list so you can keep focused on what matters.

Focus on the Most Urgent/Demanding Task(s) First
When choosing which work requirements to start with, begin with the task(s) that are the most urgent and difficult to complete.[16] This will help with meeting deadlines on time and making good use of your energy at the start of your work day. A helpful tool you can use is the Eisenhower Matrix below[17]:

	Urgent	Less urgent
Important		
Less important		
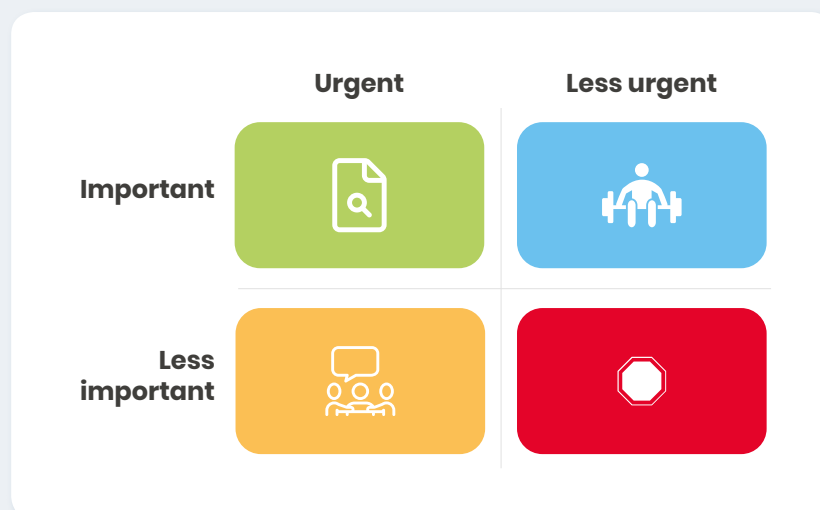
Steer Clear of Perfectionism

It can be incredibly satisfying to make your work absolutely perfect. However, this can be taxing on your efficiency, effort, and motivation.[18] Your time and energy are so valuable, especially when working through a heavy workload. Complete your tasks to the best of your ability and keep moving forward. Remember, just because something isn't perfect doesn't mean that isn't great.

How can you adopt this mindset in your workplace? How can you encourage others to do the same?

Use a Timer

Set a timer for yourself to be mindful of your time at work. The popular 'Pomodoro technique' is a favourite for many working people; set the timer for 25 minutes to focus on work, followed by a 5 minute break.[19] Repeat it throughout the day.[20]

Try "Unitasking"

Multitasking may be seen as a necessity in a fast-paced work environment, but it is often counterproductive and can result in reduced efficiency, higher stress, lower quality outcomes.[21]

By focusing on one task at a time ("unitasking"), you will be better able to concentrate and finish your task more quickly.

Minimize Distractions

Ironically, the place you work may be a hindrance for your concentration and productivity. While you may not be able to control every element of your workplace, focus on the things that are within your power.[22]

Have Limits for Your Email and Phone Usage

Email and phones can be hugely distracting in the workplace, even if they are necessary. Similar to the previous point, find ways to make your email and phone less of a distraction while you work.

What are some useful strategies that have helped you to minimize distractions and limit your email/phone usage at work (e.g., logging out of your email while you work, asking your co-workers for some uninterrupted work time)?

Reflect on Your Health and Performance

Be observant and cognizant of your health and performance, including your mindset and work behaviours.[23] This can be a helpful way to recognize your successes and develop ways to make improvements. Some sample questions you could ask yourself include:

- What have I been doing well?
- What am I struggling with? What are some possible solutions?
- How can I keep learning and improving as an employee?

Strategies for the Your Team or Organization

Have a Team Schedule
Implementing a scheduling system for your entire organization/department is a beneficial method for keeping track of every employee/team, the assignments they are to complete, and the deadlines.[24] It can also act as an accountability system to ensure projects are being finished in a timely manner. This could include anything from a whiteboard diagram to a scheduling software/app.

Note: Employees should be allowed to give their input when schedules are being created. If you are developing the schedule, take their suggestions to heart.

Establish Strong Communication Networks
The ability to exchange and receive information is essential for every organization. Here are some ways to enhance your workplace's communication:

- Integrate regular meetings, check-ins, and/or emails into the work schedule ahead of time, allowing employees to plan ahead.
- Be consistent with the mediums you use and the dates/times when the communication occurs.
- Keep the interactions and messages direct and concise.

How can you integrate consistent and concise communication into your workplace?

Introduce "No-Meeting" Fridays

While meetings are vital for successful organizations, they can be time-consuming and draining. Designating Fridays (or a different weekday of your choosing) as a day without meetings will allow for a whole day of deep, focused work.[25]

A Note to Supervisors: Be Understanding, Encouraging, and Empathetic

Supervisors play a major role in helping their co-workers navigate the demands of their everyday work lives.[26] As a supervisor, get to know your co-workers to understand their strengths, interests, and areas of improvement. When possible, assign work based on these qualities. Be sure to listen to your co-worker's questions and support them when they seek guidance or assistance.

Permit Flexible/Non-Traditional Work Routines

Having the option for flexible working hours and/or remote work can have numerous benefits, including improved employee performance and engagement.[27] Flexibility can allow employees to work when they are most productive, and remote work can be advantageous for reducing work-related distractions.[28] While these choices may not fulfill the standard 40-hour work week norm, they can lead employees to produce higher quality outcomes and support their personal well-being. In other words, focus on the quality of the work over the quantity of hours spent.

Celebrate Successes

Celebrations are an important way to recognize and reward employees for their efforts.[29] In many cases, workplace celebrations can result in higher employee morale, engagement, and a strengthened sense of belonging.[30] Such occasions should occur throughout the work year, but kept infrequent enough to maintain their sense of novelty.

What kinds of workplace celebrations have been beneficial and enjoyable for you and your workforce? What made them successful?

What occasions do you believe are worth celebrating?

Summary of Top Tips

Managing Individual Workload
- Prioritize Your Own Health Well-Being (stick to the basics like eating healthy, staying hydrated, getting 7-9 hours of sleep, getting 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week)
- Know Your Strengths, Recognize Areas of Improvement
- Take Breaks Regularly
- Say "Yes" to Saying "No"
- Be Open with Your Co-Workers

Individual Organization
- Make a To-Do List Ahead of Time
- Focus on the Most Urgent/Demanding Task(s) First
- Steer Clear of Perfectionism
- Use a Timer (be mindful of your working time, schedule time for work and breaks)
- Avoid Multitasking
- Minimize Distractions
- Have Limits for Your Email and Phone Usage
- Reflect on Your Health and Performance

Strategies for Your Team or Organization
- Have a Team Schedule
- Establish Strong Communication Networks
- Introduce "No-Meeting" Fridays (or a different day of your choosing)
- A Note to Supervisors: Be Understanding, Encouraging, and Empathetic
- Permit Flexible/Non-Traditional Work Routines
- Celebrate Successes

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