

ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

Sleep, performance and Emotional Intelligence are intimate bedfellows, says **Kenneth Nowack**



Companies nowadays are increasingly committed to helping employees stay in shape, quit smoking and eat healthily.

In the US, over 80% of companies offer some type of corporate wellness programme, compared to around 45% of all companies with more than 50 employees in the UK.¹

Among all the many wellness-related efforts companies are taking on, sleep is arguably the most important.

Lack of sleep and fatigue contribute to both performance deficits and bottom-line costs for UK companies, accounting for 200,000 working days a year lost due to absenteeism.²

An analysis³ by RAND Europe estimates that the impact of sleep deprivation on health and productivity is costing the UK up to £40bn each year, which is roughly 2% of the country's GDP.

Across an 85-year lifespan, an individual may sleep nearly 250,000 hours, or more than 10,000 full days.⁴ Yet, many of us can relate to being

chronically sleep-deprived despite our biological need to get adequate rest.

Harvard's sleep medicine expert Charles Czeisler has said that, over the past five decades, the average amount of sleep we get on work nights has decreased by an hour and a half



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– plummeting from eight and a half hours to a little less than seven hours.

Additionally, about 37% of people in the UK report they are not getting the recommended seven hours of sleep each night⁵ and an international study⁶ by the Center for Creative Leadership found 42% get six hours or less.

Our own research⁷ using a validated →

WAYS TO IMPROVE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

- ▶ Provide all employees with sleep/fatigue education and information programmes.
- ▶ Revisit/revise policies around scheduling (eg rotating shift work schedules) to minimise sleepiness and fatigue.
- ▶ Review and implement organisational strategies to reduce and manage fatigue among employees, like non-punitive programmes for employees to self-report being tired and/or decline work assignments because of fatigue.
- ▶ Review and revise travel policies to encourage flexibility in schedules to maximise sleep and alertness, like start times for meetings and red-eye flights.
- ▶ Support and provide employee stress management, mindfulness meditation training and yoga as all have been found effective in addressing insomnia.
- ▶ Review vacation and sick leave policies to minimise job burnout, work pressure and enhance detachment from work.
- ▶ Offer quiet spaces for employees to catch up on sleep during their time at the office. Even an eight-minute nap can significantly improve memory.¹⁵
- ▶ Include presenteeism, job stress and workload metrics within annual engagement surveys, and explore meaningful interventions to address current issues and concerns.
- ▶ Increase supervisory training related to workplace safety orientation, attitudes and practices.
- ▶ Offer training to leaders to increase knowledge related to human fatigue, sleep and circadian rhythms, and actions to counteract the effects of fatigue.
- ▶ Encourage employees to use company-sponsored health, wellness and employee assistance programmes to address stress, work-life integration, sleep and fatigue issues.
- ▶ Reward supervisors for fostering and reinforcing a recovery culture (such as creating policies to limit communication after hours).

health risk appraisal shows significant sleep impairment in working adults.

In a sample of 1,326 working adults, we found that 36% reported “often” or “always” receiving less sleep than required because of staying up too late or getting up too early. Almost 22% reported being tired during the day because of poor sleep quality.

Finally, slightly more than 8% reported missing an entire night or large proportion of sleep because of work or play activities in a month.

Lack of sleep diminishes performance

Studies have conclusively shown that the less sleep we get, the

worse we perform on psychomotor vigilance tasks, recall tests and our ability to concentrate.

For example, research⁸ from Ann Williamson and colleagues from the University of New South Wales, Australia, has shown that only two hours less sleep than you normally need is enough to impair your memory

and mood as if you’ve been drinking two to three alcoholic beverages.

Even small amounts of lost sleep produce measurable outcomes. For example, four consecutive nights of only five hours’ sleep per night hinders physical and cognitive performance to the same degree as blood alcohol content of 0.06%. Bear in mind that it is illegal to drive or attempt to drive while above a limit of 0.08% blood alcohol content in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 0.05% in Scotland.

Additionally, research⁹ by David Dinges, a noted sleep expert and head of the Sleep and Chronobiology Laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania, found that sleep deprivation and poor performance are intertwined.

Using a psychomotor vigilance test as a performance measure, he found that those who had a full eight hours of sleep hardly had any attention lapses and little or no cognitive declines over a 14-day study.

Lack of sleep diminishes Emotional Intelligence

Research from Matthew Walker and colleagues at the University of California using MRI technology helps explain exactly why sleep-deprived employees are often seen as moody, impatient and irritable.

In the 2007 study,¹⁰ half of the 26 participants were kept awake



The ability to manage emotions is significantly compromised directly due to sleep loss

for 35 hours straight and the other half were allowed a normal night’s sleep. All of the subjects were hooked up to an MRI and shown a number of images while the researchers monitored what happened in their brains as each image were shown.

The sleep-deprived participants showed significant activity in the amygdala – the section of the brain that puts the body on alert to protect itself and influences memory and emotions—as well as slowed activity

SLEEP RESOURCES

- ▶ The Sleep Council, sleepcouncil.org.uk
- ▶ Sleep Apps NHS, bit.ly/2OFmKFW
- ▶ British Sleep Society, sleepsociety.org.uk
- ▶ Sleep Apnoea Trust Association, sleep-apnoea-trust.org
- ▶ Sleep Clinics in the UK, bit.ly/2LCwqFS
- ▶ Sleeping Well, bit.ly/2P0vYvE
- ▶ European Sleep and Research Society, esrs.eu
- ▶ Morningness-Eveningness Questionnaire (AutoMEQ), bit.ly/37SFjy8

in the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, which influences logical reasoning and willpower. It appears that the ability to manage emotions is significantly compromised directly due to sleep loss.

In an interesting study¹¹ by Andrea Goldstein-Piekarski and colleagues, 18 healthy young adults viewed 70 facial expressions that ranged from friendly to threatening, once after a full night of sleep and once after 24 hours of being awake.

Researchers scanned participants’ brains using functional magnetic imagery and also measured their heart rate variability.

Brain scans confirmed that the sleep-deprived participants were unable to accurately distinguish between friendly and threatening faces.

The inability to recognise and react to emotional expressions of others is an important facet of emotional and social competence that appears to be highly related to the quality and quantity of sleep we get each night.

Lack of sleep reduces leaders’ interpersonal effectiveness

Several studies suggest that lack of sleep can bring out the worst in leaders. For example, a study by Jane Gaultney at the University of North Carolina explored weekend to weekday sleep differences in 379 business leaders.

She found that leaders who had the biggest change in weekend to weeknight sleep quantity received significantly lower evaluations on their leadership effectiveness from colleagues and peers.

Another study,¹² by Christopher

Barnes associate professor at the University of Washington and colleagues, found that daily sleep quality – but not quantity – directly influenced the leader’s self-control, and those who were sleep-deprived were rated as significantly more abusive and toxic in interpersonal interactions.

Our own published research¹³ with 109 senior leaders in diverse industries found that lack of sleep was significantly correlated with lower scores on a validated measure of Emotional Intelligence.

The sleep-deprived leaders were seen by peers and colleagues as demonstrating significantly less empathy, warmth and interpersonal effectiveness relative to leaders reporting little or no sleep loss over a three-month period.

Implications for companies

Companies today should consider some of the suggestions shown on p27 of this feature (*Ways to Improve Awareness of the Importance of Sleep*) to enhance employee wellbeing and help employees cope with today’s wired and “always on” mode which contributes to lack of sleep and serious fatigue deficits.

In fact, some research¹⁴ suggests that time spent using smartphones and tablets at night comes at the expense of sleep and diminishes work engagement the next day.

Each of these may have a tremendous return on investment in both in terms of financial and performance outcomes. **TJ**

Dr Ken Nowack is co-founder and chief research officer of Envisia Learning Ltd. Visit the website www.envisialearning.com

References

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