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UK Work Facts

1. French, German and US workers produce between a quarter and a third more in every hour they work than their British counterparts.¹
2. In 2003, 75% of the UK workforce suffered from stress - up from 53% in 2001 and 64% in 2002²
3. More than 13M days lost to stress-related illness in the UK in 2002 - double since 1990³
4. Long working hours lead to long-term ill health.⁴
5. About 75% of all business transformation efforts fail.⁵
6. Skill shortages are reaching critical levels in the UK.⁶
7. Employees are not apathetic or indifferent, as many suppose. In fact, people have very strong emotions about their work.⁷
8. Recent research reinforces the need for us to concentrate more on the flexibility of labour inside firms to promote innovation and improved performance.⁸
9. Findings from the Economic and Social Research Council Future of Work Programme: ⁹
 - 9.1 The commonly held assumptions about today's world of work need to be seriously questioned.
 - 9.2 Today's world of work is much less satisfying to employees than ten years ago.
 - 9.3 Millions of employees in public and private sector organisations feel under-utilised.
 - 9.4 It has also grown more stressful for all categories of employees without exception – from senior managers to manual workers.
 - 9.5 The most dramatic decline in job satisfaction during the 1990s occurred because of the hours people are now required to work and the amount of work that they must accomplish. This is particularly true of women without educational qualifications.
 - 9.6 A significant deterioration has taken place among workers in having any sense of a personal commitment to the company and no widespread belief in any sense of obligation to their firm. more
 - 9.7 Figures for different groups suggest we still have a long way to go before pay is directly related in a fair and transparent manner to effort and performance, however measured.
 - 9.8 Modern companies need to establish a greater degree of trust and commitment with their employees.
 - 9.9 No serious attempt has yet been made to relate the apparently self-evident need to promote skills and innovation to the actual internal modernisation of companies and the way in which jobs are being organised or restructured in existing and new workplaces.
 - 9.10 A recent CBI report indicates that sickness absence costs the UK economy £10-12 billion annually i.e. £476 per employee.
 - 9.11 Many employers have not yet recognised that the emergence of a more demanding workforce in future will mean they have to adopt a more sensitive attitude towards how their employees should be treated.
 - 9.12 If employees are going to cooperate in a positive and active manner with the management of workplace change they are going to need a greater sense of well-being, status and control over the work they perform.



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9.13 Britain's productivity problem and the country's future as a centre of innovation would be immeasurably improved if we focused much more of our attention on the nature of workplace organisational change.

9.14 Companies that base themselves on rigid command and control systems of decision making are unlikely to prosper in the new world of work with its emphasis on speed, transparency, flat not hierarchical structures and above all worker empowerment.

9.15 Unless, and until, we can convince more organisations within our economy to aim to produce higher specification goods and services and to change the way they engage with their employees, organise work and design jobs, our chances of becoming anything resembling a high skills economy are slender.

9.16 We are just at the beginning and not near the end of a more expansive and rigorous approach to the study of the way in which human beings are being managed at work in contemporary Britain.

9.17 We must develop a much more concerted and wide-ranging strategy that stimulates a transformation in management attitudes to workplace organisation.

9.18 We need to shift our national focus onto the internal dynamics of firms and work organisation. Reform of external labour markets alone will not enable Britain to solve its productivity problem. Neither will it help to make the country a high performance economy capable of holding its own in the future in our globalising world.

9.19 The biggest single aspiration among workers is to have an interesting job, followed by employment security, feelings that they have accomplished something positive at work and having a say on how their work gets done.

9.20 Skills and innovation at work cannot be taken in isolation. They must form an integral part of what would be a much wider approach to organisational change that is inclusive enough to ensure employees themselves are an active and not a passive influence in what is happening.

10. Rita Donaghy, Chairman of ACAS agrees:

"The research, in identifying how employees feel about their job and their workplace, is an essential first step towards developing policies for the future. Ignoring the reality and substituting propaganda for the fact will do nothing to improve the situation. Dissatisfaction can manifest itself in a variety of different ways - absenteeism, lower productivity, inefficiency and inflexibility, and poor communication. The only way to improve poor labour relations is for both employer and employee to identify and acknowledge the problems and to deal with them. Commitment and trust are hard to win and easily lost."

"The commitment of employees can make the difference between those companies which compete in the market place and those which cannot. Employers who can best combine the requirements of their business for flexibility with the needs of employees and potential employees will be well placed to succeed."

"There is no substitute for talking, no software, no management guru, no political philosophy can replace the joint talk and agreed implementation procedures that are crucial to building commitment and trust in organisations."

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