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# Managers should be assessed on work-life balance

Managers' performance appraisals should include their effectiveness in helping employees achieve a good work-life balance, according to new research from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The study, by Alexandra Beauregard of LSE's Department of Management, found that even if options such a flexible working hours and help with childcare are available to employees, this does little to reduce stress unless there is positive endorsement from managers.

Dr Beauregard, whose research is about to be published in the latest edition of the British Journal of Management, explains: "I found a strong link between work-home interference and stress despite controlling for the use of options such as flexible hours, home working and the provision of childcare.

This stress results in increased absenteeism and reduced productivity so it is clearly in management's interest to address this."

The cost to companies and other organisations incurred by stress and health-related absenteeism is estimated at £11 billion a year in the UK.

The study looked at 224 local government employees in the south of England. More than 60 per cent were women and the average age was 41.

Most participants had children or caregiving responsibilities for adult relatives.

Dr Beauregard's paper says: "The development of an organisational culture supportive of work-home balance is necessary for organisations to fully reap the benefits of their work-home options and alleviate work-home interference.

"In this study, interference has been shown to increase when employees perceive that their co-workers, superiors and the organisation in general expect them to put in long hours and assign priority to work over home in order to progress their careers.

"Management of such expectations is an area in which managers can and should play a key role.

Long hours and an emphasis on presenteeism are generally thought to be unrelated to productivity, and may even be detrimental to employee performance.

"Increasing awareness of unreasonable expectations among management and staff and addressing the potentially negative consequences of taking leave for personal reasons could contribute to a shift in workplace culture to acknowledge the importance of employees' family and non-work roles.

This culture change is overdue and entirely necessary should managers wish to reduce levels of work-home interference among their employees."

It goes on to recommend that managers' performance appraisals should encourage this culture change.

"Assessment of managers' work-home awareness and effectiveness in rendering assistance to affected employees could be incorporated into the performance appraisal process, as a means of strengthening management incentive to work with employees towards a solution to the problem of interference.

Increased managerial support for work-home issues may then have a 'top-down' effect on improving staff attitudes towards employees taking time off for personal or family reasons.

"Measures to ensure that absent employees' workloads are not routinely reallocated to remaining employees without some form of compensation or recognition, e.g. extra vacation days, may also help to eradicate co-worker resentment toward those struggling to balance competing work and home demands."