



SURVEY



Reece, Product Specialist at Chess CyberSecurity



How stressed is IT?

IS STRESS A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR OUR UK IT WORKFORCE? HERE'S WHAT WE LEARNED AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.

In early 2018, Chess CyberSecurity launched a UK-wide campaign - Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation - specifically for Information Technology workers.

The idea behind this campaign was to take the pulse of IT workers around the country by asking participants to AGREE or DISAGREE with a number of statements, such as:

- I have enough resources to do my job well
- I often work more than 45 hours a week
- My salary package is fair for the work I am expected to do
- I feel supported and valued at work

More than 1000 UK-based IT workers took part. We compiled all the anonymised data collected as part of our 2018 'Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation' campaign.

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“
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Why is Chess Cybersecurity focused on IT?

IT often represents the unsung heroes in a company.

A VP of IT in a global tech firm once compared the department to the likes of dandruff shampoo. It was something along the lines of, 'People never think about IT when everything runs smoothly. It's when there is a problem that people panic and remember we exist.'

This statement suggests that IT workers are seen as firefighters by the rest of the organisation. Yet there is so much more to the IT team than sorting IT problems. They are responsible for building and maintaining the organisation's information highway.

There is little doubt that the job for a typical IT worker in the UK has become much more complicated.

They have to manage all of the digital information that lands on the system. The end goal is always the same: make sure the data is stored and transferred securely to the right person(s), at the right time, accurately and quickly.

In other words, it is the IT team that provides and maintains the technology and services we use to fuel our organisations, as well as be the point that we contact if our devices or apps start acting oddly.

As the complexity of the IT role grows, what impact is this having on staff? Is stress taking its toll on our UK IT workforce?

How stressed is IT?

According to the UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE), anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems amongst UK workers. [🔗](#)

Recent PwC research backs this statement, finding that one in three UK workers are experiencing anxiety, depression and stress at work. [🔗](#)

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If so many of those responsible for our IT services, hardware, software and security are stressed out, should we not be concerned, particularly as organisations are so dependent on the proper running of their digital systems?

GAVIN WOOD – TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, CHESS

We presented the following statement to the UK-based IT workers that took part in ‘Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation’.

ON AVERAGE, IT WORKERS SEEM SIGNIFICANTLY MORE STRESSED THAN THE TYPICAL UK WORKER



SOs = IT WORKERS INDICATING THEY ARE STRESSED A LOT OF THE TIME
 NSOs = IT WORKERS INDICATING THEY ARE NOT STRESSED A LOT OF THE TIME

CHESS - Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation - January 2018, 1025 responses.

Almost half the IT workers said they feel stress a lot of the time.

If so many of those responsible for our IT services, hardware, software and security are stressed out, should we not be concerned, particularly as organisations are so dependent on the proper running of their digital systems?

Exactly what is the negative impact on the individual IT worker, let alone the rest of the team and the organisation, is impossible for us to confirm. That said, we’ve been able to filter responses to our statements based on whether they say they are stressed-out a lot of the time (SOs), or not.

As you will see, in many cases, the trends from SOs seem notably different from answers from those who do not feel stress a lot of the time (NSOs).

The idea behind this report is simple: we want to share our findings, so you can think about how IT workers are coping inside your own organisation.

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We encourage regular, open and honest feedback from all our people. **Every one of our people has a monthly 1-2-1 meeting with their leader, and all our leaders have people training to support them in supporting their people.**

Employees need to feel that they can reach out to management privately and without judgement. And management should be trained to spot the signs of overstressed workers, such as increased forgetfulness, tiredness, anger, anxiety, resentment. A strong working relationship between IT and HR can be a real help to get the employee any help they need, be that a lighter workload, a holiday, increased support or more acknowledgement

KATE WOOD, CULTURE DIRECTOR, CHESS

On the following pages, we are sharing a snapshot of our 'Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation' campaign as it pertains to feeling stressed a lot of the time.

Take a look at how the reactions change between the group who say they are stressed and those that say they are not.

From the 1406 respondents who took part in our Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation campaign, 1025 answered all the questions and indicated they were IT workers based in the UK.

NOTE: TO SHORTEN THE REPORT, WE DEFINE THE STRESSED AND NON-STRESSED OUT GROUPS LIKE THIS:

SOs = IT WORKERS INDICATING THEY ARE STRESSED A LOT OF THE TIME

NSOs = IT WORKERS INDICATING THEY ARE NOT STRESSED A LOT OF THE TIME.



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SOs WHO AGREE

NSOs WHO AGREE

I enjoy going to work.

79%

93%

CHESS OPINION:

Work is certainly a valuable asset among the IT community, with 93% of NSOs saying they enjoy going to work. Unsurprisingly, SOs are a little less enthusiastic, with 8 in 10 enjoying going to work. We speculate that longer working hours, less pay and less support may impact the joy level of working.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Are individual staff skills well aligned to their responsibilities?

Perks can be a cost-efficient way of making staff feel rewarded and appreciated, e.g. health or dental insurance, subsidised food, travel or childcare costs and a pleasant work environment can go long way without breaking the bank.

Are individuals' tasks clearly prioritised from most important to least important?

SOs WHO AGREE

NSOs WHO AGREE

I often work more than 45 hours a week.

59%

38%

CHESS OPINION:

6 out of 10 SOs reported regularly working more than 45 hours a week, while only 4 out of 10 NSOs agreed with this statement. The UK average for fulltime workers is 37.1 hours (ONS Feb 2017). Not only are there health risks to the individual, but it could also be a contributing factor to high stress levels.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Review working hours of each individual to ensure no one IT worker is overstretching regularly.

Find out why so many hours are being spent working. It could be issues inside or outside the organisation.

Have regular meetings with individuals putting in long hours with the aim of introducing task efficiencies.

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I feel supported and valued at work.

CHESS OPINION:

Almost half of SOs feel undervalued. Not feeling valued can have a huge impact on how a worker perceives him/herself. This perception can be intensified if they also feel under-resourced, underpaid or overworked.

SOs WHO
AGREE

56%

NSOs WHO
AGREE

83%

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Are there regular performance reviews to track progress for individual workers?

Are IT staff praised appropriately when a task is performed well?

Little things matter: reward schemes, internal competitions, or free pizzas to celebrate a win, can help make staff feel appreciated and valued.

My salary package is fair for the work I am expected to do.

CHESS OPINION:

Almost half of those that are stressed out (SOs) feel their remuneration is out of line with the work they are expected to do. It is also worth noting that only 64% NSOs feel they are appropriately paid for the work they do.

SOs WHO
AGREE

47%

NSOs WHO
AGREE

64%

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Pay plays a major role when people job hunt or are hunted, so balancing salary packages and benefits to be on par with the competition will help you retain your staff.

Are there regular performance reviews and do they tie to salary packages?

Do you award appropriate bonuses to star performers?

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I wish I had chosen a different career path.

CHESS OPINION:

IT workers who feel a lot of stress are twice as likely to dream about a different career path than their less-stressed colleagues, but still only a quarter think they may be in the wrong line of work.

Unlike many jobs, the speed at which technology evolves seems to keep the majority of IT workers in the UK engaged in the industry. The industry however is well known to be understaffed. Staff churn is expensive for businesses. While you may not lose IT workers to a different career, there is a wealth of opportunities out there for individuals with strong IT skills.

SOs WHO AGREE

26%

NSOs WHO AGREE

11%

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Consider encouraging staff to take a sick day or two when they show signs of being highly stressed.

Is it worthwhile investigating a retention programme to identify and reinvigorate IT workers who are floundering?

Is your team a cohesive unit or are there issues between staff members that haven't been resolved?

I have enough resources to do my job well.

CHESS OPINION:

Perhaps it is not surprising that a lot of IT workers across the board feel under-resourced. The number of complaints increased significantly for IT workers who feel a lot of stress.

Only 4 out of 10 SOs said they had enough resources, which makes resource allocation a prime target for internal review.

SOs WHO AGREE

41%

NSOs WHO AGREE

65%

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Are individuals' tasks prioritised from most important to least important clearly?

Is the IT department appropriately funded for the work they are expected to do?

Are IT staff given the training, time and flexibility to meet their responsibilities?

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SOs WHO
AGREE

NSOs WHO
AGREE

I have poor job security.

30%

14%

CHESS OPINION:

SOs are more than twice as likely to feel insecure in their jobs. Job insecurity can be a big cause of stress.

Poor job insecurity can stem from too little information being disseminated from the stakeholders. It could also be a result of a culture that does not acknowledge IT workers enough.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Could IT staff be incentivised through greater access to training programmes to improve their skills?

Do you have a mentoring programme, where experts can pass on their wisdom to the newer staff members?

Are staff kept informed about company performance and expectations?

SOs WHO
AGREE

NSOs WHO
AGREE

I have a good work/life balance.

56%

86%

CHESS OPINION:

Stress seems to have a significant detrimental impact on how workers perceive their work/life balance.

IT workers who feel a lot of stress indicate quite strongly that their work/life balance is out of whack. This may be also connected to working longer hours.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Are IT workers encouraged to take their allocated holiday time?

Do you have enough resources in the IT department to allow employees to take breaks without worrying about work?

If you have shift rotas, are they properly monitored to avoid IT workers working too many hours?

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SOs WHO
AGREE

NSOs WHO
AGREE

IT is a respected department in my organisation.

48%

71%

CHESS OPINION:

Overall, the IT department doesn't seem to get enough respect in the organisation.

Only 70% of NSOs feel respect, while only 1 in 2 of SOs say they feel the love.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Is the IT department reinforced as a key department by upper management?

Do employees see IT as a roadblock rather than a facilitator?

Are IT triumphs properly praised across the organisation?

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FOCUS: IT workers who experience a lot of stress work more hours.

The average weekly hours of work for full-time workers in the UK, as of February 2018, is 37.1 hours/week, according to the Office of National Statistics. [🔗](#)

In other words, those regularly putting in more than 45 hours at work are toiling 20% more than the national average.

Compelling findings suggest that workers should think hard about how many hours they clock up each week, as there may be some hidden costs to organisations if they push their workers too hard.

A number of academic findings published in the last 12 months raise a red flag about overworked people:

- Australian National University found that working anything over 39 hours a week is a risk to wellbeing. [🔗](#)
- Columbia University Medical Center used activity trackers and found that we are sedentary for about 12.3 hours of our waking day. “Employees who were sedentary for more than 13 hours a day were twice as likely to die prematurely as those who were inactive for 11.5 hours. The authors concluded that sitting in an office for long periods has a similar effect to smoking and ought to come with a health warning.” [🔗](#)
- University of College London links overwork and cardiovascular problems, such as an irregular heartbeat or atrial fibrillation, conditions that dramatically increase the chances of a stroke. [🔗](#)
- The Society for Occupational Medicine says the number of hours people are required to work has a pervasive influence on mental as well as physical health. “This study suggests that longer working hours are associated with poorer mental health status and increasing levels of anxiety and depression symptoms. There was a positive correlation between these symptoms and sleep disturbances”. [🔗](#)



We know that, at times, everyone needs extra support. We have duvet days, so people can book a day off at short notice if they need to. Another key benefit that we offer to all our people is six free sessions of confidential counselling. **We also run two Wellbeing Weeks a year to offer people information and ideas about ways they can practice exercise and self-care to help them switch off from work.**

KATE WOOD, CULTURE DIRECTOR, CHESSE

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FOCUS: Almost half of stressed out IT workers do not feel supported or valued at work

Not feeling supported or valued at work has serious consequences which can detrimentally impact an employee's mental health, behaviour and performance.

Toxic behaviour refers to an employee if he/she:

- Hides information
- Spreads negative views about company, its management or employees.
- Pestering star employees
- Lacks motivation
- Lacks respect for team members and/or management
- Takes more sick days



As well as all our leaders being enrolled in our Leadership Academy to help them support their people, we also have Cultural Architects and Parent Champions. **We take morale scores from all teams every Friday**, so we can identify and areas where our people may need extra support.

KATE WOOD, CULTURE DIRECTOR, CHESS

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FOCUS: Three out of five of SOs say they lack the resources to do their jobs well

Most of us like to do well in our work. And if the demands placed on an individual, such as an IT worker, do not align with the resources available, it can lead to increased levels of stress.

Resources refer to talent, time, budget, tools and people. When these five elements are balanced harmoniously against demands, the IT worker can thrive and excel, as can the entire organisation.

If, however, resources are meagre, but the demands are high, the IT worker may be left firefighting, patching problems on a case-by-case basis rather than having the ability to properly study and resolve the issue.



Listening to feedback from your people, rewarding and recognising their contribution, and giving them the training they need to maximise their potential will help, but the one piece of advice I would give is this: **get to know your people**. If you know your team and have regular daily huddles with them, you will be able to pick up signs of extra stress and support them when they need it most.

KATE WOOD, CULTURE DIRECTOR, CHESSE

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IT is a critical department for many organisations, big and small, and having stressed-out IT workers responsible for delivering fast, reliable and safe systems, which the entire company is heavily reliant upon, is worrying.

GAVIN WOOD – TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, CHESS

Conclusion:

The IT industry does indeed continue to thrive, with demand outstripping supply. The good news is that most IT workers in our campaign - regardless of their stress levels - indicated that they enjoy going to work, and are happy with their chosen career path.

Yet 45% of IT workers in the UK say they are stressed out a lot of the time.

From our findings, stress does seem to have quite a few negative correlations in terms of how a significant proportion of IT workers see themselves at work, from not feeling valued, respected or supported, to saying they work long hours or are underpaid.

BUT HERE'S THE PROBLEM

IT is a critical department for many organisations, big and small, and having stressed-out IT workers responsible for delivering fast, reliable and safe systems, which the entire company is heavily reliant upon, is worrying.

Perhaps they are just managing to meet expectations on typical days, but what happens if there is a serious problem? It could be anything, from a critical server collapsing to a website getting hacked, or a serious vulnerability getting uncovered. You will want a calm team of experts who can analyse and resolve the issue quickly and reestablish normal business operations.

How can we expect stressed-out IT workers to have a cool head when a big problem hits?

Organisations have a responsibility to look after their staff. Numerous academic research papers, as well as lighter examinations like 'Taking the Pulse of the IT Nation', cite prolonged stress as a major problem in organisations.

Managers ought to be trained in spotting the signs of stress and anxiety. And they should also be trained in how to communicate with (and listen to) employees who are stressed out.

We are all able to work more efficiently, thanks to technology and those that create and maintain these systems. *Let's think about how we can do a better job of looking after the people who look after the guts of the organisation.*

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About Us

Chess Cybersecurity is the security arm of Chess, winner of Best Company to Work For 2018.

Chess Cybersecurity is a specialist in security solutions, with over 25 years experience, 900 customers and 2.5 million licensed users throughout the UK, all protected by the endpoint security, web security, email security, data security, network security and remote access products and services that we supply.

Chess Cybersecurity provides security solutions and services for businesses of all sizes and public sector organisations. Chess Cybersecurity has also been Sophos' UK Partner of the Year for the last ten consecutive years.

Want To Find Out More?

This guide is designed to give general guidance, however EVERY network is unique and we ALWAYS recommend a consultation with a Chess Cybersecurity security specialist if you have any concerns or questions.

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