

24*7 Culture

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Abstract:

Over the past two decades, workplaces all over the world have experienced a wide variety of formal and informal changes in the organization of work. The pace of change has quickened in the recent past. New form of work organizations popularly labeled as 'high performance work systems' have emerged which include flexible job designs and work arrangement, a 24 X 7 work culture, shift operations, telecommuting, group work, greater information sharing, employee involvement in decision making and co-operative labor management relations to foster a participatory enterprise culture. This signifies a strategic approach to human Resource development and utilization, emphasizing the need to develop a highly skilled, flexible and motivated work force and a human resource system that promotes creativity and initiative among employees. By making better use of employee skills and knowledge, the new approach is intended to help organizations to become lean, cost efficient, flexible and more responsive to changing markets and technologies. In short we can say that in response to increased international pressures human resource managers have turned to high performance work process as key to maintain global competitiveness. While a large body of research has demonstrated the positive impact of high performance practices on the financial (7) performance of organizations, the impact on well being of employees is less well known.

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NEED OF 24 * 7

Changing customer demand

The fundamental question here is, "When customer demands change, do our coverage requirements change?" If the answer is yes, then your shift schedule either needs to be flexible enough to handle the needed change, or you need to change schedules as demands change. Traditional 24x7 schedules are often inflexible. There is little room to increase service or production levels, because equipment is fully utilized. There is also little room to lower production or service levels because the schedule is fully staffed with personnel working about 40 hours/week. Lowering the coverage level implies working less than an average 40-hour week - a situation that is unacceptable to most of us in a world where two full-time incomes are often needed to make ends meet. In some organizations, such as job shops and call centers, it is a simple matter to change output by changing the number of personnel assigned on each shift. If your company falls in this category, you probably do not need to change schedules; you only need to change staffing levels. In other organizations, the number of people required to operate equipment does not change with changing equipment output. For example, you may need 15 people to operate your manufacturing line when it is producing 25 cases each hour, and you may need the same 15 people to operate the line when it is producing 250 cases each hour. In these situations, the most cost effective way to meet changing production levels is to operate equipment at its most efficient production rate, and change the number of hours that the equipment is running. This also means that you need to change schedules to provide the right coverage for the equipment operating requirements.

Lowering costs

Effectively managing your shift work operation will lower costs. Matching the schedule to the actual coverage required is a good place to start. A properly designed schedule will improve your ability to utilize labor resources effectively, and lower the cost to produce or deliver your products.

When cost cutting is the goal, staffing levels are often the first item looked at. However, you shouldn't limit your focus to staffing levels alone. There are other opportunities to improve productivity and lower the labor cost per unit of production. These include:

- Shift-to-shift communication practices. Smooth shift handoffs allow operating efficiency to be maintained throughout day, improving labor and equipment utilization.
- Shift routines. Do machines need to be cleaned after every shift, or should they be cleaned only when they are dirty? End-of-shift cleaning routines often become an excuse to line up at the time clock at the end of shift.
- Maintenance scheduling and production scheduling conflicts.
- Unnecessarily starting and stopping equipment at breaks, lunches, and shift change. This can lower quality, increase equipment breakage and downtime, and results in lost time to perform the stop/start routine.

- Travel time and unauthorized break extensions result in lost time, production, and poorer service.

Other reasons for 24 *7 includes:

- Maximize equipment utilization.
- Maximize capacity.
- Lower inventory levels.
- Improve customer service.
- Distribute fixed costs over more units of production.
- Avoid capital expenditures.

24 * 7 CULTURE EFFECTS

Telecommuting-Today work force sitting in one branch of the office can commute over the phone to one another and discuss the issues related to their business and need not commute themselves for solving business issues as with the customers so there is no restriction in the work hours as a person can be caught on the phone anytime and anywhere.

Relocation of work- The times have changed when a person once working at the office sits on his desk and work out his responsibilities and duties. Today everyone has to move out of the office premises and work in the field also. Thus scenes in HR utilization have changed.

Growing use of temporary workforce-The HR managers have made out a new change by utilizing more of the temporary workforce for the work as it reduces cost to the company and also the legal obligations of the employer towards the employees.

An aging workforce-The workforce today is aware enough of their rights and are mature enough so that they cannot be exploited by the employers that easily as before.

The boomer age bulge- The growing workforce is also growing in age as in number. Experience has always counted over age and an experienced worker is always preferred for any profile as the employer has not to invest much on the training and he would always take less time to adjust with the work environment.

Labour shortages-The industry today is facing serious labour shortage problems. The work force is not that mobile so to compensate the work the available workforce has to work be it till whatever time.

Greater racial diversity-The labour in at any workplace is never homogeneous. The racial differences have always been there and the workers from all backgrounds today work as a team for the organization.

changing occupational distribution for women-Today times have changed and women are no more restricted from working in any area of work. Even night jobs in call centers are female dominated today so this itself clearly draws out the changes that have come up in recent times.

Dual career couples-Working career today is a necessity for both husband and wife in the family. Most of the times both the life partners belong to different careers and help each other to solve problems by suggesting each other and thus have a rough idea of each others job profile also.

**DARKER SIDE OF 24x7
INCIDENCE OF STRESS**

Stress is the most common health problem attributed to long work hours and the incidence of stress due to overwork is growing The United Nations has realized the magnitude of this problem as it has labeled job-related stress as "the 20th century disease. Of those undertaking stress reductions in the United States, three-quarters are doing so due to workplace stress. According to a worldwide poll 82 percent of respondents reported that work-related pressure causes them to feel stress on a regular basis and almost one-third of respondents experience stress everyday. Over the last five years, the levels of stress have increased for two-thirds of those surveyed In the United States, workplace stress has doubled since 1985. Approximately one-third of all Americans consider job related stress as their greatest source of stress. The increase of stress in the workplace can primarily be attributed to overwork and long work hours as employers are placing greater demands on employees.

ORGANIZATIONAL COSTS OF STRESS

The costs organizations incur from job-related stress are high. Managers may believe that their companies are benefiting when employees work long hours. There is a false perception that employees who are still at their desks come 7:00 PM are more productive and accomplishing greater results. The reality, however, is that once employees reach the point where they are experiencing stress due to overwork and long work hours, the implications for organizations are negative. High levels of work-related stress result in lower levels of performance and commitment from employees. Illnesses resulting from stress lead to increased rates of absenteeism. Workplace injuries can increase as stressed workers may lack the concentration and alertness necessary for safety.

In some instances, employees in high stress situations must take a leave of absence from work to physically and mentally recover. In Canada, employees are now taking more stress-leave absences from work than ever before. It is estimated that Canadian businesses lose approximately \$12 billion every year due to stress related disorders. In addition to health problems, work-related stress can encourage undesirable behavior among employees. A study conducted by the American Society of Chartered Life Underwriters & Chartered Financial Consultants on 1,300 U.S. workers found that half of the workers surveyed said job-related pressure prompted them to act unethically or illegally at their job.

DEPRESSION

Clinical depression is a mental disorder that is characterized by depressed moods, reduced self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and lower levels of energy. Depression that persists for several weeks and begins to interfere with work and social activities is labeled clinical depression.

Clinical depression may be caused by extended periods of stress. In the workplace, stress can contribute to depression when employees continually experience high demands and low levels of control over their own work and do not have the resources and support needed for coping with their difficulties. Depression is a serious health problem that is experienced by people of all ages and all professions, but most frequently occurs among working people of ages 24 to 44. Approximately 5 percent or 675,000 Canadian workers suffer from depression and one-fifth of all workers will experience depression at some point in their lives.

ORGANIZATIONAL COSTS OF DEPRESSION

Depression "robs thousands of employees of their will and capability to work and costs employers millions in sick leave, medical expenses, counseling, medications and production losses." Employees suffering from depression will have difficulty making decisions, concentrating and display low levels of dependability and enthusiasm towards work. Injuries in the workplace may increase, as depressed employees are much more accident-prone. Clinically depressed employees will also have a tendency to produce inferior work and have higher rates of absenteeism. As employees suffering from depression find it difficult to cope and to complete their own work they may disrupt others in workplace. In 1994, Canada Life and Health Insurance Association estimated that employees suffering from depression cost businesses approximately \$300 million in long-term disability claims, and that number is currently rising.

BURNOUT

Work exhaustion, or burnout, can occur when employees undergo extended periods of high demanding and high stress situations coupled with long work hours and work overload. The condition of burnout is characterized by reduced energy, difficulties dealing with others and difficulties completing the required tasks and duties of a job. Workers that experience burnout have feelings of low control, helplessness and powerlessness and also have a desire to withdraw from work.

Burnout is a growing problem in the workplace. A survey of 2,000 Canadian employees in 1999 revealed that 35 percent of these workers feel stressed and burned out at their job. In most instances the employees most susceptible to burnout are those who are highly motivated and committed to their work. These employees are loyal to their organization and feel a high level of responsibility and are willing to take on additional assignments and work extra hours.

COSTS OF BURNOUT

When employees reach a state of burnout, they will exhibit lower levels of job satisfaction and commitment with higher intentions to leave their job. Burnout often results in employees taking extended leaves of absence from work to recover from physical and mental exhaustion. Burnout may also result in employees leaving the organization to find another source of employment that is less stressful and less demanding. Thus, organizations run the risk of losing their best employees due to burnout. In Britain, more and more employees are opting to leave their jobs due to extreme stress in the workplace and relentless and intolerable demands placed upon them from employers. A recent study conducted in Britain reported that approximately 40 percent of the workforce intends to leave their job within the next year due to high rates of stress in the workplace.

CONFLICT BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

Overwork is causing a strain on families and relationships as it robs people of time, energy and attention needed to maintain healthy relationships with partners and children. Many employees recognize that long work hours are contributing to problems balancing work and family. A study conducted by Health Canada indicates that 40 percent of Canadian employees experience high levels of work and family conflict.

Working families struggle to balance work, home, and personal lives. As more women are now taking part in the paid labour force, the number of hours that a household works has dramatically increased. In the past, men worked approximately 40 hours each week, while women usually attended to household responsibilities. Now, dual income families may be working

more than 80 hours each week. In 1998, 60 percent of husband-wife families were dual-wage earner families, compared to 39 percent in 1971. The conflict between work and family has a dramatic effect on the quality of parenting, relationships with spouses, and other family and household responsibilities. (7)

CHILDREN

Children suffer when their parents work long hours. Families in which both parents are working can lack cohesion and be structurally deficient, as both parents are often absent. These parents cannot give children the time and attention they need. Children that do not receive adequate time from their parents feel unloved, abandoned and resentful towards parents that have relentless work commitments as it cuts into family time. An educational psychologist reports that many of the children she counsels complain about being lonely.

Parental time deficits result in behavioral, cognitive and emotional problems. Families in which both parents work long weekly hours are associated with children having lower grades in school, poor study habits and lower levels of personality attributes that facilitate achievement such as resilience and resourcefulness. Adolescents that do not receive sufficient time and attention from their parents are also prone to lower academic standing as well as substance abuse and unplanned pregnancy. Parents also suffer from long work hours. Mothers and fathers that work full-time report high rates of stress as they feel they are not spending enough time with their children. The amount of stress mothers feel is linked to the amount of time they spend at work and the kind of work that they do. Studies suggest that long work hours coupled with challenging jobs drain women of time and energy needed to devote to their children. While the share of household work remains disproportionately on the shoulders of women, fathers also experience stress due to work and family conflict. Men are beginning to feel the time crunch more acutely as they attend to more family and household responsibilities while holding full-time jobs. (7)

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to problems with children, overwork is also causing problems in personal relationships. Long work hours are a contributing factor to strained relationships, as people can feel neglected by partners working long hours.

Long work hours can lead to stress and marital problems. In addition to the obvious human tragedy associated with family breakdown, there is a reciprocal association between work-related stress and marital problems. Problems at work can harm intimate relationships and relationship stress can decrease job productivity. In the United States, it is estimated that employees experiencing marital problems lose an average of 15 workdays each year. It is also estimated that marital distress costs United States companies \$6.8 billion each year in lost productivity. In contrast, employees who have good relationships with their spouses can cope better with work problems and work-related stress.(7)

SUGGESTIONS

But there also may be a downside to this freedom as the line between work time and personal time becomes blurred. The 24*7 nature of work may produce tremendous gains in productivity, but it also increases stress on employees. Companies are, thus, constantly striving towards enhancing the quality of work life and also the personal life of its employees' and this does not stop with the employees but gets extended to his or her family as well. In house health clubs, yoga and meditation centers to relieve stress, sports and cultural activities and the like are being provided by companies.

CREATE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WORK AND YOUR PERSONAL LIFE:

So what can employees do to avoid burnout? First taking inventory of your life and finding out what is most important to you.

People who are driven tend to live work-centered lives. "a lot with single people and with self-employed people... get all their juice from working. They get all their needs met there—their need for excitement, intellectual stimulation, and community. If you're getting all your needs met at work, that's where you're going to keep turning back to. That's fine in the short term, but in the long term, it's going to cost you. One day you're going to wake up and think, 'I'm tired of working like a crazy person, but home is boring.'"

If you need to put the allure back into your personal life you must invest time and energy into creating a life outside of work. For some, this might be strengthening a marriage that's on shaky ground due to too much work. For others, it might be taking up simple activities like reading, fishing, rollerblading, or community-related activities. Basically, do *something*—not work related—that brings you joy.

WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER:

Another way to protect yourself from burnout is to work in smart ways that maximize your efficiency. The following tips can get the most from your work time:

- Delegate more.

- Put a “do not disturb” sign on your office door to minimize interruptions.
- Use the “do not disturb” function on your phone.
- Create periods of time to accept phone calls and e-mails, as well as time for focused work, to keep yourself more organized.
- Take a lunch break every day—no matter how busy you are.
- Make yourself leave work by 6 P.M. every day.

EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS AND BE WILLING TO MAKE SACRIFICES:

Sometimes we are our own worst enemy when it comes to setting healthy boundaries between our work and personal lives because we close ourselves off from our options.

One also have to be “financially healthy” before you can truly begin to take control of your work habits. If you’re not, then it’s likely that your work habits don’t stem from your personality but rather from financial burdens.

“You have to be willing to make some sacrifices if you want to reclaim your life,” she said. “You’ve got to be willing to risk losing business to set better boundaries.”

If you’re willing to take those risks, you can tell your clients you won’t be available 24 hours a day anymore. While that may seem a radical change, we have to keep things in perspective.

“I guarantee you that if you wait an hour or two hours to respond to something, chances are no one’s going to die,” she said. If you have to come to an agreement with an employer regarding your work schedule or availability before you can implement any changes, working with a career counselor to work out the best language for the conversation. You may also have to take a pay cut, become an independent contractor, or switch to part-time work.

“The important thing is to explore all your options,” she said. “Open your mind beyond what you think is possible

Conclusion

Long work hours, unemployment and underemployment all have damaging effects on health of individuals. Excessive work hours have adverse health effects on the physical, mental and social well-being of individuals. One of the major concerns of long work hours is the incidence of stress, which has many negative direct consequences, as well as causing other illnesses. Long work hours also affect social cohesion, as employees do not have the time and energy to allocate to their families, community and other personal interests. Employees are beginning to realize and understand the problems associated with long work hours. Many employees are faced with too much to do in too little time both at work and in their personal lives. As a result, many people would prefer to decrease the amount of time they spend at work in order to have a more balanced life.

It is imperative that businesses recognize the health consequences associated with long work hours. Organizations can improve their bottom line by exploring shorter work time alternatives, as employees are less likely to experience stress, burnout and other illnesses associated with long work hours. Businesses will also benefit, as employees are more effective when they are working shorter hours and exhibit a greater level of job satisfaction and commitment to their organization. Corporate cultures should be changed from promoting long work hours to encouraging a balance between work and personal life. An understanding of the negative health effects of overwork may prompt business and employees to reconstruct an appropriate frame for the amount of time employees should allocate towards work. In order to decrease the polarization in work hours and assist those who are working long hours and those that are unemployed or underemployed, there must be a reduction and redistribution of work. A wide range of options can reduce work time, such as limiting overtime, longer vacations, sabbaticals, phased-in or early retirement, job-sharing, family or educational leave and the opportunity to work part-time. Implementing these alternatives would reduce the negative health implications associated with overwork, unemployment and underemployment.

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