



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

15 March 2010

### **Bad Timing**

The present corporate world seems to have been bitten by the long hours bug. A survey of the American workforce revealed that the average number of work hours has reached an all time high. Ironically, the flexi-time concept too that was intended to give employees a better work-life balance seems to have backfired with employees using the spare time at home to do office work!

According to one researcher on changing trends in the organizational culture, *“a majority of overtime employees are those who feel that they are paid unfairly, and working long hours is the only way to show the management that they deserve better.”* There is an interesting correlation between unequal pay and long working hours since it also gives us an insight into the manner in which managers play on human psyche. Many organizations have adopted the erroneous practice of rewarding employees who stay late at the workplace. Trucking companies, for instance, reward insomniacs, despite being aware that the incidence of accidents is the highest among them. Similarly, software companies too encourage the *“code-through-the-night”* culture, little realizing that they could end up with more bugs to clear than if the engineers abided by their 40 hours a week schedule.

#### **The haunting past**

Despite the many research reports suggesting that long hours fail to enhance employee productivity, the corporate world still seems unrelenting on the issue. Organizational behavior experts attribute this to the industrial era when putting in more hours meant higher production. In addition to the past practice, the culture of working long hours also stems from a feeling of insecurity among employers. Employers thus feel empowered when they make employees work late.

On-the-job-leisure is another spin off from employers’ “work long” obsession. Employees, when tired, resort to relaxation techniques while at office. Women employees, especially those with families, however handle work pressures differently. Their urgency to reach home when they finish eight hours of work motivates them to contribute their best, thereby boosting their efficiency.

Work culture, however, also varies from place to place. Europeans, for instance, are known to take regular vacations in order to unwind and refresh themselves. Americans, on the other hand, follow a breakneck pace work culture where vacationing is considered lazy. The culture of working late is so deeply embedded that a few organizations were found to practice the *“jacket-on-chair”* act. Employees left their jackets on their chairs despite signing out, just to give their boss the feeling that they were still around. The act of deception is rather an unhealthy trend that, if unchecked, has the potential to corrupt the corporate culture as a whole. One successful CEO scrapped this at her organization. She felt that people who worked late were incompetent and inefficient. She also emphasized that late workers had inefficient bosses. The point was driven home. Employees soon realized that the quality of work and not the number of hours they spent



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

---

working mattered. The culture went through a makeover and employees began to leave the office on time and more importantly delivered a better quality of work. This effort also prove that culture could be changed if the CEO drives the change.

### **Changing times**

Change is undoubtedly happening, but gradually. Organizations across the world are beginning to understand that although time is of essence in business, so is relaxation and leisure. Effective managers believe that in today's world, innovation, creativity and swiftness govern business methods. Organizations too are making an effort to improve the quality of the work life of their employees by assessing them not only by parameters like customer satisfaction and their ability to inspire colleagues but also their frequency of taking a family vacation. The latter, according to many employers, gives an insight to an employee's personal life and reflects on his ability to strike the right work-life balance.

Time comes at a premium in today's competitive corporate scenario. However, using it to feel productive by way of showing long working hours is nothing but deception out of desperation for recognition and better benefits. Employees, however, are not to be completely blamed for such behavior. If employers change their "*we treasure what we measure*" attitude, so will employees. Following are certain measures that if incorporated in the working time policy could eliminate to a large extent, the "long hours" syndrome:

#### *Large-scale customization*

Organizations must customize work hours, thereby catering to the employees' needs at various stages of the life cycle.

#### *Standardized flexibility*

Employee opinion, regarding suitable working hours and weekly time off, should be sought and the employer should then institutionalize the work hours policy according to what the majority feels.

#### *Equal distribution of work*

Equal work distribution also implies equal distribution of time. Therefore, the friction arising out of over employment where one employee gets unduly burdened by too many things while a few others have plenty of time could be minimized to a large extent.

Time is a non-renewable resource. Hence making the most of it is the only way to effectively manage it!