

Why do people waste so much time at work?

May 29 2015, by Kyla Njoku



Based on research undertaken at Cass Business School, City University London, Professor Fleming explores how the act of working is no longer about survival and self-preservation, but has now morphed into a meaningless and painful routine.

He said, "The ritual of work is used to maintain the status quo set by neoliberal capitalism. As society is transformed into a factory that never sleeps, work becomes a universal reference point for everything else,

devoid of any moral or social worth."

Writing for BBC News [magazine](#), Professor Fleming said:

"A few years ago a disturbing story appeared in the media that seemed to perfectly capture the contemporary experience of work and its ever increasing grip over our lives: 'Man Dies at Office Desk - Nobody Notices for Five Days'. Of course, the story turned out to be a hoax. An urban myth.

"As it happens, each country has its own variation that still fools people when they periodically appear. What is strange that so many of us who encounter this fictional story genuinely shrug and mumble 'Yeah, that's about right'? But why does it resonate so well with our experiences of employment today?

"The story reminds us that this behaviour: the crazy idea of working non-stop has quietly become the new normal. Behaviour that our grandparents would have deemed insane is now rather pedestrian."

Fleming states that the average British worker spends 36 days a year answering work emails and London workers in particular receive close to 9,000 emails each year. As a result, work spills over into private time. One recent survey revealed that 80% of employers consider it acceptable to contact their employees outside business hours. British workers also waste 18 months of their lives commuting, which is often expensive and stressful.

"All of this work comes at cost." Fleming states. "For example, job-related illness is a growing problem in the UK, exacerbated by stress and being overwhelmed by the "to do" list.

"A recent study of overworked management consultants in the US found

that 35% employed in this occupation actually "faked" an 80-hour work week. For various reasons these individuals pretended to sacrifice themselves on the altar of work and still got everything done.

"None of this is to say there aren't many of us working hard doing important things that society depends upon. But the sheer amount of time spent at [work](#) is totally disproportionate to the vital tasks that need to be achieved. Disconnected too from the pay we receive for doing them. Jobs that are most necessary for the public good, such as nursing (starting salary £21k) are often the least economically recognised, whereas executive salaries stand in stark contrast."

Provided by City University London

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