

More needs to be done to ensure 24-hour working is not the new norm

November 22 2017

Employers should do more to ensure employees do not feel pressured into working outside of their contractual hours and offer more support regarding how they work flexibly, a new study in the *International Journal of Management Reviews* reports.

During the comprehensive evidence-based review, led by the University of Surrey in collaboration with Birkbeck, University of London and the University of Exeter, researchers scrutinised 56 studies examining the use of [technology](#) during non-working hours. They found that a 'one size fits all' approach to the use of technology outside working hours, such as switching off email servers outside of office hours, is not conducive to the needs of every employee.

Researchers identified a number of factors that contribute to people choosing to work outside of hours. The internet and improvements in ICT have made non-manual work increasingly portable and accessible, resulting in employees finding it far easier to work during non-contractual hours.

It was found that many employees felt pressure from their organisation to be constantly available and to engage in work during non-work time, which was exacerbated when expectations about what was required was vague. A desire to prove dedication and 'go the extra mile' were also found to be reasons why people were working more than their contracted hours.

An [employee](#)'s behaviour may in turn also shape what is expected and lead to additional out of hours working (e.g. a colleague who has been available at all times is expected to be available in the future).

However, the researchers also found that increased access to technology and working outside of office hours is actually preferred by some employees, who felt it gives them greater flexibility and control over their workload, leading to increases in self-reported efficiency and performance. The study also found that employees appreciated the benefits of being able to monitor continuously the information flow and stay on top of their work.

To overcome this disparity in how employees chose to work, researchers recommend that employers give individuals control over their working patterns and actively involve them in any decisions or policies about technology use so employees can reap the benefits of modern technologies without being enslaved by them.

Lead author Svenja Schlachter from the University of Surrey said:

"A failure to disconnect from work can negatively impact on a person's wellbeing and health. Many individuals report feeling pressured into logging in after hours to complete work, a task that is becoming more commonplace with the advance of technology. However, the flip side of this is that some actually prefer the flexibility this offers.

"Although employers implementing policies such as restricting accessibility to emails outside of office hours take a step in the right direction to ensure a good work/life balance for their workers, such regimented approaches to when you should and shouldn't be working do not work for everyone. Employers need to work with their staff to understand their individual needs wherever possible. However, employees also need to take responsibility for their working behaviour,

as it is ultimately up to them if they switch their phone off or not."

Dr Almuth McDowall, from Birkbeck, University of London said: "Our research stresses two facts. First, there is no blanket solution to how to maximise technology use for communication. Second, we need to put the issue on the table and spell out expectations about what is reasonable. Then agree on some boundaries whilst retaining flexibility."

Professor Ilke Inceoglu, from the University of Exeter Business School, said: "We have found the internet and new technology can give people flexibility in the way they [work](#), and they feel this can make them more efficient and feel empowered. But other people feel enslaved by the constant need to check and reply to emails, and managers must lead by example to ensure their wellbeing is protected."

More information: Svenja Schlachter et al, Voluntary Work-related Technology Use during Non-work Time: A Narrative Synthesis of Empirical Research and Research Agenda, *International Journal of Management Reviews* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/ijmr.12165](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12165)

Provided by University of Surrey

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