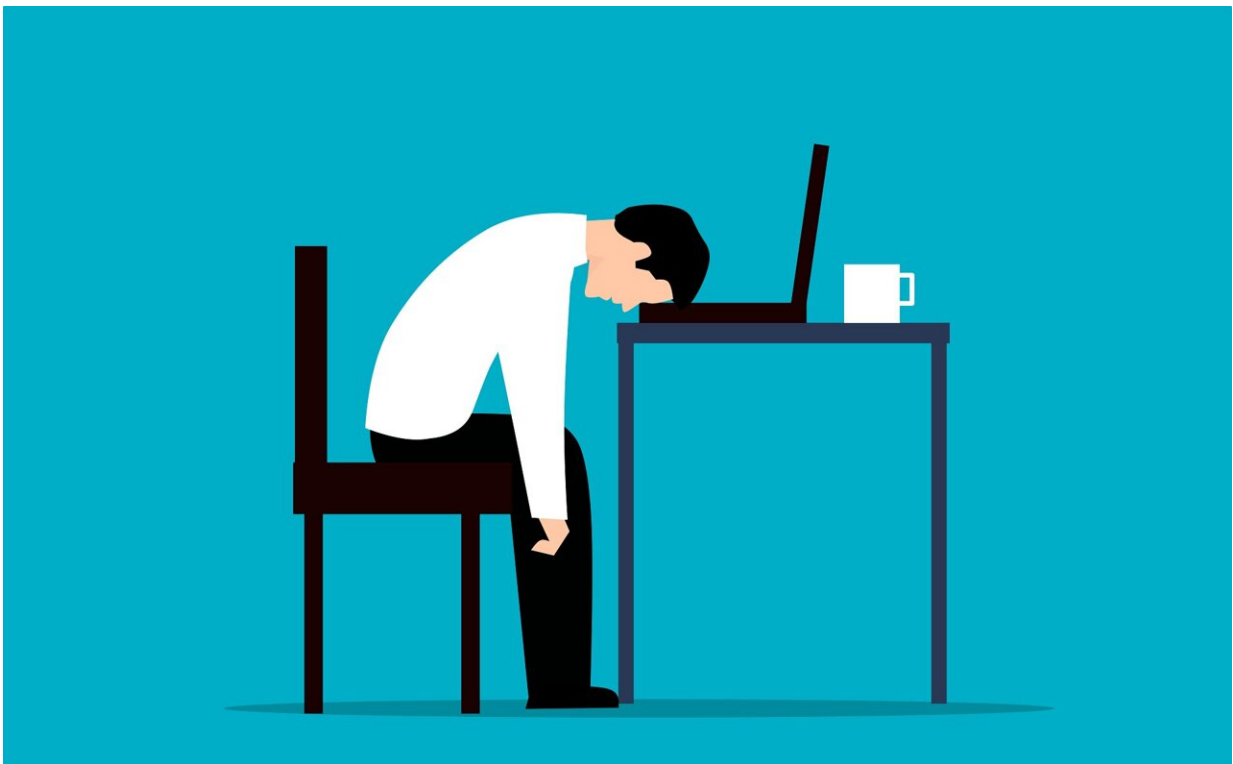


How an 'always-on' work culture can create a vicious cycle that damages workers and employers

July 5 2024, by Yasin Rofcanin and Farooq Mughal



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The glamorization of high-pressure work environments, like the infamous ["996"](#) culture (where staff work from 9am until 9pm six days a week), often portrays relentless dedication and long hours as key to

career success.

A PR boss at Chinese tech firm Baidu [publicly apologized](#) in May after glorifying a work-till-you-drop [culture](#). Qu Jing advised staff not to expect weekends off and denied any responsibility for employee welfare, saying: "I'm not your mother."

It is not surprising that there was a public outcry around a culture that discourages a [work-life balance](#). The effects of this can be [profound](#), especially for [young workers](#) who want to develop their careers amid [blurred boundaries](#) between work and personal life.

And it appears a healthy home life is important to work performance too. In [studies](#) we conducted with dual-earner couples aged 40 and over from the US, our results showed that feeling supported at home spills over into the workplace. This can improve both creativity and performance.

Two interesting results came to light. First, our results showed that constant exposure to mobile phones during non-work hours (referred to as "[phubbing](#)") damaged the support and communication between couples at home.

Employees who engaged less with their phones at home were able to enjoy the support and communication of their partner better. As employees, they felt more proactive and energized at work.

Second, by focusing on the times when positive experiences from home cross into the work domain, we found that supportive colleagues (for example, someone who would help out a colleague who had a family emergency) made employees more engaged at work.

Employees who felt supported by their partner (at home) and colleagues

(at work) felt energized and "in the flow," and they contributed to company success by showing creativity and innovation.

The changing workplace

While flexible working has become the norm in the wake of COVID, companies have increasingly been offering more flexibility. Another [study](#) shows that young employees who have discretion over when and where they work perform better in their job.

What we noticed was that the employees went above and beyond their work requirements. This piqued our interest, and our [follow-up research](#) focused on the factors that contributed to these elevated performance levels.

We found a new type of leadership trait, which we called "family-supportive leadership." This management style aims to foster a culture that values work-life balance through empathy.

We found working with family-supportive leaders who can show empathy enhances employee [performance and well-being](#). Through a family-supportive work culture, employees growing through the ranks are more likely to feel energized at work.

We conducted a [meta-analysis](#) (a scientific review of all studies published) on family-supportive leadership to understand the link between this type of leadership, the work culture and employee behavior.

Our review demonstrated that empathy from a manager improves the performance of employees—as well as the employee's job satisfaction. It also reduces burnout. The underlying reason for these positives is that family-supportive leadership minimizes conflict between work and

family as much as possible.

What's more, these leaders are praised by their teams, which has positive effects on employee morale and motivation. Where work culture supports family and leisure, we found that employees were more creative.

And in [a more recent study](#) that we conducted with young employees and their managers in Mexico—where there is an emphasis on long working hours with men predominantly the breadwinners—we found that family and leisure-supportive culture plays an important role keeping employees engaged. We measured vigor, dedication and absorption around work, which ultimately led to better performance.

In light of the Baidu misstep, it's crucial to recognize the broader implications of work exploitation in large corporations. When employers prioritize relentless productivity over creating a balance between work and family lives, it perpetuates a cycle of exploitation that places profits over employee well-being.

We have some key takeaways for leaders, companies and employees.

- invest in programs to develop family-supportive leadership practices and attitudes (for example, reduced workload arrangements or caregiver support groups)
- create a culture that's respectful of the work-family and work-leisure balance. Ensure that norms, behavior and attitudes respect the non-work lives of employees and pay attention to the boundary between work and family lives
- be aware of the dangers associated with phubbing and constant phone access. Employees who constantly feel connected develop signs of burnout, exhaustion and depletion over time. A possible solution is to normalize switching off, recovery and relaxation

strategies after work and during weekends

- invest in employee strengths (these areas where they shine at work). This is important, as employees who build on their strengths tend to feel inspired and find meaningfulness in their work.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How an 'always-on' work culture can create a vicious cycle that damages workers and employers (2024, July 5) retrieved 5 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-culture-vicious-workers-employers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.