

Hard work and no play makes Jack and Jill unhappy



Across the workforce in Australia and New Zealand we're working hard, perhaps harder than ever before, to keep our organisations going in tough times. But a huge chunk of that work is going unrecognised and unrewarded.

The old 38-hour week appears to be a distant memory with employees at all levels working substantial hours each week for no recompense.

Consider the following findings from the latest wave of the Leadership Employment and Direction (L.E.A.D.) Survey of leaders and senior managers, middle managers and supervisors and non-managerial employees.

Overall:

- Leaders and senior managers are working 51.6 hours and being paid for 38.9 hours
- Middle managers and supervisors are working 47.1 hours and being paid for 38.8 hours
- Non-managerial employees are working 44.4 hours and being paid for 38.4 hours

So why are employees at all levels giving up so much of their own time?

In difficult times, we consistently see employees at all levels feeling added pressure to keep their jobs in the face of growing expectations and harsh economic realities.

We've recently seen a number of major employers announce impending closures, large-scale downsizing, redundancies, stand-downs and lay-offs. We've heard about middle managers and supervisors in a number of industry sectors going 'back on the tools' as a means of keeping their job and keeping their organisations ticking over, in light of falling demand.

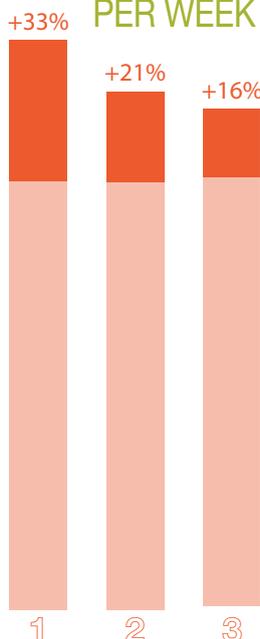
In organisations of all shapes and sizes there is pressure to maintain margins and profitability in the digital age and with growing import price pressures.

On the services front, the twin peaks of customer expectation and cost containment in service delivery present a profound challenge to leaders and managers looking to retain clients and develop lasting relationships with them.

Expectations from customers/clients, from boards, investors and owners and from the higher levels in organisations (leaders and senior managers) are also growing over time and creating pressure in the minds of employees at all levels.

So the natural response is to put your 'head down and bottom up' and work hard to stay out of the firing line. For many this means working extra hours to ensure the work

% MORE HOURS WORKED THAN PAID PER WEEK



EXTRA DAYS WORK UNPAID PER WEEK

1. Leaders & Senior Managers



2. Middle Managers & Supervisors



3. Non-managerial Employees



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is done and there are no 'exception reports' or 'significant deviations' from expectation to raise the red flag and the spectre of job loss.

Of the L.E.A.D. Survey respondents who feel they do not have work/life balance:



Leaders and Senior Managers believe they would achieve the right work/life balance if they worked fewer hours.



Middle Managers & Supervisors believe they would achieve the right work/life balance if they worked fewer hours.



Non-managerial Employees believe they would achieve the right work/life balance if they worked fewer hours.

Clearly there are many people at all levels who are making big personal sacrifices for their organisation, including those leading our organisations.

The end result of working excessive hours and tipping the work/life balance too far in the work direction is employee burnout which leads to resentment, disengagement and ultimately departure.

More than 20 million sick days each year are taken by Australian workers suffering from stress-related illnesses, costing the Australian economy \$14.8 billion annually, according to research from Medicare 24/7 Health Advice Line (MHAL).

Additionally, presenteeism is costing more than \$25 billion annually. Presenteeism is the loss of productivity that

occurs when an employee affected by stress or illness does not function to their full ability while on the job. On average, presenteeism causes six working days worth of productivity to be lost every year per employee, according to MHAL research.

The downside of this 'more work for no more pay' scenario is a significant dent to the work/life balance equation and possibly even growing resentment towards the employer.

A simple conversation about work and a willingness to adapt to get the balance right may be the difference between keeping and losing the talent that lies within.

So what should our organisational leaders and managers be doing to address what, on the face of it, seems to be an unsustainable working paradigm for themselves and those they lead and manage?

- **Recognise the situation for what it represents** – a warning sign and a wake-up call that something needs to change in order for people at all levels to feel the balance is right between work and other aspects of their lives.
- **Take a genuine interest in the work/life balance of yourself and your people** – talk, listen, understand and identify avenues to arrest the 'overworking' syndrome that dominates currently.
- **Equip yourself and your employees** – give them the tools, the skills and the focus to manage their ever increasing workload to greater effect, so that they can achieve more in less time.
- **Review the nature and extent of work being performed and be willing to act** – assess whether too much is being asked of too few, including you.

Be prepared to streamline, to LEAN the organisation from a processes and systems viewpoint, to reduce the workload and enhance the value created across the organisation.

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