

Working more than 40 hours a week: Why it can do more harm than good - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the phenomenon of chronic overwork in the modern workforce, arguing that working beyond 40 hours per week is counterproductive for both employees and organizations. The author contends that overwork leads to burnout, diminished performance, and serious health consequences, drawing on a range of third-party statistics to substantiate these claims. Key evidence includes: a McKinsey finding that 25% of employees exhibit burnout symptoms; a Slack study reporting 20% higher productivity among employees who log off at standard hours; a World Health Organization study linking 55+ hour workweeks to a 35% higher stroke risk; and a Society for Human Resource Management study finding that 84% of workers attribute unnecessary stress to poorly trained managers. The article also cites an ADP Research Institute study identifying employer expectations and workloads as top drivers of overwork culture. The article concludes by outlining managerial and individual strategies for addressing overwork, including workload auditing, manager training, and boundary-setting. Published by Culture Amp, the piece implicitly positions performance management tools and employee surveys as mechanisms for identifying and resolving overwork.

Key Insights

1. Employees who logged off at the end of the standard workday registered 20% higher productivity scores than those who worked after hours, according to a Slack study, challenging the assumption that longer hours yield greater output.
2. Working 55 or more hours per week is associated with a 35% higher risk of stroke and a 17% higher risk of death from ischemic heart disease compared to working 35–40 hours, per a World Health Organization study.
3. A study of medical residents found that working one or more extended shifts in a month was associated with an 84% increased risk of medical errors, illustrating the safety-critical consequences of overwork beyond performance metrics.

Practical Takeaways

- Regularly embedding overwork-related questions into 1-on-1 meetings and employee surveys is presented as a mechanism for early identification of workload strain before it escalates to burnout.
- Manager training is framed as a structural intervention — as distinct from individual-level remediation — with the argument that addressing the root causes of overwork requires equipping managers to monitor workloads and handle wellbeing conversations.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article aggregates multiple third-party citations from credible sources including the World Health Organization, McKinsey, Slack, MIT Sloan Management Review, and the ADP Research Institute, giving it surface-level empirical grounding. The distinction between symptom-level and cause-level interventions reflects legitimate organizational behaviour literature. **Limitations:** The article is published by Culture Amp, a performance management software vendor, introducing clear promotional intent. It does not disclose this conflict of interest or clarify which studies were peer-reviewed versus proprietary. Statistics are cited without methodology, sample sizes, or publication years in most cases, making independent verification difficult. The article conflates correlation with causation in several instances (e.g., overwork causing rather than co-occurring with health outcomes). The practical guidance is generic and skews toward individual behavioural change rather than systemic structural reform. The closing call-to-action explicitly promotes Culture Amp's product suite, confirming the branded content nature of the piece.

Organizational Practice

The article describes practices including embedding workload questions into regular 1-on-1 meetings and employee surveys, auditing employee responsibilities to identify overburdening, providing manager training on recognizing and addressing overwork, and encouraging senior leaders to model healthy work boundaries. It also references performance management process reviews as a tool for clarifying employee priorities.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader trend in PMS discourse toward integrating employee wellbeing metrics alongside traditional performance indicators. The framing of manager capability as a structural driver of overwork — rather than individual employee behaviour — points toward growing organizational interest in manager-level accountability within performance systems. The emphasis on survey-based early detection aligns with the expansion of continuous listening tools in PMS platforms. The conflation of overwork management with performance management processes suggests an ongoing blurring of boundaries between HR wellbeing functions and formal performance infrastructure.

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