

Work Your Proper Hours Day: The managers' guide

Tackling over-long hours for yourself and your team

Managers are the most overworked group in the workforce. Only some professional groups rival managers in the overall long hours league table.

Here are the facts. They are all taken from official statistics – mainly the 60,000 strong Labour Force Survey. Later we provide some advice on what to do about long hours

- 1.5 million managers work unpaid overtime (some managers may not have set hours in their contracts so even if they work very long hours they will not report unpaid overtime)
- On average they do an extra day's work a week (8 hours 36 minutes)
- If paid for this, the average manager would earn an extra £8,900 a year
- Across the economy this adds up to £13.6 billion
- There is some good news - the number of managers working unpaid overtime has fallen by 135,000 (8.2%) since the 2003 peak and they are doing 12 minutes a week less.
- There is a big difference between men and women - 66 per cent of managers working unpaid overtime are male. This suggests that men may get promoted because of their willingness to do long hours.
- But managers are fed up with their hours - 55 per cent want to reduce their hours and 15 per cent say that they would even be willing to take a pay cut in order to reduce their hours.

Managers in different sectors have different patterns of long hours. This table uses the standard breakdown of industries used in official statistics.

Industry	Number of managers working unpaid overtime	Average hours of unpaid overtime per week
Financial intermediation	180,000	9 hrs 30 mins
Construction	84,000	9 hrs 6 mins
Mining and quarrying	10,000	9 hrs
Manufacturing	289,000	9 hrs
Real estate, renting & business activities	228,000	8 hrs 48 mins
Transport, storage & communication	118,000	8 hrs 24 mins
Hotels & restaurants	47,000	8 hrs 18 mins
Wholesale, retail & motor trade	230,000	8 hrs 12 mins
Public administration & defence	92,000	8 hrs 6 mins
Other community, social & personal	52,000	8 hrs 6 mins
Education	38,000	7 hrs 48 mins
Health & social work	135,000	7 hrs 36 mins
Electricity gas & water supply	17,000	7 hrs 30 mins

There are obviously different types of manager, ranging from chief executives through to managers of small teams. The official statistics also break down managers into different occupations. The difference is that the table above is about what your company or organisation does, the table below is about what you do. However the occupational categories are a bit confusing as some jobs are heavily linked to a sector, and many middle managers are lumped in the single ‘functional manager’ group. They do show, unsurprisingly, that senior managers do the longest hours.

Official occupational group	Some explanation	Number working unpaid overtime	Av. weekly hrs unpaid overtime (those doing more than 1hr/wk)
111 Corporate Managers & Senr	senior civil servants and local government officers, directors	54,000	12 hrs

Officials	and CEOs		
117 Protective Service Officers	Officers in armed services, inspectors and above or equivalent in police and fire, ambulance, prisons	18,000	10 hrs 18 mins
113 Functional Managers	managers in finance, marketing, sales, purchasing, advertising, PR, IT, R&D	598,000	9 hrs 18 mins
112 Production Managers	managers in production, construction, mining, energy, works and maintenance	207,000	8 hrs 36 mins
116 Mngrs in Distrib Storage and Retail	store, warehouse, transport managers	186,000	8 hrs six mins
122 Managers in Hospitality and Leisure	including travel agency, conference and exhibition managers	61,000	7 hrs 54 mins
123 Managers in Other Service Industries	including garage managers, hairdressing, recycling and refuse	76,000	7 hrs 54 mins
115 Financial and Office Managers		174,000	7 hrs 30 mins
118 Health and Social Services Managers	including pharmacy, residential and day care	91,000	7 hrs 24 mins
114 Quality and Customer Care Managers		54,000	7 hrs
121 Mngrs in Farming Hort Forestry etc	quality assurance managers	10,000	6 hrs

What you should do about long hours?

As a manager, you are not just responsible for your own hours, but you have a big, if not decisive, influence on the hours of the people who work for you.

We do have some tips on personal time management for managers, but you should be just as concerned with the hours of the people who work for you.

Have you a long hours culture?

Some workplaces develop a long hours culture, with people regularly staying late and skipping breaks, even when it is not necessary. This can develop over time, and may not have a single cause.

But although as a manager it can be pleasing to see that people are putting in extra hours, a long hours culture can often be a sign of unhealthy working practices. You should want staff to do quality work efficiently - and you should reward them for their outputs, not for their presence.

In particular, you should discourage any notion that presenteeism is the route to promotion or advance. If from time-to-time staff put in extra time for a reason, you should be clear you are grateful, but that's not the same as simply encouraging people to stay late every day. You should be just as keen to praise staff who get work done efficiently without putting in regular extra hours, and it's important that you make sure everyone knows that you see this as praiseworthy activity.

One cause of people staying late to show their loyalty is that they are not getting sufficiently clear guidance and feedback from you. Some people work long hours because they are doing work to a higher standard than is necessary, and lack confidence in letting go. Don't forget almost every task is subject to diminishing returns – after a certain stage each extra hour put in will make a smaller difference to the quality of the output than the one before.

It is therefore important that you are clear about what you want done, and you should give just as much feedback afterwards if you think too much effort has gone into a task as not enough, even if the consequences are less serious.

One of the best ways of demonstrating that you do not encourage a long hours culture is getting your own hours under control. If you are efficient in using your own time, achieve what you need to and still leave at a reasonable hour your staff should admire that (as long as you are not overloading them.) Staff will pick up clear messages about what you value as much as from what you do as from what you say.

If you think you have a long hours culture, then do not be afraid to discuss it, both collectively as a team and with individual staff. You may get all kinds of good suggestions that will not only reduce staff hours, but also raise morale.

If you have the managerial authority, and it's appropriate in your organisation,

then think about whether you can introduce flexitime or other flexible working arrangements such as working from home from time to time.

With flexitime someone may still stay late but take a longer lunch break to go to the gym. Someone else will grab a sandwich but leave earlier, while their colleague will come in after the school run, but will be happy to work late. If people no longer have fixed times then it's much harder to demonstrate presenteeism by being the last to leave. Flexitime is highly valued by staff. Of course you may need to ensure that some tasks are covered, but why not give people the responsibility to organise their own rota? With informal give and take between colleagues it is much easier to construct a system that feels fair.

Managing high trust relationships and a flexitime workplace is tougher than a more rigid system, but almost always you will end up with more work done by a happier and more contented workforce.

Too much work?

If people are working extra hours simply to get the job done then it's not a case of a long hours culture, but of having too much work to do.

Some employers may have this as part of their business model, and be ready to accept the high turn over and poor staff morale that will come from a burnt out workforce, but we don't expect any of them to come to workSMART for advice!

Yet many organisations will go through periods when there is a great deal of work. Staff are more likely to go along with this:

- if the work is interesting rather than routine
- if they can see an end to it
- if there's a sense of everyone in it together and staff have a real voice in decision making with both collective and individual consultation about workloads
- if the work is well organised and fairly shared out – and seen to be
- if they can see that it was unplanned or unavoidable
- if they can see that you are more than pulling your weight

But it cannot go on forever. As the manager you will probably be highly committed to your job and the success of your organisation, but while you can expect staff to be loyal they will not be as committed as you are. This kind of work situation is inherently unstable, and it may not take much to tip an enthusiastic staff pulling together into resentment.

You should try to:

- bring in extra resources such as some temporary staff
- reorganise the work so that it is streamlined – there’s nothing more demoralising than people doing what they think is unnecessary work when they have too much to do
- look for every opportunity to show that you realise this is above and beyond the call of duty including saying thank you
- make any changes that you can to give people more flexibility about when and how they do their work
- encourage team working and team identity (though you don’t need a team song)

Long overtime hours

Of course some workers are paid by the hour, and rightly expect to get paid overtime if they do any extra work. Sometimes this is a necessary part of a job where workloads vary from week to week or there is a seasonal variation in work.

But in other workplaces a long hours culture has developed. Staff have come to depend on their regular weekly overtime to deliver a living wage. But with increased productivity people could work shorter hours and produce the same, or even more, output.

In this situation staff will be understandably suspicious of change, as they will see it as a threat to their income.

But many organisations have negotiated change with their staff so that new practices that reduce hours and increase productivity are rewarded with higher basic pay. This will be easier to do when you have formal arrangements for negotiation through a trade union that employees trust.

There are a series of useful case studies and general advice in a booklet produced by the Department of Trade and Industry and backed by both the TUC and CBI at http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/work_time_regs/managingchange.htm

Badly organised work

If some of the time people work long hours while other days they are hanging about with little to do, then that means there is a management problem. When it's just one or two people this may be the individual employee's inability to organise their work, set priorities or manage their time but it's your responsibility to support them or provide appropriate training. But if it's a more general issue, then it's your problem.

Many new managers are promoted because they are good at their job, not because they are good managers. Yet allocating work, monitoring progress and providing feedback are by no means easy, and new managers are too often subjected to the great British training technique of being thrown in at the deep end.

It may be obvious, but it is always worth remembering that you are now judged on the performance of your team not just on your own work. Spending a bit of time setting up three people to do a really good job will produce more than trying to do it yourself.

It is likely that you need to develop:

- better delegating skills – not just passing work on, but supporting and monitoring it too
- more trust - to let staff plan their own workloads and tasks
- better communication skills - so people can plan better
- more collaborative working skills - so that your team plans more together
- better management of your own time

In short you need to develop the skills that every manager needs, and your organisation providing you with training and support.

More information:

- **Changing Times: the TUC guide to work/life balance**
Handbook and website supporting the Changing Times process – an organisational scheme designed to achieve changes that are win-win-win for staff-employers-customers. With case studies from other companies who have used the techniques. Free fortnightly email magazine rounds up developments in work/life balance for an audience of unions and HR professionals.
www.tuc.org.uk/changingtimes
- **Work Your Proper Hours Day – 24 Feb 2006**
Annual TUC event, which changes date every year to reflect the proportion of the working year being spent in unpaid overtime. Diagnose and treat your own long hours situation with the online quiz, and find out

more about the long hours culture.
www.workyourproperhoursday.com