

## Managers' Tendency to Work Longer Hours: A Multilevel Analysis

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**Abstract:** While there has been renewed interest in the trend toward longer working hours, neither economic nor sociological explanations have been able to fully account for the rapid increase in work hours observed among managers today. This study presents a multi-level framework for understanding under which conditions managers are most likely to increase their work hours. Individual-level factors (for example, performance appraisal criteria and time and place of hours worked), organizational-level factors (for example, norms, leadership and culture) and economic factors (for example, declining profitability and threat of layoffs) are all considered. The study concludes with potential extensions of the theoretical model presented here and other directions for future research.

**Key words:** Longer hours, performance appraisal, individual factors, organization factors, job factors, economic factors

### INTRODUCTION

Both labor economists and organizational scientists have noted the increased number of hours that employees in the U. S. are working. While the average work week of hourly employees has remained fairly steady, over the past thirty years, the number of hours worked each week by managers has grown considerably (Bell and Hart, 2005). Work week of 50 or more hours are now quite common for managerial and professional employees of corporations (Hochschild, 1997; Filer *et al.*, 2006).

Although the trend toward longer work weeks has been well documented (Bailyn, 2003; Eastman, 2003), the reasons for this trend are still not fully understood. For instance, social pressures towards consumerism are frequently cited as a major reason for longer hours (Schor, 1992) employees are presumed to work longer hours to acquire more products to live a better life. Yet, many of the individuals who are putting in the longest hours are highly paid managers who can already afford the luxuries they desire (Babber and Aspen, 1998; Rigdon, 2004). Similarly, if employees are driven to work longer hours by economic need, then managers with more children should be the ones working longer hours. However, the relationship between family size and hours worked is not strong, either (Filer *et al.*, 2006; Schor, 1992). Another possible explanation for longer work weeks is large-scale layoffs; such workforce reductions can result in increased work responsibilities for "survivors" of downsizings (Feldman, 2005).

This study, then presents a multilevel framework for understanding when and why managers will engage in long work hours. More specifically, it suggests that there are individual-level, job-level, organizational-level and

economic factors that increase managers' tendency to work long hours. In addition, the study suggests several avenues for future research to extend the scope of the theoretical model presented here.

### THE CONSTRUCT OF LONG WORK HOURS

In this study, I will be focusing on the tendency of managers to voluntarily and regularly work more than 40 h week<sup>-1</sup>. This behavior will be referred to as "working long hours". Below, I discuss the ways in which the construct of "working long hours" is different from other related constructs and why this definition is most appropriate for our purpose.

**Voluntary versus involuntary overtime:** Probably the most well-known term in the literature on work hours is "overtime". To comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, employers in the U. S. are obligated to pay "time and a half" for every hour worked over 40 during one work week. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that in any given week, roughly 10% of the hourly workers in the U. S. receive some overtime pay. Employers may be "exempt" from the statistics of overtime work if they customarily and regularly direct the work of two or more other employees.

A distinction is generally made between "voluntary" and "involuntary" overtime. Voluntary overtime includes hours (over 40) that nonexempt employees willingly work in exchange for higher per-hour income. Involuntary overtime refers to those hours over 40 which firms can require employees to work, yet for which hourly employees are paid time and a half for every hour worked over 40.

In this study, I will be examining those hours (over 40/week) which employees work voluntarily. That is, the focus here is on managers' willingness to work longer hours which do not bring direct compensation.

**Regular versus sporadic work hours:** An important distinction also needs to be made between managers who sporadically work long hours and those who do so on a regular basis. In almost every work place are circumstances that occasionally require employees to put in very long hours of work. For example, it is not unusual for managers in accounting to put in two extra hours overtime everyday before April 15. In contrast, there are many organizations in which managers regularly and consistently put in long work weeks. For instance, Zachary (1994) describes the behavior of engineers caught up in jobs that require them to work 60-80 h weeks on a regular basis.

In this study, the focus will be on managers regularly putting in long hours of work.

**Day versus week as units of measurement:** The present study takes week as its unit of time rather than day. That is, I'll be examining managers' willingness to work more than 40 h week<sup>-1</sup> rather than willingness to work more than 8 h on any given day. This decision was made by the U.S. government.

First, labor law statutes and union contracts in the U.S. typically employ the same standard of time (Johnson, 1998; Scheuei, 1999; Walsh, 2002). Thus, for uniformity, it is appropriate to stay with the same unit of measurement. Second, as organizations, have become more flexible and creative in their policies, more professional and managerial employees are working fewer hours on any given day. For example, in some organizations, employees work 4-10 h days each week as their workload. Using the work week standard time, then, is more likely to capture individual differences in working overtime than organizational differences in scheduling flexibility (Muhl, 1999; Seal, 1999).

**Onsite versus away from site:** In this study, all hours—whether worked at the regular place of employment or not, allow individuals to put in their work hours off the premises as well (Kurland and Bailey, 1999). As will be seen later, it may be more instrumental for managers to put in those hours at the work site to gain "face time" and to create impressions of organizational commitment (Hochschild, 1997). However, in terms of quantifying work hours, the focus here will be on total hours engaged in work rather than on where those hours are worked.

**Hours paid versus hours worked:** Finally here, it is worth briefly noting a distinction frequently made by economists between "hours worked" (Justler and Stafford, 1991; Filer *et al.*, 2006). "Hours paid" has been typically used to signify the time employees spend in work activity; for example, paid holidays, vacation days and sick days are included in "hours paid" but not in "hours worked".

In this study, the focus will be on hours worked. One is not more concerned with the number of hours that individual managers actually work rather than in organizational differences in fringe benefits involving "time off" or "comp time".

### GENERAL THEORETICAL MODEL

The general theoretical model for understanding managers' tendency to work long hours appears in Fig. 1. The hypotheses on individual-level factors are presented first, followed by those on job factors, organizational factors and economic conditions.

**Individual differences:** The tendency to work long hours is likely to vary across demographic groups, personality types and other individual differences. Here, we consider the variables most frequently investigated in this regard; gender, marital status, family status, salience of bread winner role, self-monitoring, conscientiousness, achievement motivation and investment in outside-work activities and hobbies.

**Gender:** In the economics literature, there has been considerable attention given to the role of gender in the tendency to work long hours (Eastman, 2003). In general, the evidence suggests that women's hours of paid work, household chores and family responsibilities are greater than those of men. While men may be increasing the number of hours that they work, women may not be able to do this.

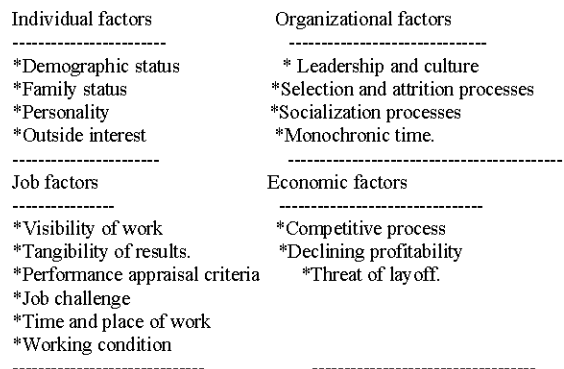


Fig. 1: Managers' tendency to work long hours

While both men and women have increased their hours of paid employment in the last twenty years, proposition 1 suggests that men, as a group, are more likely to increase the number of hours they work than women. Because more women are working "second shift" at home, it is less likely that they will be able to put in as many long hours in total as men do. Also, in cases of divorce, women are more likely to get the custody of the children than men are. These single mothers have much less flexibility of work hours, particularly at the end of the day, since "after care" programs, daycare and other childcare options are typically unavailable after 6 p.m.

**Proposition 1:** Male managers are likely to work longer hours than female managers.

**Marital and family status:** For managers who are married and have dependent children still at home, to work longer hours is a difficult choice. On one hand, individuals who have dependent children have greater economic needs. For them, working longer is financially rational. Even if working longer hours does not directly increase their earnings immediately it would be instrumental in obtaining higher performance rating.

Women need more time to managing a home and sustaining family relationships. Thus, while economic incentives to work longer hours may be present, the immediate demands of outside responsibilities make working long hours less feasible (Bailyn, 2003). In addition, single employees and those without children may be more predisposed to work long hours because workplace relationships may fulfill their important social needs as well.

**Proposition 2:** Managers who are single are likely to work longer hours than are managers who are married.

**Proposition 3:** Managers without minor children at home are likely to work longer hours than are managers with minor children still in the household.

**Saliency of bread winner role:** Previous research suggests that gender, marital status and family status alone may not fully account for differences in managers' willingness to work long hours. As proposition 4 suggests, managers' willingness to work long hours may also depend on the extent to which an individual is the major "breadwinner" in his/her family and how salient that role is to them. "Family power theory" suggests that the differential earning power of spouses significantly influences how decisions about time use are made in households (Ebby *et al.*, 1999). Individuals for whom

breadwinner status is low in salience are often more satisfied with their lives; they feel less pressure to succeed on both the home and work fronts. (Ayree, 1999). In contrast, individuals who hold the breadwinner role in their family and strongly identify with it are less likely to be satisfied with their lives in general because they feel overly stressed by demands on their time (Hochschild, 1989). Thus, not only who makes more money, but also how important the "breadwinner role" is to personal identity, may influence managers' tendency to work long hours.

**Proposition 4:** The more salient the role of family breadwinner, the more likely a manager will be able to work longer hours.

**Self-monitoring:** While there are several personality traits that might be relevant in understanding managers' tendency to work long hours, the one that has been most frequently considered in this context is self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987). Self-monitoring refers to sensitivity to cues about what behaviors are desired in a group and the ability to adapt behavior to meet the expectations of others.

One of the difficulties of assessing the past performance and future potential of those in management is that the work itself is not readily visible and the results of the work are not highly tangible. High self-monitors are more likely to notice how many hours top manager's supervisors put in by being at the office more. That is high self-monitors are more like the adage, "out of sight, out of mind" (Kilduff and Day, 1994).

**Proposition 5:** High self-monitors are likely to work longer hours than low self-monitors.

**Conscientiousness and achievement motivation:** Two other personality traits, which might account for significant variations in number of hours worked, are conscientiousness and achievement motivation. Conscientiousness refers to an individual's perseverance in the completion of tasks, while achievement motivation refers to an individual's motivation to complete tasks, maintain high standards and exert extra effort to attain excellence. While conceptually, these two personality traits are distinct, they are often highly correlated.

As propositions 6 and 7 suggests, managers who are high on conscientiousness achievement motivation will be more willing to put in long work hours. Being associated with conscientiousness is likely to impel managers to keep working until assignments are completed. Also, highly conscientious managers may decide to help team

members complete their tasks as well. Along the same line, managers with achievement motivation traits are likely to work longer hours to ensure that not only that the job gets done but that it gets done properly. In addition, managers high on achievement motivation traits are likely to take on more (and more challenging) assignments requiring longer hours of work.

**Proposition 6:** The higher the level of consciousness, the more likely managers will be able to work longer hours.

**Proposition 7:** The higher the level of achievement motivation, the more likely the manager will be able to work longer hours.

**Job-level factors:** One topic on which previous research has generally been silent in connection to the proposition to work long hours is the work itself. With the exception of economic research on the effects of hourly wage on the decision to work overtime, how the job itself induces managers to work long hours has generally not been investigated. Next, I consider how the visibility of the work, the tangibility of the work product, performance appraisal criteria, amount of job challenge, time and place of work and working condition come into play.

**Visibility of work/tangibility of results:** As several sociologists have noted, the tendency to work long hours has increased more dramatically among managers than among many other occupational groups (Hochschild, 1997). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that much of the work that managers do is not readily visible and the output of their efforts (products or services) is less tangible.

As a result, in trying to demonstrate that they "add values", managers may work long hours to stave off criticism about their contributions to the firm. Even if the quality of their work output cannot be readily measured, at least, how many hours they work can be. (Perlow, 2002).

**Proposition 9:** The less visible the work itself, the more likely managers are to work longer hours.

**Proposition 10:** The less tangible the work product, the more likely managers are to work longer hours.

**Performance appraisal criteria:** As suggested above, the organization's formal performance appraisal system also has an impact on whether managers work long hours. In those firms (or subunits) where the performance appraisal criteria are specific and measurable, it is less likely that

managers will feel pressure to work long hours. The availability of measurable outcomes mitigates against the need for impression management and putting in extra "face time" (Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 1989).

On the other hand, many organizations evaluate managers on criteria that are relatively unclear and with procedures that are somewhat secretive. For example, when organizations are assessing middle managers for promotion, how do they relatively assess such attributes as "leadership potential" and "commitment" to the firm?

In many cases, those judgements are made, in part, on an employee's willingness to work long hours (Perlow, 1999). The implicit bargain is long hours on the managers' part in exchange for increased promotional opportunities and pay raises on the organization's part (Bailyn, 2003).

The work of Borman and Motowidlo (1993) also sheds some lights on working long hours. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) argue that employees and managers evaluated on both "task performance" and "contextual performance" criteria refers to the more traditional elements of work effectiveness such as shooting for quantity and quality expectations and so forth.

Contextual performance quality such as discretionary behaviors that support the accomplishment of elements of contextual performance would include such behaviors as developing good working relationships with others, job dedication and helping others to accomplish task on time (Borman *et al.*, 1995).

Proposition 11 suggests that the more heavily managers are evaluated on performance, the more likely they are to work longer hours. If managers are evaluated primarily on task performance, then number of hours worked is of less consideration in evaluations as long as work is completed and done to specifications. On the other hand, if managers are being evaluated closely on the extent to which the job is done by others, then spending longer hours at work may be instrumental in the evaluations. Here, longer hours may be needed to develop good interpersonal relationship with peers and to assist less effective workers complete their task correctly.

**Proposition 11:** The more heavily managers are evaluated on contextual performance, the more likely they will be able to work longer hours.

**Working conditions:** Lewicki (1991) suggests that the general working conditions surrounding a job can also play an important role in increasing managers' hours of work. Lewicki's research suggests that organizations "seduce" employees, particularly those in high status careers and high status organizations, to work longer hours by providing them with highly stimulating places as well as stimulating colleagues and projects.

For instance, whether organizations may be partially altruistically motivated in providing managers and professionals with wellness centers and recreation facilities; those organizations also often tacitly expect individuals to use these facilities to "refresh themselves in order to put in longer work days (Hochschild, 1997; Schor, 1992). In contrast, it is harder to entice individuals to consistently work long hours in a workplace with few amenities.

**Proposition 12:** The better the working conditions, the more likely managers are to work longer hours.

**Organizational factors:** While the previous section addressed formal rewards for working long hours, here I consider organizations' informal rules about long work hours as well. The term "norm" is defined here as "an informal rule that develops within organizations to regularize members' behaviors" (Feldman, 2005). While rarely written down and sometimes unspoken, these informal rules can have a powerful impact on the intensity and consistency of individuals' behaviors. Here, then, norms about working long hours will refer to organizations' informal expectations of managers about the number of hours they should be working.

Clearly, multiple norms develop within work organizations and not all norms have equal power over the behavior of individual managers. For norms to influence individuals' behavior, they have to be clear enough and of sufficient strength and importance to attract manager's attention (Bettenhausen and Murnighan 1991; Gersick, 2000; Hackman, 1976; Jackson, 1966).

The 4 organizational factors that particularly impel managers to comply with organizational norms about long work hours are leadership and culture, selection and attrition processes, socialization processes and perceptions of monochronic/polychronic time.

Building on the works of Hall (1979) and Schein (1992) points out an important distinction between "monochronic" and "polychronic" time. The majority of managers in the U. S. view time as "monochronic", that is, managers view time as a measurable commodity that is spent productively or wasted. Work projects are to be completed within a preset number of time units (hours, days, week, months). In some other cultures, though, managers view time as "polychronic", that is, time is measured by how much is accomplished rather than by units of a clock or calendar. In polychronic time cultures, work is seen as having its own internal time cycle; a project will be completed when it comes to its natural fruition. Also, in polychronic cultures, it is more common for employees to work on several different projects at the same time.

Employees edge each project closer to completion but with little pressure to bring projects to closure in any present order.

Organizational norms, too, vary in the extent to which time is viewed as monochronic or polychronic in nature. Proposition 13 suggests that when organizations operate under monochronic time, managers will experience more normative pressure to work long hours.

Because time is seen as a fixed commodity, when preset deadlines are closing in, managers will feel pressured to work long hours to "keep to schedule". In contrast, in polychronic organizations, there are less likely to be perceptions of a "time frame" or anxiety about artificial deadlines (Perlow, 2002).

**Proposition 13:** In organizations that view time as monochronic managers are more likely to conform to norms about working longer hours.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) work on "people processing strategies" also suggests how different types of socialization processes may have differential effects on employee uniformity to organizational expectations. When newly hired and promoted managers are socialized individually and in an informal manner, they are more likely to be given freedom to experiment and deviate from established rules and norms. On the other hand, when organizations socialize new comers in groups with formal, fixed procedures- what Jones (2001) calls "the institutional patterns of socialization", the pressure to conform to normative pressure is much greater. This "institutional" pattern of socialization, then, is likely to lead managers to conform more readily to companies' request to work long hours.

**Proposition 14:** The more institutionalized the socialization process, the more likely the managers will conform to organizational norms about working longer hours.

**Economic factors:** Managers' tendency to work long hours may also be influenced by economic conditions facing the firm as a whole. Research on external threat to work groups, for example, suggests that the greater perceived external threats from competitors, the greater the manager's tendency to work longer hours will be. Also the greater the decline in corporate profits, the more likely managers will work longer hours and finally, the greater the threat of lay offs, the more likely managers will be working longer hours.

#### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The framework presented in this study, suggests that individual-level factors, job-level factors and economic

factors all influence managers' tendency to work long hours. As research on this phenomenon continues to unfold, it is important that the scope of the model be expanded to include moderator effects and interaction effects as well. Below, examples of some possible extensions of the model along these lines are presented in brief detail.

In previous research, the effects of age and organizational tenure on the tendency of managers to work long hours appear to be mixed. On one hand, the research on conformity suggests that when individuals are young and have little organizational tenure, they have less confidence in their own judgment and are more likely to conform to the expectations of others. Consequently, this research stream would suggest that age and organizational tenure would both be inversely related to longer work hours when norms about long work hours exist. On the other hand, some previous research on generational values suggests that young employees tend to be less committed to their organizations and are less willing to exert extra effort on their organizations' behalf (Payne, 1989).

A possible reconciliation of these research findings might involve the moderating effects of economic conditions. That is, the relationships between age/organizational tenure and hours worked may be stronger when economic conditions are poor. When firm profitability or macroeconomic conditions are poor, young managers with few years of service will have much less freedom to slack off without fear of termination or being unable to find another job.

In contrast, the relationship of age and organizational tenure with hours worked might be weaker when firm profitability and macroeconomic conditions are robust. Under favorable economic conditions, young managers will have more freedom to act consistently with their own values, since alternative employment may be readily available elsewhere.

The results of previous research on the impact of hierarchical level and personal performance history on hours worked are also mixed. In general, we would expect managers at higher levels of the organization and managers with strong performance records to be more protected from pressures to work long hours. For example, Hollander's (1958) work on "idiosyncrasy credits" suggests that managers gain credits in their personal reputation "balance sheets" by displaying consistently excellent performance on the job over a long period. By repeatedly showing that they are accomplished employees, high performers would feel less pressure to put in "face time" to validate their worth.

However, it may also be the case that the higher managers rise in the organizational hierarchy and the more successful they become, the more they internalize norms about working long hours. In other words, managers who have successful records in their companies may have internalized the pressure to work long hours-even though they have gained the freedom to deviate from normative expectations.

Here, a possible reconciliation might involve an interaction effect between hierarchical level (or performance record) and salience of the family breadwinner role. That is, the managers most likely to work long hours may be those at the higher levels of the organization (or those with the stronger performance records) for whom the role of family breadwinner is highly salient. For these managers, the inclination to work long hours developed through years of success and acclaim would be reinforced by the economic demands of being the major wage earner within the family. In contrast, the managers least likely to work long hours would be those at the lower levels of the organization (or those with the weaker performance records) for whom the role of family breadwinner is low in salience. For this latter set of managers, exit may be a more feasible (or attractive) alternative. By extending the model to include moderator and interaction effects such as these, an even fuller picture of managers, long work hours may emerge.

## CONCLUSION

Ironically, the observed increase in work hours may be counterproductive for both organizations and managers. For instance, if organizations desire longer work weeks in order to increase productivity, the evidence on that strategy is indeed mixed (Juster and Stafford, 2004). For many individuals, working long work days increases fatigue and decreases sharpness of decision making. (Babbar and Aspelin, 1998). Furthermore, when managers are putting in very long hours at work, the amount of time spent "working"-opposed to being present at work-tends to fall off as well (Karau and Williams, 1993).

Even if managers themselves want to work longer hours to purchase more goods to enjoy in their leisure time, then that goal, too, is not being fully realized. Hours of leisure in which to spend that money have declined (Schor, 1992) and purchases of work-saving appliances have done little to decrease the amount of time spent in household chores.

The tendency to work long hours, then, is by no means synonymous with greater organizational

productivity or higher quality of life outside the workplace. As research in this area continues, it is important that scholars consider not only the predictors of long work hours, but also the consequences of those work hours as well. In so doing, it is critical that both the beneficial and detrimental consequences of long work hours be considered for institutional and managerial effectiveness alike.

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