

There are moments in any institution when long working hours are both necessary and justified. Emergencies, national crises, urgent policy deadlines, or corporate reporting periods often demand extraordinary commitment. In such situations, extended hours reflect responsibility, professionalism, and dedication to duty.

The concern arises when long working hours cease to be occasional responses to urgent demands and instead become a permanent feature of workplace culture.

Research in psychology and workplace performance consistently shows that sustainable productivity depends more on clarity, prioritisation, and sound systems than on physical presence.

When employees routinely work late into the night outside of crisis periods, it may signal deeper issues ranging from poor planning and unclear role definition to anxiety about job security.

For some employees, prolonged hours become a protective strategy. In environments where visibility is mistaken for value, staying late creates the impression of indispensability.

Fear of being overlooked, replaced or judged as underperforming can quietly push individuals into a cycle of constant busyness. Over time, exhaustion becomes normalised and equated with commitment.

At a psychological level, this pattern is often linked to fear of uncertainty. Human beings naturally seek predictability and control.

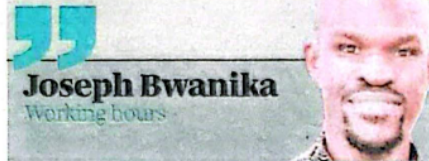
When performance metrics are unclear or organisational direction feels unstable, extended work hours provide a sense of reassurance. Being constantly active feels safer than appearing idle, even if productivity does not proportionally increase.

The same dynamic can appear at leadership level often with far-reaching institutional consequences. Leaders operating under pressure may initially extend their working hours to stabilise operations.

During genuine emergencies, such visibility can inspire confidence. However, when

Why long working hours can signal poor planning

When long working hours become habitual, they often conceal inefficiencies.



constant supervision becomes routine rather than situational, it may reflect deeper insecurity. Leaders who struggle to delegate effectively or who fear losing control may centralise decision-making. Files accumulate on one desk. Approvals slow down. Innovation becomes cautious.

Instead of strengthening institutional systems, leadership becomes personality-driven. Authority revolves around presence rather than process. While this approach may create short-term stability, it weakens long-term resilience. Institutions built around constant oversight often struggle to function independently.

Cultural norms further complicate the matter. In many professional settings, visible sacrifice is highly respected. The employee who leaves the office last is praised. The leader who rarely disconnects is viewed as hard-working and committed. Yet this culture rarely interrogates whether long hours stem from efficiency or from structural weaknesses.

Modern organisational thinking is increasingly shifting towards sustainable productivity and effective institutions distinguish between crisis-driven intensity and rou-

tine overwork. They promote strategic planning, encourage delegation, and measure performance by outcomes rather than hours logged. Employees are valued for results. Leaders are evaluated by the strength of the systems they build.

When long working hours become habitual, they often conceal inefficiencies, inadequate workflow design, weak succession planning, or resistance to change.

New strategies, digital reforms, and innovative approaches can be perceived as threats in such environments because they challenge familiar routines and reduce the need for constant manual oversight.

The distinction, therefore, is critical. Extended hours during emergencies reflect dedication and Persistent overwork as a daily culture may reflect insecurity, poor planning and incompetence in some cases.

Change, however, remains inevitable. Institutions evolve, leadership transitions occur, and careers eventually come to an end. Employees and leaders must therefore give their best while they serve, but with the understanding that no position is permanent.

Building strong systems, mentoring successors, and maintaining balance between professional duty and personal life ensure continuity beyond individual tenure.

At some point, everyone retires or moves on, and that transition should be marked by preparedness and dignity, not fear or a sense of collapse.

Work is a responsibility to be carried with excellence, but it should never become a matter of life and death.

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