

HUMAN RESOURCES

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Snooze you lose
or do you?

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- or do you?



Our working days are so full of meetings, appointments, deadlines and even more meetings, the only time left to do some real thinking is when the office finally goes quiet. Leaving us burning the midnight oil, going to bed late and getting up early to avoid the commuter rush. Even when we are at home, there is the constant attachment to our smartphones, watching for emails late into the night.

In this busy, globally connected world, our sleep is constantly being cut short. In fact one in four business leaders surveyed reported not getting enough sleep for four nights a week. A quarter of business people sleep with their smartphone beside the bed and over half check their phones before going to bed. But here's the wake-up call; adequate sleep is essential for top performance at all levels in the organisation.



“Every important mistake I’ve made in my life I made when I was tired.”

– Bill Clinton



Torture and sleep drunk

Sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture because without sleep our brains stop functioning properly. Severe sleep deprivation results in people blurting out information they know they should keep secret as they are less able to control their emotions and actions. But even a moderate sleep loss has a huge impact on performance. Recent research found that after 16-17 hours of being awake (say from 6am to midnight - 1am) cognitive performance is reduced to the same extent as driving drunk (with a limit of 0.05 blood alcohol concentration) with slowed reaction times, decreased awareness and impaired judgement.

Sleeping on the job

Sleep deprivation and work can be a very dangerous mix. A string of major accidents, from nuclear power plants and the Challenger explosion, to shipping accidents and oil spills, have all been found to have been caused, at least partially, by a lack of sleep (see side bar). While sleep related workplace accidents are not recorded in statistics, the Ministry of Transport reports that 14 percent of road accidents in 2015 were a result of fatigue, costing \$363 million. Overseas data from the USA and Sweden show that the odds of having a workplace accident were nearly twice as high for people who suffer from insomnia or disturbed sleep.

Sleep and executive performance

It is logical that sleep, or rather the lack of sleep, will have a direct impact on jobs that require intense concentration, fast reactions and alertness. What is more surprising is the impact that a lack of sleep has on performance in managerial and specialist technical professions. A lack of sleep reduces

the ability of the pre-frontal cortex to process information, manage multiple tasks and review thoughts, having a negative impact on decision making, emotional control, creativity and problem solving.

Poor Decision Making

A lack of sleep impairs the ability to make important decisions, to process information and work through complex issues. A survey of 1055 professionals (see table/diagram) reported that a lack of sleep meant they were less able to make decisions, formulate opinions and analyse information. Creativity and attention were also affected with 68 percent saying they found it harder to complete their tasks to the same standard as normal. As, Bill Clinton noted, tiredness results in mistakes and poor judgement calls, critical for high performance in executives and managers, not just presidents of the USA.

Emotional Intelligence is on snooze

It is not just the task orientated aspects of work but also the social aspects that are affected by a lack of sleep. Controlling emotions, reading emotional responses in others, and motivating others are all more difficult to do when tiredness sets in (see table/diagram).

Accidents caused by lack of sleep

• Chernobyl

Considered one of the world's worst nuclear accidents that killed 28 people and 370 people suffered radiation poisoning immediately after the accident, and the long-term health impacts are far higher. It was reported that the engineers had been working 13 hours or more at the plant before the accident happened.

• Three Mile Island

In 1979 the Three Mile Island nuclear plant reactor partially melted down. The accident occurred between 4am-6am when the plant's shift workers didn't notice a warning showing a stuck valve that resulted in the plant losing coolant.

• Challenger Explosion

The report into the Challenge Space Shuttle accident cited "... human error and poor judgement related to sleep loss and shift work during the early morning hours..." contributed to the accident resulting in seven deaths.

• Exxon Valdez

The oil spill from the tanker Exxon Valdez in Alaska, killing thousands of birds and wildlife, was allegedly caused by the third mate being asleep at the helm. The crew had put in a 22 hour shift before the accident to load the tanker.



Effective performance in organisations and teams depends heavily on the ability to work with others. When emotional intelligence is toned down it reduces the performance of not just the person who is tired but also impacts on their team.

Wake-up call to organisations

If you want people to perform at their best then it is time to wake-up to the importance of sleep. Sleep is a very personal issue, so what role can an organisation play in managing sleep? Sleep is similar to other well-being issues like nutrition, exercise and stress where there is a joint personal and organisational responsibility. An organisation's culture and policies can impact the ability of their people to get a quality sleep and function at their best.

- 1. Raising Awareness:** Many people are unaware of how much impact poor sleep can have on their performance. Sleep and its impact on performance needs to be a part of the organisation's health, safety and well-being programme. Bringing the topic up and making it part of the conversation is the first step to raising awareness.
- 2. Review your Culture:** Companies which have an Open All Hours culture often impact on sleep quality. If your senior managers are sending emails all hours of the night, then people will feel they have to respond at all hours, and are not relaxed in their sleep routine. Some companies have now implemented policies that emails are not to be sent after certain hours (eg after 7pm and before 6am) in order to break the cycle. An easy technology hack is to use an app that allows emails to be scheduled to be sent during normal hours.
- 3. Burden of being (seen to be) busy:** Some industries are known for long hours and those who are not putting in the hours are seen as slackers. If your incentives and rewards are based on face time, rather than on outputs and achievements, then this will encourage long hours and short sleep, ultimately leading to poor performance.
- 4. Travel and Jet Lag:** Company travel policies often encourage a lack of sleep by focusing on cost over the person's sleep e.g. taking the early morning flight to avoid an overnight hotel bill. But when your people have to perform at their best then this travel policy is a false saving compared to a poor decision made through tiredness. Jet lag is a disruption to our sleep cycle and circadian rhythm, so when scheduling business travel and meetings, schedule in recovery time so people can perform at their best.
- 5. Predictable Time Off:** In some industries being on-call and always available is a reality. By allocating times when people know they don't have to respond to their emails and ensure holidays are truly time away from work, it allows people to digitally disconnect, relax and sleep better.
- 6. Let them sleep on the job:** "No sleeping on the job" used to be a commonly written maxim in the company rules. However it is better to allow people to take a short nap on the job. A nap of 10

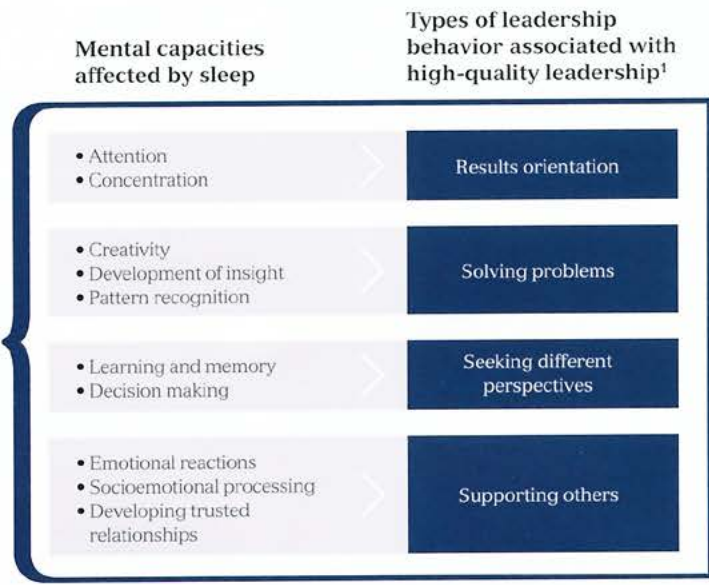


Diagram: Sleep Study

Ashridge Business School surveyed 1055 managers and professionals from UK, Europe, Middle East and America about the impact of sleep on their performance using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. The table shows the percentage of respondents who selected that the behaviour was "like me" or "Very much like me".

Cognitive Functions	
Am less able to focus in meetings	69
Take longer to complete tasks	68
Find it harder to work with particularly challenging colleagues	65
Find it challenging to generate new ideas	60
Am less able to manage competing demands	59
Find it challenging to use my least preferred influencing style	53
Find it hard to have difficult conversations	48
I am less effective in forming opinions	46
Complete tasks at lower standard than I would normally	43
Emotional Control	
Feel more irritable	84
Feel more stressed	75
Become frustrated more easily when a project is not going to plan	71
Feel like I want to be left alone	69
Feel less optimistic about my future	62
Do not want to share my thoughts and feelings with others	53
Am less mindful of my impact on others	44

to 30 minutes improves creativity and productivity.

In our busy 24/7, always-on, globally connected world a lack of sleep is far too common. High performance requires that your managers, teams and employees are making good decisions, alert to prevent accidents and can use their emotions to work well together. Sleep has an impact on our ability to do this. Now it is time for organisations to wake up to the importance of how sleep can enhance performance through effective work-life integration policies and a well-being culture. Snooze - you won't lose. **HR**



Jane Piper is an Organisational Psychologist whose aim is to make work enjoyable in our fast paced digital age. She consults with multinational organisations and individuals on work optimisation, collaboration and engagement. She is a New Zealander who went on an OE and stayed away longer than planned, and is now living and working in Zürich Switzerland. For further information see her website www.pipsych.com.