

It's about managing your energy, not time

The goal of managing energy is the optimisation of alertness and performance. It isn't the amount of time one devotes to any particular task; it is the quality of the energy you bring to it.



Reji Varghese

Last Updated : 21 January 2025, 08:04 IST

Follow Us :



0



Image for representation. Credit: iStock Photo

Recently, a video of [L&T chairman S N Subrahmanyam](#) exhorting his employees to work 90 hours a week went viral on social media. Other corporate leaders have also advocated harsh work regimens for various reasons, ranging from character-building to nation-building.

ADVERTISEMENT



The raging debate seems to be centred around the number of hours worked, but could all these corporate gurus be barking up the wrong tree?

Research has shown that managing energy is far more critical to success than managing one's time. "Time is a fixed quantity—there's only so much daily. Energy, on the other hand, is not fixed. The amount of energy you have during any specific period depends on various conditions, and it's worth it to pay more attention to your energy than it is to pay attention to time," says energy therapist and International Coaching Federation Professional Certified Coach Avril Quadros.

The goal of managing energy is the optimisation of alertness and performance. It isn't the amount of time one devotes to any particular task; it is the quality of the energy you bring to it. "Even 20 minutes of high-quality energy will do a lot more good than many hours of low-quality energy spent on that task," she adds.

Viji Hari, a diversity and mental health expert and CEO of a human resource consultancy, says, "The push for 90-hour workweeks—essentially 15-hour days—raises critical questions about the sustainability of such a lifestyle. The pursuit of relentless productivity at the cost of family, health, and balance threatens to create a cycle where burnout becomes the norm, and children's emotional and social well-being is compromised. True progress lies in fostering environments where energy is managed wisely, work-life balance is prioritised, and both professional and personal roles are fulfilled with care."

The energy crisis

A study by Gallup found that 75% of employees experience burnout at work, and only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged at work, while 63% are not engaged, and 24% are actively disengaged. This lack of engagement can be attributed to employees being exhausted, both physically and mentally. An American Psychological Association (APA) survey revealed that 60% of employees experience stress at work, leading to fatigue, burnout, and decreased productivity.

In a LinkedIn post, former HCL CEO Vineet Nayar said: "We glorify long hours, back-to-back meetings, and being always on. But an unlive life drains energy, creativity, and purpose."

Ever since our school days, we have been working according to timetables. Managing time and schedules has been of paramount importance. So, thinking about managing our energy levels instead of our time is a paradigm shift in thinking.

Managing energy is not just about getting enough sleep or exercising regularly. It's about understanding how to allocate your physical, emotional, and mental resources to achieve optimal performance. A study by the Harvard Business Review found that employees who managed their energy levels were 50% more productive and had 25% higher job satisfaction.

"In an era of relentless work hours, shifting focus from time to energy is vital as the true driver of productivity. A well-rested, mentally engaged individual achieves more without sacrificing well-being. True success lies in a holistic approach—balancing work, rest, and personal growth—where managing energy, not hours, ensures both productivity and a fulfilling life," says Viji.

The four dimensions of energy

There are four dimensions of energy that employees need to manage.

Physical energy: Maintaining physical stamina and endurance throughout the day.

Emotional energy: The ability to manage emotions, build strong relationships, and maintain a positive attitude.

Mental energy: The ability to focus, concentrate, and make effective decisions.

Spiritual energy: The ability to connect with a higher purpose, find meaning in work, and maintain a sense of fulfilment.

Energy oscillation

"The key to managing your energy is to alternate between energy expenditure and energy recovery—our bodies and minds are built for oscillating energy use, not linear use. Focusing on energy instead of time encourages you to think about your energy use throughout the day as oscillating, with times when you're working hard in a given area and other times when you're resting," says Avril.

That approach starkly contrasts a linear view of energy expenditure, which is often at the core of productivity or time management systems.

Strategies for managing energy

To manage energy effectively, employees can adopt the following strategies:

Prioritise self-care: Sleep well, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy diet.

Take breaks: Take regular breaks to recharge and refocus.

Set boundaries: Establish clear boundaries to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Practice mindfulness: "Rejuvenation practices like Meditation, Yoga, and Tai Chi are your secret power sources. They recharge your energy, sharpen your focus, and greatly enhance productivity, helping you achieve more without burning out," says Avril.

Re-evaluate priorities: Align work with personal values and priorities to increase motivation and engagement.

Managing energy is crucial for corporate employees to achieve optimal productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction. Employees can unlock their full potential and drive business success by understanding the four dimensions of energy and adopting strategies to manage energy effectively. As workplaces continue to evolve, organisations need to prioritise energy management and provide employees with the tools and resources needed to thrive.