

Professionals more likely to work outside 'core' hours, demands increasing

ANDY PRENDERGAST

Just over one-third of white-collar professionals are starting work earlier or finishing later than their 'core' office hours, with just 25% sticking to the core hours, a new survey finds.

A new Robert Walters Ireland survey reveals that most professionals in Ireland are working outside core office hours – and nearly half of employers are redistributing work amongst their existing staff due to skills shortages.

The research found that only 25% of professionals now say they adhere to the core hours at work, instead over a third (37%) are starting early or finishing late every day, while 38% report their hours being workload dependent.

The main reason cited for working beyond their usual office hours was “catching up on work or meeting deadlines” at 54% of respondents. A further 25% reported working late “to communicate with teams in different time zones.”

The survey uses a general standard of Irish offices operating within the 8:00 am to 6:00 pm window. With a one-hour break for lunch, the average workweek is 37.5 hours.

Other Robert Walters Ireland research found that 53% of professionals admit to checking emails whilst on annual leave “as a way of reducing the backlog they’ll return to.”

Microsoft’s Work Trend Index recently highlighted the evolving trend of the “infinite workday”. The research showed that 40% of professionals worldwide start checking their emails from 6 a.m to manage busy inboxes. While 29% of professionals log back into their work emails by 10 p.m., and 20% do so on weekends as well. The study also found that the number of meetings held after 8 p.m. has increased by 16% year-on-year.

Suzanne Feeney, Country Manager of Robert Walters Ireland, said that despite critical skills shortages impacting hiring plans in some areas, “many employers still expect the same productivity and output, putting pressure on existing staff.”

“Our research indicates that many Irish workers are working longer hours to meet demands or connect with colleagues in different time zones.”

“To avoid professionals feeling pressured to clock-in at all hours, response times must be clarified through things like time-zone tagging in correspondence, implementing delayed sends and allocating specific, pre-agreed time slots for international calls”, she recommended.

SKILL SHORTAGES

Forty-five per cent of employers are “redistributing the work among staff” to deal with skilled talent shortages, while 26% stated they were hiring less skilled professionals to help fill the gaps.

In this context, two-thirds of existing staff describe their workload as “heavy” and “demanding”.

When asked about different strategies employers could implement to help staff avoid overworking, 43% of workers said they would like their employers to trial “power hours” in the office: allocating specific blocks of time for quiet, interruption-free working to promote concentration and help boost productivity in the office.

RISK OF BURNOUT

Ms Feeney noted that while implementing “power hours” may not fit every workplace, “it does underscore the importance of optimising the working day.”

“If employers continue to tolerate a culture of silent overwork within their organisations – especially in the wake of skills shortages – they risk not only burnout and attrition but also a collapse in morale and productivity.”

“Addressing this means resetting expectations on working hours from the top. Not only should leaders openly acknowledge when responsibilities and remits are increased; clear protocols and expectations should be put in place to ensure staff are supported in prioritising tasks, setting expectations for deadlines and being transparent on their capacity.”