

Layabout managers

 By [Auguste Coetzer](#)

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Worker's Day recognises the national contribution of our labour force. It's also a good time to recognise that the workers have a point when they insist it's unfair to focus exclusively on the low paid when companies complain of time wasting, laziness, sick note abuse and other forms of workplace cheating.

Those in managerial grades can be just as guilty and the problem is international as well as local.

Indeed, the challenge is almost bound to increase in view of the worldwide growth of flexi-time, working from home, internet access via company systems, the popularity of mobile devices and rights around maternity and paternity leave.

Scrutiny of international and South African HR periodicals and local CCMA rulings indicates that malingering, stealing company time and using company resources for personal purposes is a serious white-collar issue.

The higher up the chain this occurs the greater the potential damage. Those on the shop floor may conclude that if lazy bosses who commit time fraud can get away with it, so can they.

The dilemma of how to police the boss was crystallised in an article published by the American Psychological Association.

Apparently, it suits many US companies to look away rather than tackle internet abuse. One executive asked: "What are you going to do, fire the vice-president because he's downloading porn?"

The article said 83% of surveyed businesses adopt internet policies, but almost half show little concern about excessive time on the net.

For downloading pornography alone, 21% of surveyed companies said they had fired or disciplined staff.

Not gender-specific

In India, efforts to woo women into responsible positions include 'privilege packages' such as flexi-time and working from home. This prompted complaints from men that perks can be abused.

However, one Chennai-based consultant noted that laziness or unwillingness to work is not gender-specific. Men are just as guilty.

In the US, another focus area is the impact that a layabout team member can have on morale and productivity. Over there, skilled individuals increasingly work in teams in a relaxed atmosphere. They are treated as professionals, with the assumption they will not take off needless time for family or health reasons.

Unfortunately, when one 'professional' exploits the system, team morale plummets and work is affected.

Abuse was also noted in an investigation at the US Patent and Trademark Office into flexi-time and working from home. The subsequent report said many in positions of trust routinely lie about hours worked.

A particular concern locally is that managers are asleep on the job when it comes to combating corruption. The Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act says those in positions of authority who know (or ought to have known) of corrupt practices involving R100,000 or more must report the matter to police.

This does not happen nearly often enough, judging by the growing perception that corruption has become a national scandal.

Managers at every level must set an example. Abuse of privilege has to be kept in check, including abuse of first-class travel and accommodation perks.

Finger pointing at the workers while ignoring abuse in managerial ranks won't get the job done.

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