

24/7 Workplace Connectivity: A Hidden Ethical Dilemma

Presented by
Charles F. Piazza

Business and Organizational Ethics Partnership
Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University
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Introduction

'Extreme' Jobs on the Rise.

Marilyn Gardner, The Christian Science Monitor, December 4, 2006

Flextime Sham: "Flextime" and "Part time" Used To Mean Fewer Hours. Not Anymore.

Sharon Liveten, Pink Magazine, June/July 2006

Always on the Job, Employees Pay with Health.

The New York Times, September 5, 2004

Overwork in America: When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much

Ellen Galinsky, The Family and Work Institute, 2004

Laptop Slides Into Bed in Love Triangle

The New York Times, August 24, 2006

Please Don't Make Me Go On Vacation.

The New York Times, August 10, 2006

These headlines and article titles, many from the popular press, capture today's work climate. For many, work is a 24/7 endeavor. With laptop and cell phone in hand, employees are always connected to their workplace, ready to deal with what ever issues emerge no matter what time or day of the week. This is in addition to the long hours they may already be physically spending in the office.

The twenty-first century corporation has a global reach, and competes in a fast-paced, ever-changing world-wide business climate. To be agile and responsive to economic and market demands, many business enterprises establish working partnerships with other companies, disperse their operational units throughout the world, develop a global workforce, and collaborate via complex electronic information and communication systems. Functioning with a 24/7 work mentality, organizations are information-driven, socio-technical entities—human-digital work systems—that often are experienced as a seemingly endless series of conversations, decisions, tasks and projects. With information and communication technology (ICT) having become integral to the workplace, the human person and the business's ICT are one, unified system. With this, a new type of workplace and worker has been created.



In dispersed business enterprises the workplace is not defined by a designated location, but by the worker's presence and attention to the task being conducted. Effective information flow and dynamic interactive connectivity are fundamental elements, making it necessary for

managers, staffs and team members to be available 24/7 to share information when needed, and address issues when they arise. The digitization of the workplace is changing the human experience of work in radical ways that have far reaching ramifications for present day employees, successful business operations, social health, as well as future generations. The profile of the 24/7 workplace is one of an organization that is in operation around the clock, where managers, staffs and teams always stay connected to the workplace, and managers have power beyond the physical office. Thus, the organization essentially “never sleeps,” and employees never totally “go off duty.”

In light of this business strategy, how can work be conducted as if people authentically mattered? How can dynamic organizations function so employees are perceived as valued human beings, and not exploited by the organization’s agility and technology applications? What organizational cultural values are needed to guide businesses in developing operational and managerial practices so people do not become mere mechanical components of a large scale workplace digital information and communication system? How can organizations aid managers and staff members in their striving for economic and performance excellence, while not losing sight of the significance of non-work relationships, sacrificing their health, or letting go of personal interests that are meaningful to them?

In today’s dispersed business climate, work-life balance is a complex issue. Its successful resolution can only be achieved by the conscious attention from both employees and employers. Because of the significant concerns that business ICT applications raise, the position this essay takes is that organizations have a responsibility, like with other workplace health and safety issues, to ask questions about information and communication systems applications’ impact upon employees’ work-life balance.

Understanding and limiting digital technology’s ill effects on workers’ health and relationships must become a recognized priority. Managers and employees can then work together to design and implement information and communication systems, and organizational practices that are beneficial to the business’ operations, but less intrusive in workers’ home life and leisure time. In this manner, productivity and performance can be high quality, and work meaningful and satisfying.

Thus, the purpose of this essay is to heighten the awareness of the importance of critically reflecting upon the impact of business ICT application on the workforce, and its creation of 24/7 connectivity. While raising more questions than providing answers, the aim is to encourage an honest grappling among members of the business and academic communities about how digital technology is transforming the nature of contemporary work life, and the ethical concerns arising from the digitalization of the workplace. The intent of this discussion is not to bash corporations that focus their energies on having the highest competitive advantage possible, or to judge professionals who thoroughly enjoy making work their life’s number one priority and always being available to address work issues.

By presenting insights gained from a review of existing research and from conversations with corporate leaders and working adults in university graduate programs, the hope is to promote an ongoing dialogue that:

- Examines the ramifications of the 24/7 work environment on current workers, their families, and future generations.
- Encourages business professionals to discern potential consequences of technological applications before implementing them in the workplace.

- Aids in the development of organizational policies and practices regarding 24/7 connectivity that authentically respect employees as individuals with personal lives and relationships, and protect their physical and psychological well-being.
- Fosters the creation of a healthy, less stressful workplace where employees find work engaging, meaningful and satisfying, and less intrusive than some present day work environments.

A Snapshot of the 24/7 Workplace



Organizations have often been analyzed from the vantage point of their structures, human resources, political and power systems, and cultures (Bolman and Deal, 2003). When examined through the lens of communication, an ever-evolving, intelligent, socio-technical network is revealed. Many of today's employees "think for a living" (Davenport, 2005). They are always accessing gathered data, sharing insights learned from experience, being innovative, handling complex issues, and striving to make well-informed decisions. This is particularly true for management level professionals.

Some of the organizational hallmarks of this information-driven networked business enterprise are:

- Highly competitive business arena where time equates to gaining market advantage and saving money.
- Dispersed organizational units with a global workforce.
- Culture characterized by speed, agility, responsiveness and innovation.
- 24/7 operational mentality and practice.
- Collaborative, team-oriented, multitasking work strategy.
- Feedback-oriented and innovative knowledge commons work climate.
- Teleworking operational practice with flexible work hours.
- A symbiotic relationship between people and technology, particularly information and communication systems.
- Continuously evolving networks and being available as needed.

In the dispersed business enterprise with its flexible work environment, people are working different schedules, and are often in different time zones. Effectively, business operations never cease; for, metaphorically speaking, the company does not "close its doors" at the end of the work day. No matter when decisions need to be made, or emergencies arise, they need to be addressed in a timely fashion. Such an operation requires a high level of connectivity and employee availability to function efficiently and successfully. Such access needs to be able to reach beyond the traditional workplace office, making the customary 9-to-5 workday no longer feasible.

In this 24/7 workplace where set timeframes and workspaces are discarded, employees focus on being productive, and have become accustomed to always performing. They gauge their performance by its speed, cost-effectiveness, high quality and customer satisfaction. Employees are always connected, never totally go "offline" because they continuously think about, monitor, work on, and/or are available to deal with work issues. For some, non-work modes of existence even vanish.

Professionals I have spoken with over the years fall into one of four categories regarding their stance about the 24/7 workplace and being constantly connected.

- Some find this work style professionally enjoyable, exciting, engaging and psychologically rewarding.
- Then there are those who acknowledge its extreme demands, but feel that this form of work environment is necessary for today's competitive, dispersed business enterprise.
- Others question the 24/7 workplace and find its work environment unsatisfying, but feel that they must accept it to retain their jobs, stay financially secure, and be able to provide for their families and retirement years.
- Lastly, there are those employees who do not want to work in this manner, and choose to establish an alternative work manner that reduces the availability and workload demands.

No matter which position one has, it is important to be aware of the ramification of business ICT applications and 24/7 connectivity. The reason is simple. Technology is a major factor in the transformation of how we interact with colleagues, multitask and handle work duties, configure relationships, address family responsibilities, and approach recreation time. Various technologies are definitely benefiting organizations and aiding employees perform their jobs. They are also contributing, though, to workplace stress, a feeling of being overworked, and a sense of not being able to focus on one task and do a quality job. Workers are being marginalized from their families (Galinsky, et. al, 2004), and isolated from their non-work friends.

Further, workers are increasingly unable to physically or mentally divorce themselves from job responsibilities. 24/7 work requirements and virtual modes of operation are affecting employees' health and personal life. Workloads are increasing, making multitasking even more imperative. Professionals are working longer hours at the office, and then continue to work at home. Home activities are interrupted by work phone calls. Project team members consult with each other on weekends. Commute time is used to check in with staff members, handle clients, or catch up on work phone calls. Sick days and vacations are not being taken regularly. In essence, the worker is becoming a component of the business's electronic information system, and a cog in the organizational machinery. In the 24/7 workplace, the human element is being lost.

Human Dignity and the Framing of Workplace Ethical Questions

Working and being available 24/7 has many ramifications. It affects: 1) civic involvement, 2) business performance, 3) relationship stability, 4) parenting quality, and 5) personal health.

Workplace stress is on the rise, and is impairing employees' health. This is particularly true for white-collar professionals, because they have major job responsibilities, work under pressure, and have a tendency to not take long vacations to recuperate, if they take them at all. The International Labor Office, an agency of the United Nations, states in *Economic Security for a Better World* (Standing, et. al., 2004) that increasing work stress and job demands are occurring in many countries throughout the world. This report also predicts that the occupational diseases of the twenty-first century will be heart attacks, strokes and suicide.

Extreme Jobs: The Dangerous Allure of the 70-Hour Workweek (Hewlett and Luce, 2006), a recent study published in the Harvard Business Review, points out that 44% of high earning professionals feel that the pace of their jobs is extreme. In *Overwork in America: When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much* (Galinsky, et. al., 2004), the Families and Work Institute

reports that one in three employees are chronically overworked. 89% feel that their job is very demanding, and, at times, there is not enough time to get the job done. 36% of those considered highly overworked experience extreme levels of stress, with 48% of them feeling that their health is poor. Only 41% of those highly overworked believe that they are effective at taking sufficient care of themselves, while 21% of this category has symptoms of clinical depression.

The study further notes, that only 14% of the U.S. workforce takes an extended vacation of two weeks or more. 37% takes less than a 7-day vacation. One in five employees does job related work while on vacation. Because of the work that accumulates while they are gone, 43% feel overwhelmed when they return. 39% of employees feel a sense of anger at their employers for expecting too much.

Studies also indicate that such work habits are affecting family life. In *'Extreme' Jobs on the Rise*, Marilyn Gardner (2006) points out that we live in a culture that idealizes extreme behavior, and is one of the motivating factors for over a third of highly paid professionals to work more than 60 hours per week. Besides eating and sleep habits, such work routines significantly impact quality relationship time, involvement with parenting children, and engaging in family activities. When work becomes such a demanding priority, choices have to be made, and some things suffer. As reported in the Families and Work Institute's *National Study of the Changing Workforce* (Bond, et. al., 2002), jobs are increasingly interfering with family responsibilities and their well-being.

Thus, 24/7 workplace connectivity raises many questions for both workers and business leaders. Among them are:

- Does the work day ever come to a close?
- Can one be "offline or out of touch" and still be a responsible employee?
- Are vacations possible? Can one ever afford to be sick?
- How does one follow career aspirations and obtain financial stability, while taking family responsibilities seriously?
- What is the responsibility of an employer to ensure that work and personal time boundaries are established so health and well-being are maintained?
- What are the organizational cultural values that enable a business to foster sustainable work-life balance?
- How can ICT be applied in business situations in a manner that promotes quality of life?

Keeping these pressing questions in mind, this essay turns to articulating a virtue ethic framework that can enable business leaders foster organizational cultural values that foster employee well-being and quality of life in a socio-technical environment.

From a virtue ethic perspective, people have an inherent right to pursue the good life, and seek their fullest potential. They also have a right to be treated with dignity, and not be devalued. These notions are clearly set forth in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A business enterprise that subscribes to a virtue ethic approach would not want to deny or be an impediment to these rights, and, as a human institution, would seek to uphold them. Human resource laws and regulations concerning discrimination, harassment, violence and safety are a testament to the organization's requirement to create a humane work

environment that treats all with the dignity they inherently deserve. An organization, as well as its individual members, has a responsibility to treat members of the workforce with dignity, respecting their rights and fostering their well-being. Since employees have a right to a physically and psychologically safe and healthy work environment, the psychological ramifications of a 24/7 connected workplace alone are cause enough for business leaders to take seriously the need to be aware of ICT's impact upon workers.

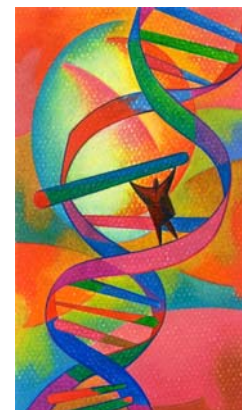
Further, virtue ethics is about character and making choices. It is not a prescriptive stance, but a call to discern and seek higher standards, to be critically reflective, to act in a praiseworthy manner, and challenge oneself to realistically live the ideal. In regards to the workplace, it is a call to conduct business and work in a socio-technical world as if people are its stakeholders. It is a challenge to gauge business success not by the mere following of pragmatic business and management principles, but by being a worker, a manager, or a business leader with integrity who makes a lasting contribution. It is a challenge to establish an organizational culture and work environment that enables people to align their talents and energies with the business' goals, work to their fullest potential, and live meaningfully.

Respect and human dignity are fundamental to work satisfaction and a productive work environment. Being a socially conscious and responsible organization includes not creating work practices that adversely affect employees, their partners, and their families. Employees are entitled to a sense of autonomy and independence, enabling them to have a sense of integrity, fulfillment, and happiness in their work. They have a right to be able to shape their work, including the direction and format it takes. These are important concepts to integrate into an organization's culture, even though many employees only work for the money. A job should not be dehumanizing, even if an individual does not see their job as their "life work."

The human person can easily be forgotten or lost in a technical business environment because technology and profits can easily take over, making the workforce mechanistic, and the worker an expendable commodity. Thus, keeping human dignity in the forefront of a business enterprise enables it to remain cognizant of the above human rights and values.

In a socio-technical organizational system, dignity relates to the establishment and maintenance of a balanced system that does not demean the human person, nor make the person a cog in a machine, or a processing chip on a motherboard in a digital information system. Dignity is about creating and sustaining the work rhythm so the worker is not exploited or harmed, and, if so desired, has a full life outside of the workplace. It is about fostering a harmonious and compatible relationship between people and the machines they use, so both the worker and the organization can reach their full potential and dreams, and workers are enabled to maintain and nourish the relationships and interests that are meaningful to them. From this vantage point dignity is about the well-being of the organizational system in general, and the human element in particular.

Business technologies, then, complement employees, and enhance the work experience. ICT should free them to do their best work and improve both the quality and experience of work. Technology is never to control or enslave. Thus, ICT applications and organizational practices are to maintain a healthy work environment where implemented technical devices and systems do not harm the employee in any way, nor create a debilitating workload.



In light of this, worker dignity is about balance and boundaries in the business organizational system. Attention to worker dignity shapes business strategies, organizational dynamics and communication, managerial practice, and work habits. It is the guiding principle for how organizational power over the employee is exercised. It is the norm by which job expectations and requirements, ICT applications, and availability expectations are benchmarked.

Worker dignity is about who has ownership of the employee's life—the individual or the employing company. It is about the employee having ownership and control of his/her own life and work style, and setting boundaries to the organization's power and the manager's presence in one's personal and home life.

Worker dignity is about orienting work around life, and not vice-versa. It is about giving family members and non-work colleagues a significant presence and voice in a one's life, and a claim on one's time as one sees fit.

Thus, human dignity in the workplace is concerned with recognizing and valuing the human aspect of a socio-technical organizational system when discussing the business enterprise:

- Seeing the employee holistically, a human being who is more than just a worker.
- Understanding the significance of solitude, social interaction, family relationships, civic engagement, and recreation for a person and his/her well-being.
- Accepting that people have a right to direct and control their own lives, and shape their livelihoods in a personally meaningful manner.
- Reclaiming that work is about meaningful occupation, not merely a means for personal survival and organizational profit.
- Developing human-centric information and communication systems that enhance and serve humankind.

While values hold out standards, they also can create a forum for reflection because of the thought-provoking questions they raise. The notion of human dignity points towards related values that encompass well-being, rights, power and equity of resources. As outlined below, human dignity, coupled with these four values, can serve well as guiding ethical lenses when implementing ICT and establishing work-life balance practices in a 24/7 work environment.

- **Enhances Human Dignity.** Do workplace practices and/or the organization's utilization of ICT dehumanize the user or anyone associated with him/her? Do they create an unreasonable workload? Is the quality of life and/or work diminished by the creation and deployment of this practice, technology, or information system?
- **Fosters Health and Well-being.** Do workplace practices and/or ICT impair—physically or emotionally—the well-being or livelihood of those that employ them? Do they harm, in any way, the worker's family, friends, etc.? Do they lower organizational morale, create anger towards the organization or colleagues, or diminish organization's spirit or community networking?
- **Safeguards Human Rights.** Will any commonly recognized human rights be lost or violated by the engagement in these workplace practices, or the use of this ICT? Does the technology or practices exploit the generosity of employees and their personal resources?
- **Promotes Appropriate Use of Power.** Will any individual or group potentially be disenfranchised or discriminated against due to the application of this practice or technology? Is an in appropriate use of power allowed or created by this

practice or technological application? Does the organization and management in appropriately intrude into the employee's home life and non-work time?

- **Advocates Equity of Resources.** Are any individuals or groups—corporate, civic, or international—disadvantaged or deprived of needed resources by the nature of this system or the practices that surround it?

Ethical Issues and Concerns

With this discussion of human dignity, rights and a safe workplace as a backdrop, let's examine more closely the 24/7 workplace and the issues that lead to overwork, burnout and the loss of ownership of one's life and private time.



Knowledge work is different from physical labor. It is more difficult to “leave work at the office,” because job tasks are portable, plus work stays with one mentally and emotionally. As economic and market dynamics continue to shift, business becomes more competitive and fast-paced, and the need to work in a “lean” manner increases, managers more and more play on this dynamic, expecting employees to be available and work during off hours. Employees take this 24/7 expectation seriously, perceiving it as a job requirement. If they disagree or encounter a family situation that would hinder them working 24/7, they rarely say anything for fear of losing their job or future career opportunity. As competition in the business arena increases, and the global organizational structure becomes the norm, fewer opportunities for not working in a 24/7 environment are possible.

Nine common threads that run through the workplace illustrate the condition in which workers perform their duties.

- A synthetic, continuously morphing work environment fashioned by organizational strategies, market demands, managerial expectations, workloads and job requirements, resulting in a reduction of job predictability and stability that contributes to workplace stress.
- An organizational strategy, structure and management practice founded upon accessibility and communication, resulting in the need for 24/7 connectivity that is creating a sense of urgency and expected immediate response to workplace communiqués.
- The integration of digital information systems and technologies into the very fabric of work and business operations, resulting in the worker becoming dependent upon and ultimately being identified with digital technology.
- A continuous flow of information that has developed an information glut, times creating a state of being overwhelmed, thus parallelizing workers and inhibiting them from being able to locate needed information and effectively performing their jobs.
- Simultaneously participating in more than one meeting or project network via electronic information and communication systems, therefore lessening workers' attentiveness and concentration on the particular task at hand.
- The perception in the business arena that work is the primary life task, causing employees to choose between a successful career and an enriching private life, between work duties and family responsibilities, between financial stability and meaningful non-work work interests.

- The blurring of the boundaries between the workplace and home, leading to the loss of the distinction between work time and personal time.
- The encroachment of organizational and managerial presence into employee's personal life, resulting in the worker's loss of control over his/her life and schedule.
- The inability of workers to separate themselves from the presence of work and its duties and demands, causing them to not always take sick days and vacation time when needed.

Thus, the ethical issues that surround the worker are associated with five areas: availability and workload, employment requirements, work resources, health and livelihood, information processing and overload. Tables 1 outlines the particular characteristics of these areas.

Table 1.

Ethical Impact on Workers Associated with 24/7 Work Connectivity
<p>While not an exhaustive list, key ethical concerns include:</p> <p>Availability and Workload.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1) Need to always be available to lead, provide input, problem-solve, collaborate in work that is ongoing or arises from a crisis, 2) Expected to be a subject matter expert (SME) or knowledgeable, experienced employee to project teams or other employees, 3) Short project timeframes, or target timelines to retain a competitive advantage position, or desired market share, 4) Too much work to complete or information to process in an eight-hour, five-day work week, 5) Working with a global workforce, or in a dispersed organization requires one to be available or work during nontraditional hours, on holidays, weekends, etc., and 6) Travel time. <p>Employment Requirement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1) Availability expected, 2) Job grows to fill availability, 3) Work until job is completed is expected, and 4) Subject matter expert (SME) to the company at large as needed. <p>Work Resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1) Short staffed, 2) Limited resources, 3) Use personal equipment and home space for work, and 4) Not always compensated for all hours worked. <p>Health and Livelihood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1) Prioritize work, company loyalty and business success over personal health, quality family time, and valued relationships, 2) Unable to psychologically and emotional disconnect, and 3) Unable to take sick days, vacation time, etc. <p>Information Processing and Overload.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1) Glut of information, 2) Work paralysis due to overload, and 3) Cannot stop processing information and ideas when away from work.

The ethical dilemmas that managers face are rooted in the current highly competitive business climate and the blurring of the boundaries between the workplace and home. They easily lead to the commoditization of the worker, and an unintentional abuse of organizational power. Table 2 spells out the details of these dilemmas.

Table 2.

Managerial Ethical Dilemmas Associated with the 24/7 Work Connectivity
<p>While not an exhaustive list, key ethical dilemmas include:</p> <p>High Pressure Culture of Speed, Efficiency, Cost-Efficient and Competitive Advantage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Business and work metrics: 1) Business market growth, 2) Increased profits, 3) Operational effectiveness, 4) Cost-efficiency, 5) Total customer satisfaction.▪ Operate in dispersed and follow the sun manner.▪ Must keep projects moving. <p>Worker as Machine and Expendable Commodity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Work is primary focus and life task.▪ Give employee a workload based upon what needs to be done, not what worker can handle.▪ Not understanding and caring mentality or leadership approach.▪ Company vision, value statements, and culture descriptions at time say employees are valued, but operational practice and attitude indicate different. <p>Constant, Anytime Communication and Collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ ICT designed and applied to enable needed communication and teamwork based upon organizational needs.▪ Intrusiveness of organization and management into employee's personal life. <p>Reduced Resources Mentality and Work Climate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Low operational cost perspective and practice. Often an organizational mandate and sense of good business practice.▪ Too much to do with too limited resources, particularly human and financial.▪ Downsizing workforce size, but maintain or increase work output.▪ Jobs are now too large and complex for the number of employees assigned. <p>Managerial Power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Perception of company ownership of employee due to compensation for work. Notion of organizational power and control over employee.▪ Work until job is done, but with the "enterprise" nature of the organization, work is never completed. Always work to do.▪ Company has a right to intrude into home life because it has much at stake, and the employee has a responsibility for managing the work successfully.▪ Culture of fear and power.▪ Managerial power over: 1) Job requirements and work expectations, 2) Work schedule, 3) Financial security, 4) Career opportunities.

Recommendations.

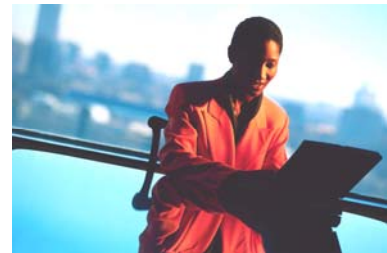
The ethical issues associated with the 24/7 workplace challenge business leaders to discern what type of organizational culture and managerial attributes foster communication, the acquisition of knowledge and the use of information technology without exploiting a company's human resources, nor impairing their well-being.

In light of the virtue ethic presented earlier, managing the 24/7 workplace is about creating work intentions and technological applications rooted in the notions of human dignity and of the good life. It is about setting boundaries on the organization's intrusion into an individual's life, and the manager's power over the employee. There are five areas that are important in establishing a 24/7 technological work environment that fosters employee well-being, and thus the potential for a higher level of work satisfaction and quality performance.

Organizational Culture. A business' culture is the social ecology that sets the vision and practice of the company, plus the tone for how the workforce will be viewed and treated. Thus, an organization's culture needs to be critically aware of the socio-technical nature of contemporary business enterprises, and be sensitive to the impact of the particular ICT applications utilized in its daily operations. As more organizations discover and declare that their employees are their greatest asset, it important that they develop policies and practices that are rooted in an authentic sense of human dignity where people are truly valued and not dehumanized by the technical aspects of the workplace. While striving to reach strategic corporate objectives is the overarching goal, working in a manner that fosters employee health and well-being must always be a fundamental concern.

To achieve a workplace rooted in worker dignity, organizations need to:

- Comprehend their synthetic nature, and ground their beliefs and values in a candid understanding of the transformative power of digital technologies, and information and communication systems' ability to reshape the image of the workforce and mechanize the human worker, transforming employees into networked information processing nodes.
- Establish a work environment that does not overly blur the boundaries between machine and the person.
- Deploy ICT in a manner that serves people and human work, expanding human capabilities, improving quality performance and productivity, and enhancing the work experience.
- Foster and maintain a non intrusive communication practice and management style, limiting organizational access to employees during off hours.
- Understand that employees have lives outside of work, and that fulfilling personal lives and routine recreation are critical to quality performance and high morale.
- Enable managers and staffs establish a work-life balance that is healthy for them and satisfying.
- Be a "family-friendly" corporation, promoting time off and recreation, as well as flexible work schedules.



Human Resource Management (HRM). As advocates for both the organization and employees, it is important that HRM departments and professionals:

- Develop a HRM philosophy and practice that guards against the mechanization and commoditization of the worker.
- Envision the employee in a holistic manner, i.e., a person who is a civic member, a partner or spouse, parent, and friend to others who has interests outside of work, and needs leisure time.
- Promote a physically and psychologically safe work environment grounded in the spirit of the UN's universal declaration of human rights regarding dignity and work, and the OSHA regulations.

- Return to an 8-hour day/40-hour work week job expectation and workload, and limiting managers' and team members' practice of contacting colleagues and requiring work during off hours.
- Reward non 24/7 work practices.
- Aid employees develop work philosophies, habits and schedules that allow enable them to routinely take extended vacations, and not work when overly tired or ill.

ICT Department: In light of the above understanding of ICT and the workplace, information systems professionals need to develop a human or people-centric approach to technology development and application. They need to:

- Collaborate with the HRM department and managers to establish and maintain a socio-technical cultural stance that fosters organizational and worker well-being.
- Work with leadership and HRM professionals to monitor ICT's appropriate design and use in communication, teamwork, information processing, etc.
- Envision themselves as critical overseers and advocates for ethical ICT use. During planning sessions, etc. raise the ethical questions about the impact on people of ICT tools, systems, and implementations being discussed.
- Follow professional associations codes of ethics, such as the one set out by the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM).

Leadership and Management. Business professionals who have the authority need to consider revising the work environment, particularly existing values, operational processes, and reward systems so they do not promote a destructive 24/7 work attitude. They need to:

- Model a leadership and work style that does not create the expectation of 24/7 availability, or make a 24/7 work mentality pervasive in the organization's work culture.
- Develop a leadership style that cares about employees, respects their personal and professional needs, and fosters their well-being.
- Establish management practices that do not undermine family life, relationships, and do not require workloads that do not allow for leisure time.
- Enable and mentor employees to set work boundaries.
- Do not be exploitive or intrusive on personal time.
- Model work practices and set expectations that enable employees to not be consumed by job tasks, and to reduce work stress by not feeling the need to always be available.
- Encourage employees to take time off, structuring job expectations and workloads so employees can utilize vacations and sick leave.
- Develop business goals and practices, team structures, human and technical resources, and customer service philosophies so employees do not have to always stay connected.
- Expect workers to be available during emergencies or critical business periods, not on an on-going 24/7 basis.
- Advocate for realistic project time frames and adequate financial and human resources.

The Worker. Recognizing the allurements of the current business arena and the human desire for financial security, employees at all levels need to:

- Believe that they have a choice, can thoughtfully set priorities based upon their dreams and aspirations, and can direct their life as they see fit.

- Develop the inner resources and professional skills to build the life and career that they truly desire.
- Reclaim a “whole life” perspective regarding work, understanding that one functions better if one pursues non-work interests, has relationships beyond the workplace, and is well rested.
- Develop one’s voice, and take responsibility for setting work boundaries.
- Take back power over one’s own life and sets clear boundaries between work and personal life.
- Understand the socio-technical nature of work, how capitalism and business practices exploit it, and technology’s power and tendency to take over.

Conclusion.

As can be seen, business leaders and workers are faced with difficult challenges and choices regarding the 24/7 workplace. Globalization coupled with information and communication technologies have redefined the workplace, and reshaped the nature of work. As professional responsibilities have become more demanding, the worker has been transformed into an information processing entity tethered to the workplace. This commoditization and mechanization of the worker is an ethical concern that has far reaching ramifications for both the present and future workforce. The current workforce’s health is one issue, but there is another of equal importance. Today’s children are tomorrow’s employees, and will have to work in the business climate we create. If it is this stressful now, what will it be like in ten or twenty years? Plus, they will have to endure the society we form through our lack of attention to civic issues and quality parenting.

The solution to how business enterprises can operate in a global marketplace while truly respecting their employees as human resources and assets is complex. The core of the solution, though, is a culture that embodies a sense of human dignity, and is aware of the transformative powers of technology. Effective solutions will entail business enterprises continuing to strive to become emotionally intelligent organizations that are self-aware, and understand and value their socio-technical nature while using its information and communications systems to liberate their workforces to do their best work and to live fully. Continuing to embark on this path will not be easy, because it will mean letting go of some deeply rooted perspectives, values and practices, as well as both businesses and workers examining their priorities.

The success of business enterprises in re-humanizing the technical 24/7 workplace is a matter of choice. Our choice.

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Bio

Charles (Chuck) F. Piazza, PhD cand. is part-time associate professor in the School of Management at John F. Kennedy University, and the director of ISmentor Group, a think tank for exploring information systems design and applications, ethics in a socio-technical world, leadership, knowledge management in virtual environments, and organizational communication in dispersed workplaces. As an independent scholar and professor he engages working professionals in analytical discussions on these topics, exploring their nature, as well as practical applications in and ramifications for businesses and society. He is the former Associate Director for the Masters of Science in Information Systems at the University of San Francisco.

His diverse background in such fields as ethics and information systems leadership development, human resource management, organizational psychology, knowledge management, e-learning, and virtual management systems, has lead to challenging, visionary courses with an interdisciplinary approach. Besides working as an organizational consultant and being awarded Instructor of the Year twice during the last 8 years, he has published articles and presented at conferences on a various subjects, including leadership, information ethics, organizational theory and change, knowledge management, mentoring, and transformational adult learning. He continues to research technologically supported organizational systems with his current study being focused on the managerial and ethical issues arising from the use of information and communication technology in the workplace.