Working and commuting

Warm up



1.Look at the people in the photo and say what they are doing.

2.Think of ten activities people can do on trains or busses when commuting to work?

3. What do you like to do while commuting?

Read for main idea

You are going to read an article about working and commuting. Read the article quickly (skim) to find out the author's point of view. Does the author think it's a good idea to use your commuting time for work?

Which of these titles would be best for the article?

1. Answer e-mails on the train and go home earlier
2. Only work on the train in the morning - you can relax on the way home
3. Stop working on your commute - it doesn't benefit anyone
4. Tell your boss you want your life back

Vocabulary

Match the words/phrases in bold from the article with their meaning. Two of them have the same meaning.

1. journey	a. being asked to do long hours or difficult tasks in your job (adjective)
2. slaves	b. forbid or stop people doing something (verb)
3. productivity	c. healthy and sensible (adjective)
4. on the move / on the go	d. how much you can make or do at work; how fast you can work (noun)
5. overworked	e. logical, based on facts, not on feelings (adjective)
6. rational	f. look after or take care of people's well-being and safety (verb)
7. ban	g. not receiving payment which matches the amount or difficulty of work done (adjective)
8. safeguard	h. people who have to work for no money because they are controlled by someone else (noun)
9. sane	i. trip, travelling from one place to another (noun)
10. underpaid	j. while you are travelling or moving from one place to another (adverb phrase - informal)

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Our **journey** to and from the office has been taken over by work. Instead of reading a book, catching up with the news, or just relaxing, our commute time is now spent reading and replying to work-related emails. The transport we use to get to and from our jobs has become another workplace.

The sad thing is that we agree to this extra work, even though it's unpaid. Hours spent commuting add nothing to our bank accounts, despite saving our employers the expense of higher salaries.

Working while commuting is part of a harmful "always-on" culture. It reflects an environment where we are **slaves** to work, even when not physically in the office. However, our **productivity** can only come at the cost of our emotional and physical health. We must fight to resist it.

Work-life imbalance

Research shows that workers choose to work while commuting, in part, to make their jobs easier. Answering emails on the way to or from work can help to save time later in the day or the next day. Work that could not be finished during the day can also be done **on the move**.

But here "savings" of time and effort may not be real. Employers are not going to cut email traffic just because workers are replying to emails on the way to and from work. On the contrary, employers will want to encourage email traffic outside of regular hours in order to get workers to do more for free.

Work "saved" during commute time, in this case, may result in more work during paid work time, surprisingly. Workers may be in the position of doing more work, for no extra pay. Out-of-hours working suggests that work cannot be fitted into paid hours and therefore that workers are overworked (and underpaid) for the work they do.

Always-on culture

New technology helps us to connect with our work, beyond normal hours. Laptops and iPhones mean we have instant access to our work and workplaces. Wifi on trains and buses has helped to turn commuting into work time. But technology itself does not explain why work is done outside of regular hours. For that we need to look at organisational culture.

Organisations now demand that their employees give their bodies and lives to work. Staying late at work is seen as the right thing to do. Presenteeism - the act of being present at work for longer than is required - is very common in workplaces and reflects on the culture of overwork that is everywhere in modern society.

Working during commute time is simply part of the same culture. It demonstrates the way work has taken over our lives. We find time to work even when we're not at work because we are part of a culture that values and demands hard work.

Few benefits

Yet all this extra work seems to bring very few economic benefits. Productivity remains low in the UK despite long working hours. Commuters are not more productive for answering emails **on the go**. In fact productivity is likely to be lower because workers feel stressed and exhausted from their commute and work schedules.

Research continues to show the negative health effects of long hours of work. By working more we suffer both physical and mental ill-health. We also miss time with our families, friends and communities. And we lose the ability to think and act beyond the roles we fill as workers.

Work may now be a normal part of commuting time but its performance puts high costs on us and society more generally. In a **rational** world, we would **ban** out-of-hours email, not just to protect free time, but also to **safeguard** health. Beyond this we would challenge work culture and promote ways of living that are less work-centred. Cutting work hours would be the only **sane** way of restoring the balance between jobs and life.

Adapted from TheConversation.com, Author David Spencer, Professor of Economics and Political Economy, University of Leeds. Aug 31st, 2018.

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