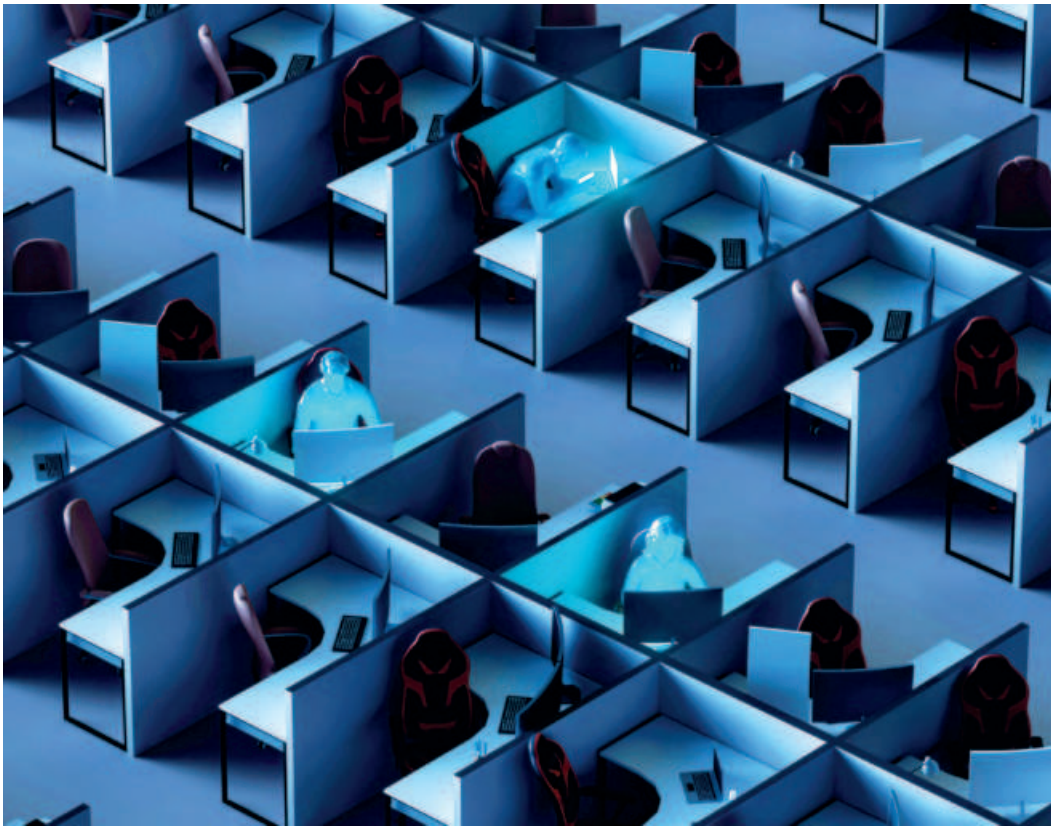# Why the culture of glorifying over-work needs to stop

Being the last person to leave the office was a badge of honour in the old world. Today, it can be a shame.

ZARIF FAIAZ

The glorification of overworking and the expectation to stay late in the office have become long-ingrained in the corporate culture of many countries, including Bangladesh. But in this modern age, while many countries across the world are doing away with this culture, staying late is still often seen as a sign of dedication and hard work in Bangladesh. Is this relentless pursuit of productivity, however, hurting more than helping?

Historically, the practice of staying late at work was seen as a badge of honour, a tangible demonstration of one's dedication and commitment to their job and employer. This notion was rooted in the industrial age's emphasis on physical presence and hours logged as proxies for productivity and loyalty.

However, extensive research and shifts in generational mindsets have debunked this equation of time spent at work with productivity and commitment. Research shows that excessive hours are demonstrably bad for business. A 2014 study by Stanford University found that employee productivity falls sharply after a 50-hour workweek, and falls off a cliff after 55 hours.

A 2020 meta-analysis published in the journal Burnout Research also found a strong correlation between long working hours and burnout, a state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy. Burned-out employees are more likely to be absent from work, disengaged, and ultimately leave their jobs altogether. This high turnover rate can be incredibly costly for businesses, with replacement and retraining expenses eating into profits.

The perpetuation of this culture in Bangladesh, where companies often reward employees who willingly overwork and stigmatise those who prioritise work-life balance, is particularly concerning. This not only fosters an unhealthy work environment but also discourages talented individuals who seek a more balanced and fulfilling professional life.

The expectation to conform to this outdated model of work is at odds with the aspirations of younger generations who advocate for a healthier approach to work, one that values efficiency, flexibility, and the importance of mental and physical well-being.

The good news is, there's a growing movement towards a more sustainable work model. Companies around the world are exploring the concept of four-day workweeks, with some even trailing them with remarkable success.

In the UK, a recent pilot program involving over 70 companies and 3,300 employees saw a dramatic shift in work culture. Employees worked 100% of their workload 80% of the time, with no pay cuts. The results were overwhelmingly positive. Productivity remained the same or even increased, employee well-being soared, and absenteeism rates dropped. Nearly all participating companies (92%) opted to continue with the four-day week after the trial period.

This isn't just an anomaly. Similar trials in Iceland and Japan have yielded similar results, suggesting that a shorter workweek can be beneficial for both employees and employers.

The concept of a healthy work-life balance is finally gaining traction. While a drastic shift to a four-day workweek may not be feasible for all Bangladeshi companies right away, there are steps that can be taken in the interim.

Firstly, companies need to encourage effective time management. Equipping employees with the skills to prioritise tasks and delegate effectively can significantly boost productivity within standard working hours. Secondly, valuing outcomes over presenteeism is crucial. Employees who consistently deliver high-quality work within their designated hours should be recognised, not those who rack up the most overtime. Finally, leading by example is paramount. Managers who themselves leave at a reasonable hour and actively encourage breaks and vacations send a powerful message.

The generational shift in mindset is not just a trend but a response to a deeper understanding of what motivates people and what contributes to a productive and innovative workplace. Millennials and Generation Z have been at the forefront of advocating for flexible work arrangements, mental health days, and the integration of technology to streamline work processes. These changes are not just about comfort or convenience; they are about creating a sustainable work environment that respects individual needs and fosters long-term productivity and innovation.

The world of work is changing. Bangladesh's companies must adapt and embrace a new era where valuing employee well-being and fostering a healthy work-life balance go hand in hand with success.

From policy to production: bringing equality into RMG and agro-processing management

ZARIF FAIAZ

Capacity development in Bangladesh's ready-made garments (RMG) sector has long meant training workers on skills at the sewing line. Supervisors and operators attend courses, production targets are discussed, and efficiency is tracked. Yet one layer of the factory has often been left out of that picture: mid-level management, particularly staff in administration and human resources.The same pattern is often seen in the agro-processing (AP) sector, where line workers may receive basic technical training, but administrative and HR personnel remain disconnected from deeper conversations around rights, gender inclusion, and decent work.

When that tier is not exposed to the same conversations on rights, equality and workplace relationships, gaps open up between what factories say on paper and what happens on the production floor. Policies may reference gender, grievance procedures or non-discrimination, but they are not always understood, enforced or updated by the people who manage day-to-day decisions. Over time, those gaps show up in very practical ways: how complaints are handled, who gets promoted, who is listened to, and whose problems are quietly ignored.

Swisscontact's has tried to step directly into that space. Instead of designing yet another worker-focused course, the programme has brought mid-level management into the frame, convening 48 staff from 27 RMG factories and 16 staff from 8 AP factories for targeted training on gender equality, labour rights and decent work (LRDW) and environment responsibility (ER). Each factory nominated two participants, typically drawn from HR, administration or similar roles, for a three-day course delivered in three separate batches.

At the heart of the intervention is a relatively simple diagnosis. The core problem is not only a lack of rules; it is a lack of knowledge and awareness among factory management – especially mid-level managers – about how equality and environmental responsibility shape the workplace. That gap affects how leave is granted, how harassment is addressed, how performance is judged and how disputes are resolved. Over time, it affects livelihoods just as surely as a change in piece rates or overtime hours.

In both the RMG and AP sectors, women workers often face compounded disadvantages. Many have entered these workforces as a first route to income and a measure of independence, yet still find themselves sidelined when decisions are taken. If HR and admin teams are not equipped to recognise and address gender-based inequality, female workers may face subtle but persistent barriers: being passed over for training, discouraged from promotion, or left without remedy when they raise concerns. Others, including workers from minority or marginalised backgrounds, may experience similar patterns of exclusion.

Swisscontact's intention is to help factories build a more equal working environment from the middle out. That means encouraging managers to see themselves not only as enforcers of rules but as stewards of workplace culture. When mid-level staff understand how policy choices land on the production floor, they are better placed to create a more supportive atmosphere – one where female workers and others who are often excluded can participate, progress and be heard.

The approach also complements earlier work under swisscontact's intervention to strengthen supervisory skills and widen women's access to line leadership roles. While those initiatives focus on who leads production teams, this new intervention looks at who shapes the rules and practices that frame working life. Taken together, they begin to align the leadership on the floor with the policies in the office, so that efforts to promote equality are reinforced rather than undercut.

One of the recurring questions from factory leadership is what all of this means for productivity. For many owners and senior managers, output remains the primary concern, especially in a market marked by tight margins and demanding buyers. Swisscontact has chosen to address that concern head-on, arguing that gender-sensitive, equality-focused policies are not a distraction from performance but a precondition for it.

The case is practical. Clear, fair policies on promotion and discipline can reduce disputes and absenteeism. Grievance mechanisms that workers trust can surface problems early, before they escalate into unrest or costly turnover. Managers who understand gender dynamics are less likely to overlook talent, meaning that skilled women are more likely to move into roles where they can contribute fully. In short, treating workers fairly and protecting their rights is presented not only as the right thing to do, but as a driver of smoother operations and stronger output.

For mid-level managers, that framing matters. When equality and ER are linked to the metrics they are already expected to deliver – efficiency, quality, stability – the conversation shifts from "extra work" to "better work". The training encourages participants to see policy review and implementation as part of their core responsibilities, not an add-on left to compliance teams or external audits.

If the model takes root, several outcomes are within reach. Factories would have a cadre of mid-level managers who understand and can act on equality and employee relations issues. Policies would be more closely aligned with workers' realities and more consistently applied across departments and shifts. And, over time, the link between fair treatment and productivity would become visible enough to sustain change without constant external support.

"You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them."

Michael Jordan

LeCun walks away from Meta, and from the LLM era he calls a dead end

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Yann LeCun, one of the founding figures of modern deep learning and Meta's Chief AI Scientist for nearly a decade, has quietly walked out of the company at a moment when AI is its most expensive and strategic bet. The announcement came with the kind of brevity that feels almost mismatched to the weight of the moment: Meta confirmed his departure; LeCun confirmed his new role at a small startup; and the industry exhaled in confusion. This is, after all, not just another researcher leaving Big Tech for a shinier lab. LeCun is one of the three pioneers who shaped the neural network revolution that underpins everything from image recognition to ChatGPT. A Turing Award winner. The architect of convolutional neural networks. A scientist whose early bets, dismissed repeatedly and sometimes mocked, went on to define entire eras of computing. And yet he is leaving a company spending billions on AI to work on technology that Meta, by his own account, does not consider a priority. He has not gone to a competitor. He has not retired. He has not stepped back into academia. He is moving toward a direction he believes the future is pulling us, even if the world's most powerful AI companies are not.

For months, he has been unapologetically blunt about his concerns. In a talk at MIT just weeks before leaving Meta, he said that "nobody in their right mind would use LLMs of the type that we have today" within three to five years. Coming from anyone else, this would have been provocative. Coming from someone who spent forty years predicting the future correctly? It felt like a warning. LeCun's argument is straightforward: today's large language models are statistical parrots. They predict the next word. They do not understand the physical world. They do not know that objects exist even when you are not looking. They cannot reason causally. They are incredibly useful but they are not intelligent in any meaningful sense. He has repeatedly compared their intelligence to that of a cat, insisting the cat is smarter.

His alternative vision is something he has long championed: world models. Systems that learn from the observable universe, through vision, action, and feedback, much like children learn physics by dropping things until gravity makes sense. These models aim to build causal, grounded understanding rather than statistical prediction. It is not surprising that he wants to build that future. What is surprising is that Meta is not the place where he believes that the future will be built. This is despite the fact that Meta has publicly committed staggering amounts of money to its AI efforts. It has released Llama, one of the most influential open-source LLM families in the world. It has heavily reshaped its product line around generative AI. In that context, the departure of the person responsible for the scientific foundations of its AI strategy feels less like routine turnover and more like a philosophical parting of ways.

If your chief scientist calls your core technology a dead end, you either change course or brace for departures. Meta has done neither. LeCun has made his stance clear, repeatedly, sometimes loudly. And Meta has carried on, investing more aggressively than ever in exactly the approach he disavows. The conflict is ideological. One side believes the future lies in bigger, more capable large language models. The other believes scaling is a distraction from building systems that actually understand the world. However, what makes this moment uniquely unsettling for the industry is LeCun's track record. In the 1980s, he struggled to find a PhD adviser because machine learning was considered a fringe obsession with no scientific future. Thirty years later, that so-called dead end became the foundation of modern AI. He has been early and right enough times that dismissing him now feels risky.

His three-to-five-year timeline for the obsolescence of current LLM architectures is not a prediction most companies want to hear, especially companies whose valuations have been boosted by the promise of generative AI. But if he is even partially right, the implications are enormous. Entire startups built around LLM APIs may find themselves racing against a technological cliff. Investors who believe bigger is better may discover that scale hits limits sooner than expected. And AI labs pouring billions into ever-larger models may realize they have been competing in the wrong marathon. But of course, LeCun could be wrong. Even the most brilliant scientists swing and miss. Paradigm shifts do not run on schedules. Markets reward performative certainty more than scientific humility. And LLMs, for all their flaws, have become profoundly useful, integrated into workflows, search engines, creative tools, and customer support systems. They are not going away tomorrow.

But even if LeCun is wrong about the exact timeline, he may be right about the direction. The industry has been oscillating between excitement and anxiety, moving faster than its own understanding. Most of today's models are impressive in performance and deeply limited in cognition. And the deeper these limitations are studied, the clearer it becomes that statistical prediction is a powerful trick, not a path to general intelligence. What makes LeCun's exit unsettling is not just the departure itself but what he chose over Meta. He walked away from infinite compute budgets, world-class labs, and global influence to work on something he believes is being ignored. And that brings us to the uncomfortable truth: this is a moment when the brightest minds in AI are diverging rather than converging. Some believe intelligence is a matter of more tokens, more parameters, more memory. Others believe intelligence requires a fundamentally different kind of machine; one that perceives, experiments, forms hypotheses, and understands causality.

What happens next will depend on which vision proves truer. If LLM-centric AI keeps advancing at its current pace, Meta's bet will look prescient and LeCun's warning will fade into a historical footnote. But if the limits of scale arrive abruptly, and they often do in technology, the companies chasing bigness will have to answer why they ignored one of the field's most credible skeptics. For now, the only certainty is uncertainty itself. The foundations of the current AI wave suddenly feel less stable, less inevitable, and more open to disruption than they did just a week ago. And in that sense, LeCun's exit may end up mattering even more than where he goes next, because it reminds us that in a field obsessed with prediction, the future still has an unnerving habit of surprising even its boldest architects.