

WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

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Last night was the same as usual. You got ready for bed, crawled under the covers a bit too late, and finally drifted off. Several hours later, you are awake, staring at the ceiling, brain spinning, with little hope of sleep.

We can all be plagued by the problems of falling asleep, fragmented sleep, or waking too early, and there are many reasons why you may not get a full night's rest. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open recently published a study which included more than 100,000 participants and presented an interesting conclusion. The prevalence or improvement of four psychosocial supports in your workplace – quality leadership, procedural justice, a collaborative culture, and co-worker supports – are associated with the reduction of sleep disturbances. *Is it possible that organizational behaviour is keeping you up at night?*

We devote about one third of our life to sleep. We can't live without it. While we don't really understand why we *need* sleep, evidence points to maintaining our immune system, physical and psychological recovery, and promoting memory consolidation. We have all experienced restless nights, and even a modest loss of sleep can impair our daily performance, marked by fatigue, poor recall, and muddled decision-making. While these can feel like personal lapses as we try to mask them, our fatigue affects our work and the work of others. Lack of sleep is also costly for your organization, as job-related errors and absenteeism increase. For the economy, sleep issues cost billions

of dollars due to lost productivity, injury, illness, and poor decision-making. In medical terms, lack of quality sleep, or insomnia, is defined as a difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep three nights a week, and chronic insomnia as suffering from insomnia for three months or more; about 10% of the population suffers from this condition. And more than just fatigue is at play, as chronic insomnia can damage your health by contributing to weight gain, diabetes, depression, an increase in blood pressure, and a greater risk of stroke.

● **SLEEP 101**

Sleep seems simple, yet it is biologically sophisticated. The daily cycle of sleep is guided by your circadian rhythms which are controlled by the suprachiasmatic nucleus located just above the optic nerve. This 'internal clock' helps regulate many bodily functions, and the neurons of the suprachiasmatic nucleus are sensitive to light, helping trigger the production of melatonin for inducing sleep, and cortisol and other hormones for you to wake.

When sleep comes, it is divided into two broad phases, REM (Rapid Eye Movement) and non-REM; combined, both segments take around 90-120 minutes to complete. In a full night's sleep, you will repeat this non-REM and REM cycle five or six times.

Non-REM sleep is first, and moves through three stages. The first stage is the transition between wakefulness and slumber when your body starts to slow down and you enter a light sleep. After several minutes, you enter stage two where breathing and

heart rate slow even more, your body cools, and eye movements stop. You spend more time in stage two than any other stage. In the last period, stage three, brain waves, heartbeat, and breathing are at their slowest, producing the deep sleep that we find so refreshing.

REM begins after the three segments of non-REM sleep, and starts about 90 minutes after falling asleep. It is characterized by rapid movements of the eyes, dreaming, and brain activity that is so prolific that the brain seems almost awake. Although you are asleep, your eyes move rapidly in a manner that is similar to when you are awake and are asked to remember specific images. Breathing and heart rate increases, and your brain sends neurotransmitters to your muscles to prevent your body from physically acting out your dreams.

● **YOU NEED YOUR SLEEP**

Principals and Vice-Principals have demanding, stressful jobs and are required to be in top form every day. Unfortunately, this can't always be the case. Could changing some of the organizational behaviours in schools and districts help enhance employee well-being through improved sleep? The JAMA Network Open study says:

"Improvements in leadership quality and procedural justice (i.e: vertical resources) and in culture of collaboration and co-worker social support (i.e. horizontal resources) were associated with a lower risk of persistent sleep disturbances in a dose response fashion."

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This means that with an increase of these four psychological supports, sleep disturbances could be reduced. While each factor exhibited a positive effect on sleep, the study indicated that procedural justice and leadership quality were more consequential. While the horizontal resources of culture of collaboration and co-worker support were still significant, a difference is that the vertical resources, leadership and procedural justice, are organizational behaviours that are largely determined by how leaders perform their roles. The results of this study echo other findings, showing that a higher presence of the same four psychosocial resources in the workplace have been associated with reduced risks

of stress-related cardiometabolic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Procedural justice is based on the fairness exhibited in decision-making. For example, if you were transferred to another school with no prior notification or consultation, you would likely consider the decision as lacking procedural justice. We have all felt the sting of a decision we consider unjust, and it comes at a cost to your sleep as you ruminate over a lack of fairness and transparency in the process. Further, an employee's respect for their leaders can suffer when decisions appear to be made with no sense of procedural justice. Leaders at

all levels of the organization – from Vice-Principals, to Principals, to Superintendents — can promote a sense of procedural justice and impartiality by using transparent decision-making processes, providing voice to employees, and striving for fair and objective decisions.

Study participants were also asked to assess leadership quality, rating statements such as: does your immediate manager take time to engage in your professional development; do you have the necessary and sufficient authority to do your work; and, my boss shows that they care about how things are for me, and how I feel. The lower the prevalence of these factors, the more employee's sleep was disrupted. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y of employee motivation can help to illustrate this finding. Theory X and Y managers see employees differently. Theory X managers believe that employees are unmotivated, need close supervision, and work just for the money. Conversely, Theory Y managers see

employees as individuals who are interested in doing well, are self-motivated and, as a result, require less direct supervision. The study seems to indicate that leaders who take an interest in *how* employees work and not just *what* they produce are likely leading a more rested workforce.

Quality sleep is critical for all employees and desperately needed to tackle the complex and demanding assignments found in public education. Whether in a corporate setting or in the education sector, careful consideration for how we lead personnel and implement transparent and fair decision-making processes can support the employees upon whom our organizations depend. This is not a suggestion that your boss consult with you, and then tuck you in every night, but rather that your organization could benefit from a careful analysis of their practices in leadership and procedural justice, so that everyone can get a good night's sleep. After all, tomorrow is going to be another busy day.

● **TROUBLE SLEEPING?**

The one key factor is to be kind to your circadian rhythms. Keep to a schedule and don't cheat yourself on sleep. There are plenty of resources online: consult with your health practitioner if you have further concerns.

RESOURCES

Good sleep practices:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/SleepHygiene.pdf>



McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_X_and_Theory_Y



JAMA Online:

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2804654>

