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Executive Registry
79-4866

18 SEP 1979

MEMORANDUM

TO: DDCI

79-3021

STA

SUBJECT: Suggestion Concerning the Work Schedule of Around the Clock (24 hr.) Offices.

Most of the 24 hour offices are operated around the clock because of their critical nature. It seems ludicrous that what is known about human behavior and physiology has not been used in scheduling working hours for these offices. I suggest that permanent shifts of a standard 8 hour duration replace both rotating shifts and 12 hour extended working shifts.

If I were to submit a plan to MAXIMIZE physiological and psychological problems along with the concommitant errors in judgement is those critical offices which have to be manned on a 24 hour basis, I would introduce a work schedule having rotating shifts whose duration was 2 weeks or less. If their performance was not deficient enough, I would extend their hours so that they were working 12 hour shifts.

There is a significant body of emperical evidence which indicates that it takes humans about 2 weeks to adjust to major changes in their day-night cycles. There is some evidence that with repeated changes the body adapts more rapidly; but the adaption period is still several days. Therefore, with rotating shifts, people have to attempt to overcome actual physiological handicaps.

There have been a number of studies which have catalogued the mixture of physiological and psychological difficulties associated with rotating shifts. Difficulties with sleep, appetite, digestion, and social relationships are the most common problems reported. Also mentioned are morale problems, unusually high sick leave use, rapid turnover, and burnout (a psychological state in which one is not able to cope with the stress of the environment).

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Admittedly some people may not see rotating shifts as a major problem, or perhaps, even a problem worth considering. I see rotating shifts as a matter of managerial insensitivity and lack of knowledge. There seems to be no apparent compelling reason for the use of such shifts. Their use cannot be supported on logical/emperical grounds.

The data concerning the length of the work period is somewhat ambiguous. It appears that in general lengthening the standard working day leads to a drop in productivity per hour. Although people may not loose efficiency in a crisis situation or an experiment lasting two or three days, objective measures indicate that most people do not maintain their previous average performance with work periods as long as 12 hours.

There seems to be a simple alternative of switching to three permanent 8 hour shifts. I would suggest the following shift hours as just one example of how to spread the undesiralbe hours among the shifts and to appeal to varous types of people: (1) Main Shift - 1200 to2000- This shift is especially for the person who does not begin to function fully until late in the morning. (2) Night Shift - 2000 to 0400 - This shift may appeal to those who are "night persons" - the kind of person who feels that he/she is functioning at his/her best at the end of the day. (3) Morning Shift - 0400 to 1200- This shift would be for the person who finds it difficult to sleep until sunrise. All the shifts would provide time for employees to conduct business, arrange medical appointments, etc., during traditional working hours withoutnecessitating the use of annual leave and minimize the conflicts of commuting by avoiding peak rush hours. In order to entice people to work these shifts(the agency may not have a particular skilled person with midday, evening, or morning tendencies) incentive systems could be used. If the reward is large enough (for a particular person this could include pay and annual leave) , people are able to learn to adapt to a new physiological pattern.

I am not claiming that these shifts would solve all the problems associated with night work. Permanent shifts would tend to reduce these problems

I felt that I should make these comments because of my expertise as a psychologist and as a person who had over a years experience working an 2300 to 0700 shift before coming to the agency

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