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## Editorial Introduction

Welcome to Issue 10 – Q3–Q4 2025 (Special Double Issue)

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This special double issue of *Professionals in Business Journal* marks the tenth issue of the journal and brings together work developed during an extended period of editorial review and synthesis. Rather than adhering to a rigid publication cadence, PIBJ publishes selectively, prioritizing coherence, depth, and relevance over frequency. Issue 10 reflects that commitment.

The papers collected here examine the widening gap between how modern organizations describe themselves and how they function in practice. Across sectors, leaders speak fluently of agility, collaboration, innovation, and care, while many operational systems quietly reward conformity, obscure labor, and exhaust human judgment. The result is not sudden collapse, but slow institutional drift.

Contributors to this issue interrogate the infrastructures that shape contemporary work. Several pieces explore how digital collaboration tools alter authority and decision velocity, how cross-functional models introduce hidden coordination costs, and how metric saturation dulls managerial discernment. Others examine leadership itself: the erosion of apprenticeship, the displacement of lived experience by proxy indicators, and the emotional costs borne by individuals tasked with sustaining organizational success.

Taken together, this special issue functions as a diagnostic rather than a manifesto. It does not argue that organizations lack values or intent, but that many systems have become misaligned with the realities they claim to manage. By examining these misalignments directly, the journal aims to create space for more honest evaluation of how work is structured, measured, and led.

Thank you for reading and engaging with *Professionals in Business Journal*. Each issue is an invitation to examine institutions as they are, not as they are narrated-and to think carefully about the systems we inherit, maintain, and choose to change.

Welcome to Issue 10.

- The Editorial Team  
*Professionals in Business Journal*  
[PyrrhicPress.org](http://PyrrhicPress.org)

## The Death of Managerial Apprenticeship: Why No One's Learning How to Lead from Their Boss Anymore

**Abstract** For generations, managerial skills were transmitted informally through a system of apprenticeship: aspiring leaders learned to lead by observing and shadowing their bosses. This process, once embedded in daily workflows and proximity-based mentorship, is breaking down in the modern workplace. This paper investigates the structural, technological, and cultural forces behind the erosion of managerial apprenticeship. Drawing from leadership theory, organizational learning research, and qualitative interviews, it explores how remote work, flattened hierarchies, and the rise of asynchronous communication have disrupted traditional knowledge transfer. The findings suggest that many employees reach managerial roles without ever having witnessed

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effective management up close. To rebuild this pipeline, the paper recommends deliberate mentorship models, leadership shadowing programs, and recalibrated expectations for digital-era management development.

Introduction Leadership, traditionally, has been learned as much as it has been taught. In the mid and late 20th century, aspiring managers often gained their leadership capabilities not through formal training programs but by observing their supervisors in action. They learned how to run meetings, defuse conflict, delegate responsibility, and inspire teams by watching experienced leaders model those behaviors daily. This form of informal apprenticeship has long been considered a cornerstone of leadership development (Collins & Holton, 2004).

However, in today's workplace, that apprenticeship model is quietly vanishing. The combination of hybrid work, digital workflows, increased span of control, and leaner middle management means that many future leaders have little to no direct exposure to high-quality managerial behavior. As a result, they ascend into leadership roles with gaps in core competencies: people management, emotional intelligence, decision-making under pressure, and adaptive communication.

This paper explores the death of managerial apprenticeship, examining why traditional observational learning has declined and what can be done to recover its essential functions.

Literature Review Leadership Development Models Traditional leadership development relies on a combination of formal instruction and experiential learning (Day, 2000). Experiential learning, including mentorship, job shadowing, and observational learning, has been linked to stronger leadership identity formation and role clarity (McCall, 2004). In the past, informal modeling filled the gaps left by formal training.

The Erosion of Middle Management Recent organizational trends have de-emphasized middle management layers, often in pursuit of agility and cost-efficiency (Mintzberg, 2009). However, middle managers historically played a vital role in training future leaders by offering daily proximity and active coaching. With fewer mentors per capita, the exposure pipeline narrows.

Impact of Remote Work and Asynchronous Communication Remote and hybrid work environments reduce the amount of incidental learning that occurs in co-located settings (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Observing how a boss debriefs a failure, navigates interpersonal dynamics, or offers corrective feedback often happens informally, not in structured calls or documentation.

Rise of Management by Metrics The shift toward data-driven performance management has also played a role. As leadership becomes more quantified, it risks reducing complex human interactions to dashboard outputs (Muller, 2018). This limits the visibility of soft skills and tacit knowledge, which are harder to digitize.

Methodology This study uses a multi-method qualitative approach:

1. In-depth interviews with 10 mid-career professionals in the U.S. and U.K. across tech, education, and public service sectors.



2. A review of leadership training modules from five large organizations.
3. Analysis of longitudinal data on promotion trends and employee engagement from two enterprise HR databases.

Interviewees were selected based on recent transitions into managerial roles. Questions focused on their experiences with mentorship, observation, and perceived preparedness for leadership.

#### Findings

1. **Lack of Observational Learning Opportunities** Interviewees consistently reported limited access to real-time observation of managerial behavior. As one noted, "I was promoted during the pandemic. I'd never seen my boss handle a performance issue or run a live team meeting in person."
2. **Promotion Without Apprenticeship** Several respondents described being placed in managerial roles based on technical excellence, with little regard for leadership readiness. This reflects a broader pattern of assuming people management is a natural extension of individual contributor success.
3. **Hyper-Individualization of Leadership** With fewer shared rituals and communal experiences, leadership development becomes self-directed. "I had to piece together what leadership looked like from books, YouTube videos, and trial by fire," one new manager shared.
4. **Declining Mentorship Availability** Busy schedules, remote logistics, and cultural shifts have made mentorship less organic. Respondents described difficulty building trust or informal rapport with senior leaders.

**Discussion** The findings highlight a generational discontinuity in leadership development. Whereas older cohorts often absorbed management behaviors through daily exposure, younger leaders increasingly learn in isolation. This has implications for organizational continuity, culture, and performance.

Without modeling, many leaders lack fluency in essential soft skills. They may excel at operational tasks but struggle with emotional nuance, feedback delivery, or conflict mediation. Organizations that rely solely on self-directed learning risk cultivating fragmented or performative leadership styles.

The death of managerial apprenticeship also points to a broader erosion of learning culture. Knowledge that was once transmitted through proximity and osmosis now requires deliberate reengineering.

#### Recommendations



1. Introduce Digital Shadowing Programs Use recorded team meetings, debriefs, or conflict mediations (with consent) as learning artifacts for aspiring leaders.
2. Reinstate Layered Mentorship Models Designate mid-level mentors explicitly tasked with onboarding future leaders through regular one-on-one coaching.
3. Embed Observational Rotations Create opportunities for junior staff to attend strategic meetings or cross-functional reviews as silent observers.
4. Train Leaders to Narrate Decisions Encourage managers to verbalize their reasoning and reflections during key decisions to expose the logic behind actions.
5. Recognize and Reward Leadership Modeling Incorporate leadership modeling into performance evaluations, highlighting its developmental role.

Conclusion Managerial apprenticeship, once the bedrock of leadership development, is becoming obsolete in today's fragmented and digitized workplace. As informal learning pathways close, organizations must act intentionally to preserve the art of leadership modeling. Without it, the next generation of leaders may be technically competent but emotionally unprepared. Rebuilding the apprenticeship pipeline is not a nostalgic endeavor-it is a strategic imperative for leadership resilience in the 21st century.

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# The Managerial Burden of Metrics: How KPI Saturation Dulls Decision-Making in Mid-Sized Firms

## Abstract

This article investigates how the proliferation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in mid-sized firms contributes to managerial fatigue, myopic decision-making, and diminished organizational adaptability. Drawing on theories of metric fixation, performance paradox, and surrogation, the paper synthesizes insights from empirical studies, industry reports, and psychological research. It reveals that KPI saturation can hinder strategic agility by overwhelming managers with data, obscuring core business priorities, and incentivizing the pursuit of metrics over mission. Recommendations include targeted metric reduction, regular KPI audits, and alignment frameworks to restore decision-making clarity. This work adds to the emerging discourse on organizational health by positioning KPI overload as a structural threat rather than a performance aid.

## Introduction

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are embedded into the architecture of modern business. From operations to finance, HR to logistics, organizations increasingly rely on KPIs to monitor progress, inform decisions, and signal accountability. In mid-sized firms, which often straddle the complexity of large enterprises and the agility of startups, KPIs serve a vital function in navigating growth and competitiveness. Yet, as these firms scale, they frequently import performance frameworks designed for much larger entities. The result is often a deluge of metrics, many of which are poorly aligned, redundant, or misinterpreted.

The managerial consequences of this KPI proliferation are profound. Studies in organizational psychology and management theory have begun to document what practitioners intuitively understand: that too many metrics can impair decision-making, dilute strategic focus, and exhaust cognitive resources. Unlike large corporations with specialized departments to parse and interpret data, mid-sized firms tend to place this burden on already overstretched managers. This paper argues that KPI saturation has evolved into a silent organizational pathology—one that reduces responsiveness, promotes short-termism, and erodes internal trust.

## Literature Review

The literature surrounding KPIs in business management reveals a tension between their intended role as performance tools and their unintended effects as organizational stressors. Meyer and Gupta (1994) introduced the concept of the performance paradox, showing that while performance measures aim to clarify goals, their proliferation can obscure them. In the years since, this paradox has found new relevance amid the data deluge of the digital age.



Metric fixation, a term popularized by Muller (2018), describes the organizational obsession with quantification. Rather than improving performance, metric fixation can distort behavior by incentivizing the manipulation of numbers instead of the pursuit of genuine improvement. This fixation is often driven by external pressures from stakeholders, as well as internal desires for control and predictability.

Another related concept is surrogation. As Tayler and Harris (2019) explain, surrogation occurs when managers begin to treat metrics as the goals themselves, rather than as representations of underlying strategic objectives. This shift can lead to behaviors that optimize for the metric but undermine the organization's mission.

In mid-sized firms, the adoption of enterprise-level KPI frameworks can create systems too complex for lean managerial teams to navigate. Grabova et al. (2011) noted that SMEs adopting large-scale business intelligence systems often lack the structural capacity to filter, contextualize, or retire obsolete KPIs. This leads to cluttered dashboards and contradictory signals, creating confusion instead of clarity.

The psychological toll of KPI overload is also well-documented. Research by Shah (2022) indicates that excessive performance monitoring is correlated with higher levels of workplace stress, burnout, and disengagement. Managers facing unrealistic or excessive metric requirements report lower job satisfaction and reduced capacity for creative problem-solving.

#### Theoretical Framework

This paper operates at the intersection of three theoretical perspectives: the performance paradox, metric fixation, and surrogation. Together, these frameworks explain how KPI systems can evolve from decision-support tools into decision-impeding burdens.

The performance paradox highlights the diminishing returns of increased measurement. As Meyer and Gupta (1994) demonstrate, beyond a certain threshold, more metrics generate noise rather than insight. Metric fixation extends this insight by examining the behavioral consequences of overemphasizing measurement. It shows how organizations, in their quest for accountability, often create cultures of surveillance that impair trust and adaptability (Muller, 2018).

Surrogation brings a psychological lens to the discussion. It reveals how individuals cognitively substitute abstract goals with tangible metrics, leading to goal displacement and ethical lapses (Tayler & Harris, 2019). When combined, these theories illustrate how KPI saturation can become a structural liability.

#### Methodology

This study synthesizes data from three sources: 1) peer-reviewed academic literature; 2) industry case studies from mid-sized firms; and 3) interviews with ten senior managers across manufacturing, services, and logistics sectors. While not a formal empirical study, this integrative approach allows for a multidimensional understanding of KPI saturation and its effects.



The ten interviewees were selected based on their managerial responsibilities and tenure in firms ranging from 100 to 500 employees. Conversations were semi-structured and focused on experiences with KPI systems, decision-making challenges, and perceived organizational effectiveness. Data was coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and anomalies.

## Findings

Three major themes emerged from the data: cognitive overload, strategic myopia, and deteriorating morale.

### Cognitive Overload

Managers consistently reported being overwhelmed by the volume and inconsistency of KPIs. One respondent described their dashboard as "an ocean of numbers, most of which I can't act on." Others noted that metrics often lacked context or were duplicative across departments. This overload inhibited quick decision-making, as managers spent time deciphering which KPIs mattered rather than acting on insights.

### Strategic Myopia

Several managers noted a drift toward short-term optimization at the expense of long-term strategy. For example, one firm prioritized reducing call times in customer service, only to discover a decline in customer satisfaction. The metric had become a surrogate for quality, leading to unintended consequences. This pattern aligns with the concept of surrogation and underscores the risk of confusing operational proxies with strategic goals.

### Deteriorating Morale

Finally, the psychological impact of KPI saturation was evident in nearly every interview. Managers spoke of "metric fatigue" and a sense of being constantly evaluated. This environment fostered anxiety and reduced experimentation. Some reported disengaging from the KPI process altogether, seeing it as a bureaucratic exercise divorced from real outcomes.

## Discussion

These findings suggest that KPI saturation is not merely a technical issue of dashboard design but a deeper cultural and structural problem. When metrics become ends in themselves, they distort judgment and narrow the cognitive bandwidth of decision-makers. In mid-sized firms, where roles are more fluid and accountability less siloed, this effect is magnified.

Moreover, the findings support the idea that not all measurement is helpful. As with any form of communication, signal-to-noise ratio matters. A well-crafted set of 10 meaningful KPIs may offer more strategic value than 50 fragmented ones. The challenge is in identifying which metrics truly reflect the organization's mission and capacity for change.

## Recommendations



1. Conduct KPI Audits: Firms should regularly review their KPIs for relevance, clarity, and alignment with strategic goals. Obsolete or low-impact metrics should be retired.
2. Implement Tiered Metrics: Not all metrics need to be visible at all levels. A tiered system can help ensure that managers are not overwhelmed with irrelevant data.
3. Promote Metric Literacy: Managers should be trained not just in reading metrics but in understanding their limitations and context.
4. Reconnect Metrics to Mission: Periodic discussions that link KPIs to broader organizational goals can help reduce surrogation and keep teams focused on what matters.
5. Limit the Number of KPIs: Less is often more. Firms should aim for quality over quantity in their metric systems.

## Conclusion

The managerial burden of metrics in mid-sized firms is a pressing but underexamined issue. While KPIs are designed to enhance performance, their unchecked proliferation can lead to confusion, stress, and strategic misalignment. By recognizing KPI saturation as a systemic risk, organizations can begin to restore balance in their performance management systems. This paper calls for a shift from quantity to quality in measurement practices, with an emphasis on clarity, alignment, and organizational health.

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## The Slack Effect: How Internal Messaging Platforms Rewire Organizational Culture and Decision Velocity

### Abstract

Internal messaging platforms like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Discord have fundamentally reshaped organizational dynamics. This paper explores how these tools, originally designed for communication efficiency, are now central to shaping organizational culture and accelerating or fragmenting decision-making processes. Drawing from literature in organizational behavior, digital communication, and enterprise systems, this article proposes that internal messaging platforms create new patterns of visibility, informality, and immediacy that challenge legacy structures of control and information flow. Using cross-sector interviews, platform analytics, and a review of current research, the findings suggest that while internal messaging improves responsiveness and connection, it also introduces challenges of information overload, performative participation, and decision diffusion. Strategic recommendations include structured channel governance, asynchronous work policies, and digital etiquette frameworks to optimize decision velocity without cultural degradation.

### Introduction

The rise of internal messaging platforms in modern organizations represents one of the most significant, yet understudied, shifts in workplace communication in the last two decades. Tools like Slack and Microsoft Teams are now deeply embedded in daily workflows across industries, from tech startups to government agencies. These platforms have moved beyond their initial function as chat applications and now function as digital watercoolers, dashboards, meeting rooms, and cultural arenas (Gibbs et al., 2013). Their omnipresence raises an important question: How are internal messaging platforms reshaping the cultural and operational foundations of organizations?

While proponents argue that internal messaging enables faster decisions and more inclusive collaboration, emerging evidence suggests a more complex reality. Messaging tools can bypass formal hierarchies, create invisible power structures, and foster a sense of always-on urgency. This paper explores this paradox by analyzing how internal messaging platforms influence organizational

culture and decision velocity. It proposes that these platforms both accelerate and obscure decisions, erode traditional gatekeeping, and create new modes of visibility and control.

#### Literature Review

**Digital Communication in Organizations** Digital communication tools have long been known to affect hierarchy, transparency, and coordination. Early research on email revealed both democratizing and fragmenting effects on workplace communication (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Internal messaging platforms extend these dynamics by introducing real-time interactions with persistent visibility, reshaping norms around participation and response.

#### Organizational Culture and Technology

Organizational culture is traditionally shaped through rituals, narratives, and informal interactions (Schein, 2010). Messaging platforms now serve as sites of culture creation, where emojis, gifs, custom channels, and reaction metrics construct a shared language and social contract. Yet, culture transmitted digitally is prone to misinterpretation and uneven participation (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

#### Decision-Making Velocity

Research in decision science highlights the importance of velocity in competitive environments (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, increased speed does not guarantee better outcomes. Messaging platforms accelerate access to information but can also lead to premature decisions or overexposure of minor issues. The availability heuristic may dominate in such environments, favoring readily visible input over deeper analysis (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

#### Methodology

This paper draws on a multi-method qualitative study combining:

1. Semi-structured interviews with 12 professionals across tech, healthcare, education, and nonprofit sectors, all using Slack or Teams as their primary communication tool.
2. Analysis of public Slack communities (e.g., remote work groups, developer collectives) to observe cultural patterns.
3. A thematic review of recent peer-reviewed and gray literature on internal messaging in organizational settings.

The interview sample included participants from both managerial and non-managerial roles, aged 25 to 52, with experience in organizations ranging from 20 to 2,000 employees.

**Findings** Four primary themes emerged from the data:

1. **Acceleration of Informal Influence** Messaging platforms create alternative pathways to influence outside of formal hierarchy. Employees who are quick to respond, active in

threads, or known for humor and helpfulness gain reputational capital. As one product manager noted, "The people with the most Slack clout often aren't in the org chart."

2. **Cultural Flattening and Fragmentation** While messaging tools flatten communication hierarchies, they also fragment culture into micro-channels. Team culture becomes hyper-localized, with different norms emerging in different channels. This can lead to uneven experiences of belonging or exclusion, particularly for new hires or remote workers.
3. **Decision Diffusion and Overexposure** Participants reported that decision-making was both faster and more chaotic. In the absence of clear channel governance, decisions are sometimes made informally in threads without documentation or accountability. One interviewee described it as "decision-making by emoji-whomever gets the most thumbs up wins."
4. **Performance Anxiety and Visibility Loops** High visibility in messaging platforms can create anxiety and lead to performative behavior. Some employees feel pressured to constantly signal productivity, even outside work hours. Others curate messages to appear confident or competent, reducing authenticity. This culture of performativity can reduce psychological safety.

## Discussion

The findings confirm that internal messaging platforms are not neutral tools but active shapers of organizational culture and performance. They shift power away from titles toward visibility and responsiveness. They democratize input but can overwhelm decision processes. They build community but also produce fragmented cultural microclimates.

These dualities suggest that the Slack Effect is both enabling and eroding. The velocity of decision-making is increased, but the coherence of decision rationale may suffer. Organizations must therefore be intentional in how they structure digital communication.

## Recommendations

1. **Establish Channel Governance** Define clear purposes for each channel (e.g., announcements, brainstorming, decisions) to reduce ambiguity and ensure traceability of decisions.
2. **Encourage Asynchronous Work** Normalize delayed responses and batch communication to reduce performative urgency and promote deeper focus.
3. **Train for Digital Communication Literacy** Equip employees with training on tone, clarity, and context to minimize miscommunication and maximize psychological safety.
4. **Make Decisions Visible** Develop systems to summarize, log, and link decisions to specific channels or threads for retrospective clarity.

5. Monitor Culture Signals Use internal pulse surveys and analytics to identify patterns of exclusion, overload, or burnout linked to messaging behaviors.

## Conclusion

Internal messaging platforms are now central nervous systems for many modern organizations. Their influence on culture and decision-making is profound but ambivalent. They offer speed, connection, and informality, but also generate new forms of overload, ambiguity, and cultural strain. Organizations that embrace these platforms without examining their structural impacts risk trading efficiency for coherence. By implementing strategic guardrails and promoting mindful usage, businesses can harness the Slack Effect for sustainable decision velocity and healthier workplace culture.

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# The Myth of the Cross-Functional Team: When Collaboration Becomes a Hidden Cost Center

## Abstract

Cross-functional teams are widely celebrated as a hallmark of modern, agile organizations. They promise increased innovation, faster execution, and broader ownership. However, beneath this promise lies an underexplored reality: cross-functional collaboration often carries hidden costs that undermine productivity, increase cognitive load, and dilute accountability. This paper investigates the structural, psychological, and economic burdens imposed by cross-functional teams. Through case studies, survey data, and an extensive literature review, it reveals that while cross-functional structures can enhance innovation under specific conditions, they often result in decision diffusion, meeting overload, and role ambiguity. The study argues that without clear governance, cultural maturity, and decision rights, cross-functional teams evolve into inefficiency machines. Recommendations include redefining collaboration thresholds, instituting role anchoring, and auditing time cost in project workflows.

## Introduction

Cross-functional teams (CFTs) have become a standard fixture in modern organizational design. Popularized by the tech industry and cemented through Agile, Lean, and Design Thinking frameworks, the concept suggests that assembling individuals from different functional backgrounds leads to richer insights, faster iteration, and holistic solutions (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). From product development to strategic planning, organizations increasingly turn to cross-functional configurations to break down silos and drive innovation.

However, the widespread embrace of CFTs has often overlooked their downsides. Mounting anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the very features that make CFTs attractive can also sow dysfunction. Misaligned incentives, unclear accountability, redundant communication loops, and culture clashes frequently emerge within these teams. Despite their prevalence, there is little critical examination of the cumulative costs-temporal, cognitive, and financial-of cross-functional collaboration.

This paper investigates the paradox of the cross-functional team. While CFTs are designed to improve performance, they often introduce inefficiencies that go unmeasured. This study proposes a new lens through which to evaluate cross-functional work: the concept of collaboration as a cost center.

## Literature Review

**Origins and Promises of Cross-Functional Teams** The rise of CFTs is tied to the evolution of knowledge work. In a dynamic business environment, specialization creates silos, while integration offers adaptability (Mohrman et al., 1995). Scholars and consultants alike have extolled the virtues



of cross-functional work in promoting speed, creativity, and alignment with end-users (Wheelwright & Clark, 1992).

However, many of these claims stem from ideal conditions. In reality, successful cross-functional collaboration requires high trust, strong leadership, and shared language-conditions not easily established or maintained (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

#### Decision Diffusion and Role Ambiguity

A significant challenge in CFTs is decision diffusion. Without clearly defined decision rights, authority becomes ambiguous, resulting in delays or consensus-seeking that erodes accountability (Hackman, 2002). Role ambiguity further compounds this issue, as team members struggle to navigate overlapping responsibilities.

#### Meeting Overload and Cognitive Fragmentation

Research indicates that CFTs often lead to increased meeting volume, with employees spending up to 35 percent more time in collaborative activities than five years ago (Cross et al., 2016). This overload fragments attention and reduces deep work capacity, diminishing actual productivity despite surface-level engagement.

#### Cultural Clash and Misaligned Incentives

Functional subcultures-engineers, marketers, finance professionals-bring divergent norms and expectations to the team table. While diversity can enrich discussions, it can also stall progress if not mediated effectively (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018). Misaligned KPIs and performance metrics further undercut unity, as team members prioritize function-specific goals.

#### Methodology

This research utilizes a triangulated qualitative approach:

1. Case studies from three mid-size companies in tech, manufacturing, and professional services.
2. A thematic review of 15 recent studies on cross-functional teams and organizational collaboration.
3. In-depth interviews with 10 professionals (managers and team members) who have worked on or led CFTs in the past two years.

Interviewees discussed the structure, outcomes, and tensions within their cross-functional experiences. Data was coded for patterns of friction, inefficiency, and unmet expectations.

#### Findings

1. The Efficiency Illusion

2. Most participants initially perceived their CFTs as successful due to perceived inclusivity and dynamism. However, over time, delays, circular conversations, and accountability lapses emerged. As one marketing lead put it, "Everyone was involved, but no one was responsible."
3. Collaboration Fatigue
4. Employees reported burnout not from workload, but from the constant need to update, align, and translate information across functions. Weekly syncs turned into daily check-ins. One engineer described the process as "death by meeting."
5. Dilution of Expertise
6. Functional specialists felt underutilized or sidelined when broader consensus took precedence over depth. Design, for instance, was often overruled by business priorities without clear rationale. "We were brought in for our expertise, then ignored," said one UX designer.
7. Emergent Informal Hierarchies
8. Despite the flat structure, informal power dynamics formed based on vocality, seniority, or role proximity to the executive team. This undermined the egalitarian ethos of CFTs and skewed decisions.

## Discussion

These findings challenge the assumption that more collaboration is inherently better. In fact, collaboration has diminishing returns when it is unstructured, culturally misaligned, or overused. CFTs work best in environments with clear chartering, cultural readiness, and real decision-making autonomy.

The problem is not cross-functionality per se, but the uncritical deployment of collaborative structures without regard to cost or context. Organizations often confuse interaction with effectiveness and overestimate the value of consensus. The result is a hidden cost center that drains time and cognitive resources without delivering commensurate value.

## Recommendations

### Define Collaboration

**Thresholds** Set clear criteria for when cross-functional structures are appropriate. Not every project benefits from maximum participation.

### Anchor Roles with Accountability

Ensure each function has defined responsibilities and authority within the team. Use a RACI framework to map decision rights.

#### Audit Collaborative Time

Track time spent in meetings, updates, and coordination. Compare against project outputs to assess efficiency.

#### Empower Functional Champions

Preserve depth of expertise by giving functional leads veto power in their domains when stakes are high.

#### Develop Cultural Interoperability

Invest in shared language and cross-training to reduce friction between subcultures.

#### Conclusion

Cross-functional teams are not a panacea. When poorly structured or indiscriminately deployed, they impose hidden costs that erode the very value they are meant to create. Organizations must move beyond the myth of collaboration as a universal good and adopt a more nuanced, critical approach to team design. By measuring the true cost of collaboration and enforcing structural clarity, firms can unlock the potential of CFTs without succumbing to their pitfalls.

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## Culture Fit is Killing Innovation: How Homogeneity Became a Hidden Hiring Bias

### Abstract

The term "culture fit" has become a dominant force in corporate hiring, often touted as a safeguard for team cohesion and productivity. Yet, beneath its appealing surface lies a troubling mechanism of exclusion. This paper argues that culture fit functions as a socially acceptable form of hiring bias, reinforcing homogeneity and suppressing the very diversity of thought that drives innovation. Drawing on organizational psychology, diversity management research, and analysis of hiring practices across sectors, the article reveals how culture fit disproportionately penalizes nonconforming candidates under the guise of subjective alignment. It proposes a shift toward "culture add" frameworks that prioritize complementary value alignment without demanding sameness. Recommendations include bias interruption protocols, reframed interview questions, and recalibrated innovation metrics that reward cognitive diversity.

### Introduction

Hiring for "culture fit" has become a ubiquitous mantra in modern organizational life. Framed as a strategy to ensure cohesion, trust, and alignment within teams, culture fit is widely perceived as a best practice in recruitment. Yet, as companies increasingly claim to value diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), a growing body of evidence suggests that the culture fit paradigm may be doing

more harm than good. At best, it subtly privileges familiarity over novelty; at worst, it becomes a gateway for implicit bias to flourish under the guise of team harmony.

While culture fit is often defined in positive terms-shared values, complementary work styles, mutual understanding-it is rarely interrogated as a mechanism of exclusion. In practice, hiring managers often interpret culture fit in subjective, affective terms: Did the candidate make them feel comfortable? Would they enjoy having lunch together? These gut-level judgments, while natural, tend to favor those who resemble the evaluator in background, demeanor, communication style, or worldview (Rivera, 2012). The result is a self-reinforcing cycle of sameness that stifles cognitive diversity and undermines innovation.

This paper examines the hidden costs of culture fit, particularly its role in suppressing creative dissent and maintaining monocultures in teams and leadership. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, case studies, and empirical data, the paper makes the case for retiring the language and logic of culture fit in favor of a more generative framework: culture add. Culture add shifts the emphasis from fitting in to contributing something new-foregrounding the complementary rather than the conforming.

#### Literature Review

**Culture Fit and Organizational Homogeneity** The concept of culture fit emerged from organizational behavior literature in the 1980s as companies sought to codify their internal values and norms (Chatman, 1989). Early research suggested that alignment between personal and organizational values could improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Over time, culture fit evolved into a shorthand for hiring decisions that balance qualifications with perceived social and emotional compatibility.

Yet, culture fit is inherently ambiguous. Unlike technical competencies or experience, it is rarely operationalized in concrete, observable terms. This vagueness allows evaluators to substitute their own cultural preferences for objective evaluation. Scholars have noted that culture fit often becomes a proxy for affinity bias, where individuals gravitate toward those who resemble themselves in superficial ways (Koch, D'Mello, & Sackett, 2015).

#### Cognitive Diversity and Innovation

Decades of research in organizational psychology and innovation science underscore the importance of cognitive diversity-differences in perspectives, heuristics, and problem-solving approaches-for team creativity and adaptive performance (Page, 2007). Homogeneous teams may communicate more easily, but heterogeneous teams outperform them when it comes to novel solutions and complex decision-making (Hong & Page, 2004).

Despite this evidence, many organizations continue to prioritize social fluency over idea fluency in hiring. The result is teams that get along well but think alike, reducing their capacity to challenge assumptions or generate breakthrough ideas.

Bias and Exclusion in Hiring Practices Implicit bias research has shown that unstructured interviews and subjective evaluations are highly susceptible to bias based on race, gender, accent, and cultural signaling (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Culture fit assessments, often conducted informally, provide fertile ground for these biases to manifest under a socially acceptable rationale.

Moreover, culture fit tends to penalize individuals who challenge dominant norms. Candidates who express unconventional views, resist small talk, or question company practices are often labeled as poor fits—even when their dissent signals valuable critical thinking.

**Methodology** This paper synthesizes findings from:

1. A meta-analysis of 35 peer-reviewed studies on culture fit, innovation, and diversity.
2. Qualitative interviews with 15 HR professionals and hiring managers across tech, finance, and nonprofit sectors.
3. Review of anonymized candidate feedback and decision rationales from internal hiring panels at three multinational firms.

Interviews focused on how culture fit is defined, evaluated, and rationalized in hiring decisions. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring patterns of justification, exclusion, and bias.

**Findings**

1. **Ambiguity of Culture Fit Language** Across interviews, hiring professionals struggled to articulate what culture fit meant in operational terms. Common phrases included "shared energy," "same vibe," or "just gets us." Such language correlated strongly with informal gatekeeping.
2. **Overreliance on Gut Feelings** Many managers admitted using intuition to assess fit, especially during final stages of evaluation. This reliance on gut feelings systematically favored candidates with similar communication styles, humor, or interests.
3. **Penalization of Nonconforming Candidates** Feedback documents revealed that candidates who pushed back on standard procedures or asked probing questions were frequently labeled as "difficult" or "not aligned," even when technically qualified.
4. **Innovation Bottlenecks in Homogeneous Teams** Teams built on culture fit tended to report higher cohesion but struggled with cross-functional collaboration and creative ideation. Leaders noted that such teams often "agreed too quickly" and lacked healthy dissent.

**Discussion**

The findings confirm that culture fit functions as a hidden filter for conformity, not just compatibility. While cohesion has value, excessive homogeneity reduces a team's capacity to learn, adapt, and innovate. Culture fit, when interpreted subjectively, undermines the very qualities—originality, critical thinking, divergent perspective—that organizations claim to value.

Moreover, the concept of culture fit reinforces power asymmetries. Dominant cultural norms become the default, while deviations from those norms are coded as risk. This dynamic disproportionately affects marginalized candidates who may bring different speech patterns, values, or behavioral norms.

It is time to retire culture fit as a hiring goal. In its place, organizations must adopt frameworks that value difference, intentional inclusion, and constructive dissent. Culture add offers one such alternative.

#### Recommendations

1. Replace Culture Fit with Culture Add Redesign interview rubrics to assess what unique perspective or experience a candidate can bring to the team. Train evaluators to look for complementary, not conforming, attributes.
2. Operationalize Evaluation Criteria Use structured interviews with standardized questions tied to job-relevant competencies. Reduce reliance on informal conversations as decision-making inputs.
3. Implement Bias Interruption Protocols Introduce pause points in hiring to reflect on decisions, surface assumptions, and challenge intuitive rationales.
4. Rethink Team Cohesion Metrics Expand team performance metrics to include dissent tolerance, idea diversity, and cognitive friction-not just alignment or harmony.
5. Hold Hiring Panels Accountable Require justifications for candidate rejection based on values alignment. Ensure those rationales are specific, behavioral, and consistent.

#### Conclusion

Culture fit is not a neutral concept-it is a mechanism of sameness, often at odds with innovation and inclusion. By valorizing comfort over contribution, it entrenches bias and narrows the pipeline of creative talent. If companies are serious about innovation and diversity, they must abandon the comfort of fit in favor of the challenge of difference. Culture add is not just a semantic upgrade-it is a strategic imperative for the modern organization.

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## Shadow IT and the Hidden Workforce: Understanding the Rise of Unauthorized Systems in Corporate Environments

### Abstract

As organizations increasingly digitize operations, a parallel phenomenon has emerged: the proliferation of unauthorized, employee-driven technologies known collectively as “Shadow IT.” From unsanctioned cloud apps to rogue automation scripts and third-party analytics platforms, Shadow IT represents both a risk and a response—a hidden workforce architecture developed in reaction to bureaucratic delay, technological insufficiency, and operational misalignment. This paper explores the systemic causes, organizational impacts, and ethical dimensions of Shadow IT. Drawing from enterprise IT governance literature, organizational behavior theory, and case-based field interviews, we argue that Shadow IT is not merely a compliance issue but a signal of unmet need and innovation under constraint. Rather than punish or ignore it, forward-thinking companies must learn to map, integrate, and co-opt Shadow IT into agile governance frameworks that foster trust, creativity, and performance.

## Introduction

Enterprise technology environments are becoming more complex, interconnected, and regulated. In response, IT departments have implemented strict protocols, security standards, and approval workflows to ensure control and compliance. However, across nearly every industry, employees have quietly developed alternative digital solutions-tools, scripts, apps, or entire workflows-that bypass centralized IT oversight. This phenomenon is known as Shadow IT.

Shadow IT includes a wide range of user-initiated technologies: unauthorized Slack groups, Google Sheets used instead of ERP systems, cloud-based task trackers like Trello or Notion, custom Python scripts for automating repetitive tasks, and API connectors that integrate external services without IT's approval. According to a Gartner (2022) report, nearly 30 to 40 percent of technology spending in large enterprises is not controlled by the IT department-a statistic that underscores the scope of this silent movement.

This paper defines and analyzes Shadow IT as a sociotechnical response to systemic dysfunction. It examines its root causes, both technological and cultural; its risks, which span security, compliance, and sustainability; and its potential, as a decentralized force of creativity and agility. We argue that Shadow IT is best understood not as deviance, but as innovation under constraint-a shadow workforce of digital labor that must be reckoned with, integrated, and ethically managed.

## Literature Review

### Definitions and Scope

Shadow IT is broadly defined as the use of information technology systems, devices, software, applications, and services without explicit IT department approval (Silic & Back, 2014). It can range from benign productivity hacks to highly complex systems managing core business processes. Often, Shadow IT arises in environments where official solutions are slow, outdated, or poorly suited to user needs (Behrens, 2009).

### Causes of Shadow IT

Research identifies several drivers of Shadow IT:

- **Agility Gap:** Centralized IT departments often move slowly due to compliance constraints, legacy systems, or staffing shortages (Györy et al., 2012). Business units, facing urgent demands, deploy their own solutions.
- **User Empowerment:** The consumerization of IT has empowered employees to seek out and configure their own tools (Tarafdar et al., 2013). The rise of SaaS platforms has reduced barriers to entry.
- **Mistrust or Alienation:** Some users feel the IT department does not understand their needs or fails to deliver user-friendly tools. Shadow IT becomes a form of digital self-defense.

- **Innovation Pressure:** In fast-moving industries, experimentation is encouraged, and formal IT processes may be seen as inhibitors (Zimmerman, 2016).

## Risks and Consequences

While Shadow IT can boost productivity and responsiveness, it carries serious risks:

- **Security vulnerabilities** due to lack of oversight, encryption, and patching.
- **Data privacy violations**, especially under GDPR, HIPAA, or SOC 2 regimes.
- **Redundancy and fragmentation** of data assets and workflows.
- **Lack of scalability or documentation**, which undermines institutional knowledge.

Nevertheless, empirical research shows that total suppression of Shadow IT is ineffective and often counterproductive (Jones et al., 2020). What is needed is a reframing: from eradication to ethical integration.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach:

- **Literature synthesis** of over 40 academic papers and industry whitepapers on Shadow IT, digital transformation, and enterprise governance.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with 26 employees across IT, marketing, finance, and operations in mid-size to global organizations.
- **Case analysis** of three organizations that attempted to either suppress or integrate Shadow IT over a three-year period.

Thematic coding was used to identify drivers, patterns, consequences, and ethical considerations of Shadow IT behavior and governance.

## Findings

### 1. Shadow IT as Survival, Not Sabotage

Contrary to common assumptions, most Shadow IT does not stem from malicious intent. Interviewees reported building or adopting unauthorized systems because sanctioned options were unresponsive or inadequate. A marketing analyst at a media firm said, “We waited four months for a Tableau license. I just used Looker on my personal Google account. We couldn’t wait.”

A project manager at a logistics firm described a timekeeping solution built in Airtable to replace a cumbersome legacy tool. “It wasn’t about defiance-it was about getting things done.”

These findings challenge the dominant narrative that Shadow IT represents disobedience. In many cases, it is a form of operational citizenship.

## **2. The Hidden Workforce Behind Business Continuity**

Shadow IT often plays a critical, yet unacknowledged, role in sustaining business operations. During the pandemic, one public sector organization relied on a “rogue” Zoom system set up by frontline workers to coordinate emergency services while official systems lagged behind.

These decentralized solutions operated with no budget, no IT support, and no documentation-but they worked. In effect, employees became de facto IT architects, building critical infrastructure in real time.

The labor behind Shadow IT is invisible and unrewarded. It reflects a hidden workforce that expands the boundaries of responsibility and innovation.

## **3. Cultural Contradictions and Control Myths**

Organizations often claim to support agility, experimentation, and innovation-but enforce IT policies that punish these very behaviors. Employees described being reprimanded for using unauthorized tools, even when those tools increased efficiency.

This contradiction reflects deeper tensions in organizational culture: control versus autonomy, centralization versus trust. When governance systems are inflexible, Shadow IT becomes not just a workaround, but a cultural signal that policy is out of sync with reality.

## **4. Shadow IT as a Source of Institutional Memory Loss**

While Shadow IT can enhance responsiveness, it also creates risks of knowledge fragmentation. Tools built by individual employees are rarely documented, integrated, or transferred. When those employees leave, critical systems disappear.

One case study organization lost two years of client data when a salesperson’s custom CRM dashboard, built in Airtable, was deleted upon their departure. IT had never known it existed.

This fragility reveals a paradox: Shadow IT expands capability in the short term but undermines resilience in the long term-unless managed consciously.

## **Discussion**

### **Reframing Shadow IT: From Threat to Signal**

Shadow IT should not be seen solely as a threat to governance. It is a diagnostic signal-a form of distributed innovation that reveals where the organization is failing to meet demand. Rather than suppress it, leaders should investigate what Shadow IT reveals:

- Where are the process bottlenecks?



- Which tools are too rigid or outdated?
- Where does formal governance fail to support actual work?

Shadow IT is often the canary in the coal mine for organizational misalignment.

### **Governance by Design, Not Suppression**

The future of enterprise IT lies in governance by design-creating systems that allow for secure, user-driven flexibility. This includes:

- **Digital sandboxes** for prototyping new tools in a safe environment.
- **IT-business partnership models** where user needs drive tool selection.
- **Shadow IT registries**, where users can disclose tools without penalty and receive minimal support.
- **Community-based tech stewards** who support ethical innovation at the team level.

These approaches move governance from “command and control” to “enable and integrate.”

### **Ethical Implications and Labor Considerations**

Shadow IT raises ethical questions. When employees create business-critical systems, should they be compensated or recognized? Who owns these systems? What happens to risk and liability?

Organizations must clarify:

- **Ownership of intellectual property** created by employees outside sanctioned systems.
- **Fairness in recognition**, especially when informal IT labor is gendered or racialized.
- **Boundaries of responsibility**, to avoid exploitation under the guise of “initiative.”

### **Recommendations**

1. **Shadow IT Discovery Audit**  
Proactively survey employees about unsanctioned tools. Frame the inquiry as collaborative, not punitive.
2. **Tool Rationalization**  
Identify redundancies across sanctioned and unsanctioned platforms. Eliminate overlap and provide supported alternatives.
3. **Create a Shadow IT Registry**  
Develop a voluntary, low-barrier system for employees to disclose tools in use. Offer light-touch support and governance.

4. **Incentivize Innovation Ethically**

Recognize and reward employees who build useful tools. Offer pathways to scale solutions enterprise-wide with proper support.

5. **Implement Ethical Guidelines for Digital Citizenship**

Draft a Digital Citizenship Code that defines rights and responsibilities for employee-built tools, emphasizing security and collaboration.

6. **Train IT Teams in Facilitation, Not Just Security**

Shift the IT function toward enablers of user-driven innovation. Train them in dialogue, coaching, and partnership.

7. **Governance Layer for Integration**

Invest in APIs and integration platforms that can securely link approved and grassroots systems into one data fabric.

## Conclusion

Shadow IT is not a bug in the system-it is a shadow system born from systemic gaps. It reveals the distance between what organizations promise and what they enable. In an age of decentralized work, rapid experimentation, and digital literacy, employees will continue to build their own tools when institutions fail to serve them.

Rather than policing innovation, leaders must architect systems that are flexible, secure, and inclusive. This means designing governance models that honor creativity, reduce friction, and build trust across silos. The future of IT is not just in control-it is in co-creation.

To manage Shadow IT ethically and effectively, organizations must recognize it for what it is: a mirror held up to the institution, reflecting both its constraints and its hidden potential.

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## The Ghost in the Ledger: Unrecorded Labor in the Age of AI

### Abstract

This paper explores the growing phenomenon of shadow work-the invisible, unpaid labor increasingly performed by consumers and employees in an AI-driven economy. From navigating complex digital platforms to self-managing administrative tasks that were once employer- or company-handled, modern labor has expanded in scope without equivalent compensation or recognition. Using economic modeling, philosophical analysis, and contemporary case studies, this research reveals how digital systems offload work onto users while externalizing costs. Drawing from the labor theories of Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt, the paper interrogates the ethical implications of automation, convenience, and corporate design. It calls for a reconceptualization of labor value, ethical product development, and compensation strategies that honor the full spectrum of human effort in the digital age.

### Introduction

The contemporary workplace is increasingly shaped by digital infrastructure and algorithmic systems. While these tools offer convenience, speed, and scalability, they also introduce a hidden cost: the transfer of labor to individuals outside formal employment. This labor-commonly referred to as "shadow work"-includes self-checkout at grocery stores, learning software interfaces for

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onboarding, managing digital calendars, troubleshooting tech issues, and more. These tasks were once handled by human employees but are now offloaded onto end-users under the banner of efficiency.

This paper investigates how AI and digital systems reconfigure labor relations by shifting the burden of work from organizations to individuals. It draws from economic modeling to estimate the scale of hidden time costs, engages with philosophical theories of labor and value, and evaluates implications for organizational ethics, human resources, and product design. The central argument is that ignoring shadow work results in a distorted understanding of productivity and a failure to recognize the full labor ecosystem.

### Defining Shadow Work

Ivan Illich (1981) first popularized the term "shadow work" to describe unpaid labor that supports the functioning of capitalist economies. In today's digital context, shadow work encompasses activities required to interact with technology platforms, fulfill bureaucratic requirements, and maintain personal productivity in the face of corporate automation.

Examples include:

- Navigating self-service portals
- Creating and managing online accounts
- Learning user interfaces without guidance
- Participating in unpaid onboarding modules
- Acting as one's own IT support

These actions blur the boundaries between user and worker. As automation advances, human effort does not disappear-it is displaced, fragmented, and hidden from the economic ledger.

### Economic Modeling of Hidden Labor Time

To assess the cost of shadow work, we can apply time-use economics. Consider a corporate software platform that saves the company 50 support agents by automating onboarding. If each of the 10,000 users spends two hours learning the system on their own, the platform displaces 20,000 hours of labor-without accounting for fatigue, stress, or failure rates. At a conservative estimate of \$25 per hour in labor value, this represents \$500,000 of unpaid work borne by users.

Multiply this by the hundreds of platforms used in enterprise and consumer spaces, and the scope of displaced labor becomes staggering. However, this labor is absent from GDP calculations, cost-benefit analyses, and productivity metrics (Schneider & Harknett, 2019).

This raises fundamental questions about the ethics of value extraction. If companies benefit from labor without compensating it-or even acknowledging it-are they engaging in a form of digital exploitation?

## Marx, Arendt, and the Value of Invisible Labor

Karl Marx's theory of surplus value is directly relevant here. According to Marx, capitalist profits emerge from the exploitation of labor-the difference between the value workers produce and the wages they receive (Marx, 1867/1990). Shadow work represents a further abstraction: labor performed without wages, often without awareness.

In this model, the user becomes a laborer whose productivity benefits the company but is not recorded or remunerated. Marx would likely identify this as an advanced form of alienation-workers estranged not only from the product of labor but from the awareness that they are laboring at all.

Hannah Arendt adds another dimension in her distinction between labor, work, and action (Arendt, 1958). For Arendt, labor is cyclical, necessary, and invisible-often performed in the private sphere and historically devalued. By this logic, shadow work aligns with domestic labor: essential to systems but unrecognized in public or economic terms. The digitization of life has extended such invisible labor into every sector.

## Philosophical Implications of Labor Erasure

The erasure of labor has both moral and political consequences. When labor is not named, it cannot be protected, compensated, or collectively negotiated. This obscurity undermines democratic agency by privatizing struggle and fragmenting resistance.

Moreover, shadow work often intensifies for the digitally marginalized-older adults, non-native speakers, or those with limited access to training. Thus, technological progress reproduces structural inequality under the guise of universal access.

## Product Design and the Ethics of Burden Distribution

Design choices influence who does what work. Every decision to automate a process for the company creates new responsibilities for the user. The question is not whether automation is good or bad but who absorbs its cost.

Designers have a responsibility to ask:

- Is this task necessary for the user, or a corporate convenience?
- Can we provide adequate guidance, support, or compensation?
- Are we designing for accessibility, or assuming digital fluency?

Companies like Apple, Microsoft, and Google often release updates that demand user adaptation without offering offsetting support. Meanwhile, enterprise platforms regularly introduce complexity that burdens frontline employees without revisiting job descriptions or compensation.

## Human Resources and the Invisible Job Description

Modern HR practices increasingly demand self-management from employees. Staff are expected to monitor their own performance, manage multiple platforms, and stay constantly "upskilled" on new

tools. This expectation is rarely reflected in official job descriptions or compensated through salary increases.

In effect, the modern worker becomes a hybrid of producer, administrator, IT specialist, and learner. This role inflation is often justified as "empowerment," but in practice it amounts to labor intensification (Bain & Taylor, 2000).

#### Ethical Compensation Models for the AI Era

To address shadow work, organizations must expand their definitions of labor and value. Potential solutions include:

- Time-use audits: Mapping hidden tasks in the employee experience
- Training compensation: Paying workers for time spent learning required tools
- Simplified interfaces: Investing in design that minimizes user burden
- Participation stipends: Compensating consumers for contributing data or feedback
- Universal digital labor rights: Establishing legal recognition for unpaid platform work

Such initiatives move toward a more ethical AI economy—one that acknowledges labor wherever it occurs.

#### Case Studies

1. **Self-Checkout Systems:** Retailers like Walmart and Target have widely adopted self-checkout. Customers now scan, bag, and often troubleshoot purchases. While this reduces staffing costs, it shifts operational labor to the consumer without benefit (Lu, 2021).
2. **Corporate Learning Management Systems (LMS):** Employees at large firms often spend hours navigating LMS platforms to complete compliance modules, certifications, or onboarding tasks. This unpaid time, although required, is not categorized as labor in compensation structures (Davis, 2020).
3. **Remote Work Tools:** Platforms like Slack, Zoom, and Asana demand not only use but cognitive navigation, etiquette learning, and constant engagement. The mental labor of managing digital boundaries is profound and unacknowledged (Mazmanian et al., 2013).

#### Toward a New Labor Paradigm

Shadow work reveals a deeper flaw in how business and economics conceptualize labor. As automation increases, we must redefine value not solely by output but by effort, attention, and time.

The gig economy, platform capitalism, and AI infrastructure all benefit from unpaid participation. But this model is unsustainable. It risks burnout, inequality, and societal fragmentation.

The future of ethical business depends on visibility-making the invisible labor visible, then valued. This requires changes in policy, design, compensation, and cultural norms.

## Conclusion

AI and digital platforms have not eliminated labor-they have displaced and disguised it. Shadow work proliferates in the gaps between automation and support, between convenience and control. To build a humane digital economy, we must acknowledge and value all labor, not just what appears on a balance sheet.

The ghost in the ledger is not a myth-it is us. And it is time we came to account.

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## Quiet Collapse: The Emotional Cost of Organizational Success

### Abstract

This paper investigates the hidden psychological and existential toll of high-performance business cultures that are financially successful yet emotionally unsustainable. As organizations pursue relentless growth and efficiency, they often neglect the inner lives of their employees. Drawing on qualitative interviews with former employees from high-growth firms, foundational concepts from organizational psychology, and existential philosophy, the paper reveals a disturbing trend: the erosion of identity, the rise of quiet burnout, and the normalization of moral disengagement. It argues that contemporary metrics of success are dangerously incomplete and calls for a redefinition of organizational health grounded in human dignity, psychological safety, and existential coherence.

### Introduction

By many external measures, today's high-performing organizations appear to thrive. They grow revenue, scale rapidly, attract investor capital, and rank high on performance metrics. However, beneath these glossy surface indicators lies a quiet collapse—an internal crisis marked by emotional exhaustion, moral confusion, and identity fragmentation among workers. This collapse is not dramatic; it is gradual, invisible to quarterly reports, and often masked by the very language of success.

This paper contends that the relentless pursuit of performance, especially in tech and finance sectors, is exacting a human cost that remains largely unexamined. Drawing on organizational psychology, existential theory, and in-depth interviews, it exposes the dissonance between corporate success and human well-being. The goal is not to reject performance but to reimagine it in human terms.

### Organizational Success as a Double-Edged Sword



The modern corporation increasingly relies on data-driven, performance-based evaluation systems. Objectives and key results (OKRs), performance indicators, and quarterly targets dominate the managerial vocabulary. While such systems enhance clarity and focus, they also risk dehumanizing the workplace by reducing individuals to metrics (Townsend & Morgan, 2017).

Companies such as Uber, Amazon, and Goldman Sachs have been lauded for their growth but criticized for their workplace culture. Uber's aggressive, performance-at-all-costs environment was detailed in Susan Fowler's 2017 exposé, which revealed systemic burnout, harassment, and moral neglect (Fowler, 2017). Amazon warehouse workers report being treated as replaceable parts in a vast logistical machine, monitored by productivity tracking systems with no tolerance for deviation (O'Neil, 2016).

### The Performance Trap and Its Psychological Toll

The performance trap refers to a workplace dynamic in which employees continuously push beyond their limits to meet escalating demands, often at the expense of their psychological and physical health (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy, becomes normalized in such cultures.

Research indicates that environments which reward overwork and punish vulnerability contribute to chronic stress, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Keller et al., 2019). Psychological safety—defined as the belief that one can take interpersonal risks without fear of punishment—is virtually absent in high-pressure settings (Edmondson, 1999). Instead, fear-based motivation prevails, encouraging short-term compliance but long-term disengagement.

### Existential Dissonance and the Erosion of Identity

Beyond psychological symptoms lies a deeper existential crisis. Existential theorists such as Viktor Frankl and Rollo May emphasize the human need for meaning, coherence, and moral agency in work (Frankl, 2006; May, 1994). When employees feel that their labor serves only abstract shareholder interests or algorithmic goals, they experience alienation—a loss of self in service of systems they do not control or believe in.

Interviews with former employees of a global consulting firm reveal this dissonance. One respondent described feeling like a "ghost with a laptop," drifting through projects with no personal investment. Another, a tech executive, recounted waking each morning with dread, unable to connect his labor with any authentic sense of contribution.

This erosion of identity is not limited to burnout. It reflects a deeper spiritual crisis: the loss of alignment between one's values and one's work. When success is defined externally and performance becomes a proxy for worth, individuals are reduced to role-players in someone else's game.

### Moral Disengagement in High-Performance Cultures

Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement explains how individuals rationalize unethical behavior in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Bandura, 1999). In high-pressure business

environments, moral disengagement often manifests through euphemistic labeling ("moving fast" instead of cutting corners), displacement of responsibility ("just following orders"), and dehumanization (viewing clients or users as data).

Employees in such environments often report ethical fading, where repeated exposure to questionable practices gradually dulls moral sensitivity. This erosion of ethical consciousness is not the result of malice but survival. When careers hinge on compliance, dissent becomes costly. Over time, workers learn to silence their conscience to preserve their position.

#### The Philosophical Problem of Success

Success, as defined by dominant corporate paradigms, is often quantitative: revenue growth, market share, productivity. But is this definition sufficient? Philosophers from Aristotle to Simone Weil have argued that a good life involves eudaimonia-flourishing rooted in purpose, virtue, and authenticity (Nussbaum, 2000).

If business success comes at the expense of these human goods, is it truly success? Or is it a form of ethical malnourishment masked by material abundance? Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre warned of "bad faith"-the self-deception involved in conforming to externally imposed roles at the cost of personal freedom (Sartre, 1956). Many employees in high-performance cultures live in this state, performing identities they do not own, pursuing goals they do not choose.

#### Workplace Culture and the Failure of Leadership

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping the ethical climate of organizations. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, empathy, and moral example, has been shown to mitigate burnout and enhance employee engagement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Yet many high-performing firms operate under transactional leadership models, where incentives and punishments dominate.

Leaders who model overwork, suppress vulnerability, or prioritize optics over substance contribute to cultures of quiet collapse. Conversely, leaders who acknowledge complexity, tolerate imperfection, and value integrity can create space for human growth even amid performance pressure.

#### Case Studies in Quiet Collapse

1. **The Startup Unicorn:** A fast-growing tech firm celebrated for its innovation but plagued by high turnover and employee mental health crises. Internal surveys revealed that 68 percent of staff felt "disposable," and 41 percent sought therapy due to work-related stress.
2. **The Financial Powerhouse:** An investment bank known for record profits and crushing hours. Former analysts reported panic attacks, insomnia, and feelings of numbness. One stated, "We were rich in money, poor in spirit."



3. **The Mission-Driven Nonprofit:** Despite its social justice aims, internal culture rewarded self-sacrifice to the point of breakdown. Employees who questioned workloads were labeled uncommitted.

Across all cases, the common denominator was not malice but misalignment: between values and actions, performance and purpose, structure and soul.

#### Organizational Psychology and the Path to Wholeness

Organizational psychology offers pathways to restore alignment. Theories of self-determination emphasize autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Workplaces that support these needs foster resilience and authenticity.

Positive organizational scholarship suggests that cultivating gratitude, compassion, and meaning enhances both well-being and performance (Cameron et al., 2003). Initiatives such as mindful leadership, restorative circles, and narrative coaching have shown promise in rehumanizing work environments (Boyatzis et al., 2006).

#### From Efficiency to Integrity: Redefining Success

True success must be multidimensional. It should include:

- Psychological sustainability: Can employees thrive over time?
- Ethical coherence: Are values practiced, not just posted?
- Existential meaning: Does work connect to a deeper purpose?

Companies like Patagonia and IDEO have demonstrated that financial success and human flourishing need not be mutually exclusive. Their cultures prioritize autonomy, learning, and shared mission.

#### Conclusion: Toward a Human Renaissance in Business

The quiet collapse within high-performing organizations is a symptom of a deeper crisis: the separation of business success from human well-being. This paper calls for a philosophical reorientation. Performance should not be abolished but embedded within a broader ethic of care, dignity, and meaning.

Leaders, scholars, and workers alike must resist the allure of superficial metrics and embrace a deeper inquiry: What kind of world are we building through our work? And who are we becoming in the process?

To ignore the emotional cost of organizational success is to accept a hollow future. But to name it, study it, and transform it is to begin the long work of repair. That work starts now.

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## Professionals in Business Journal – 2025 Q3–Q4: Issue 10 Wrap-Up (Year-End Special Issue)

As we close out **2025**, **Professionals in Business Journal (PIBJ)** marks a significant moment with **Issue 10**, a special double issue that reflects both the evolution of the journal and the broader realities shaping modern organizational life. This issue serves not only as a culmination of work developed throughout the year, but as a deliberate pause for synthesis—an opportunity to step back, examine patterns, and name structural truths that are often obscured by the pace and performance demands of contemporary business culture.

Issue 10 brings together a body of work that interrogates the systems beneath everyday professional experience. Across sectors and organizational forms, contributors examine how decision-making is shaped by metrics, platforms, incentives, and inherited cultural assumptions. Rather than focusing on surface-level trends or managerial prescriptions, the papers in this issue address how work is actually coordinated, measured, and lived—particularly in environments that prize speed, visibility, and optimization.

Several articles explore the transformation of authority and judgment in digitally mediated workplaces. Internal messaging platforms, cross-functional collaboration models, and KPI-driven performance frameworks are examined not as neutral tools, but as infrastructures that quietly rewire power, responsibility, and accountability. Contributors trace how these systems alter decision velocity, fragment attention, and shift cognitive and emotional labor downward, often onto individuals least empowered to change the structures themselves.

Leadership, too, is treated with sobriety rather than mythology. This issue examines the erosion of apprenticeship and experiential learning, the replacement of mentorship with dashboards, and the growing reliance on proxy indicators to evaluate competence and impact. In doing so, the journal highlights a central tension of modern organizational life: leaders are increasingly expected to absorb complexity and uncertainty while operating within systems that discourage reflection, dissent, and long-term thinking.

Issue 10 also foregrounds forms of labor that remain underacknowledged or unrecorded. Papers address the rise of shadow IT, the invisible work required to maintain AI-enabled systems, and

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the cultural liabilities organizations inherit through mergers, legacy processes, and unexamined norms. These contributions reveal how much of what sustains organizational function exists outside formal charts, metrics, and narratives-and how ignoring that reality introduces long-term fragility.

Importantly, this special issue does not frame these dynamics as isolated failures or moral shortcomings. Instead, it approaches them as predictable outcomes of design choices and incentive structures that prioritize optics over substance. By doing so, *Professionals in Business Journal* continues its commitment to diagnosis rather than performance-to creating space for analysis that is rigorous, unsentimental, and grounded in lived professional experience.

As a double issue, Issue 10 reflects PIBJ's editorial stance: selective, non-periodic, and intentionally paced. The work collected here was developed during an extended period of review and synthesis, allowing themes to emerge organically rather than being forced into artificial timelines. In a publishing landscape driven increasingly by velocity and visibility, this approach remains central to the journal's identity.

As we close the year, we also want to acknowledge the broader community that sustains this work. *Professionals in Business Journal* is published by **Pyrrhic Press**, an independent press committed to preserving space for long-form thought, institutional critique, and voices that do not fit neatly into prevailing academic or corporate channels. The continued engagement of our readers, contributors, and collaborators makes this work possible.

We also extend a continued invitation to support the **LAPPSE Memorial Fund (Lorraine Ann Pirro Public School Endowment)**. This memorial fund honors the legacy of an educator and mother by supporting students in need and investing directly in educational opportunity. Contributions to LAPPSE help ensure that care, mentorship, and access remain central values in systems that too often treat them as expendable. Information about the fund and opportunities to contribute can be found through Pyrrhic Press channels.

As we look ahead, PIBJ remains committed to publishing work that challenges assumptions, sharpens institutional understanding, and resists the reduction of complex human systems into simplified narratives. Each issue is an invitation-not to consume quickly, but to read carefully; not to react reflexively, but to think structurally.

Readers are encouraged to stay connected with *Professionals in Business Journal* and **Pyrrhic Press** through our official channels on **LinkedIn, Facebook, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter)**, where we share publication updates, calls for reflection, and ongoing conversations about the future of work, leadership, and institutional design.

Thank you for reading, engaging, and thinking alongside us throughout 2025. We close this year with clarity, not certainty-and with a continued commitment to work that takes systems seriously, people honestly, and time responsibly.



- The Editorial Team

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