



Comment

Making a case for side hustling

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It is time for companies to stop preventing their employees from holding multiple jobs

Piyush, 32, works in an IT start-up in Bengaluru. He teaches data science on an online platform on weekends, and is also independently working on an AI initiative with a team of developers. His typical workday involves going to office from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., going to the gym to work out, and then working on his own initiative post dinner from 10 p.m to 12 a.m. He keeps what he does outside the work under wraps and talks about his life with a few friends at office in hushed tones. When a senior leader hears rumours, she avoids talking to Piyush because he is a good worker and she does not want to lose him.

Like Piyush, there is a trend among employees to hold multiple jobs in the form of moonlighting, i.e., take up freelance projects or work on a part-time basis or start an entrepreneurial venture while holding a full-time day job. In a survey we conducted, we found that more than 45% of the respondents either themselves engaged in side hustling or knew of someone close who was hustling. Leaders in traditional organisations, however, either turn a blind eye to this or have hushed conversations with the employees to conform to the contracts signed.

[Future of work](#)

Assumptions and the reality

Organisations have typically assumed that activities outside work may deplete individual resources, which could result in poorer performance at work. Thus, they ban employees from side hustling. Engagement in another paid activity is seen as a distraction, breach of contract, and leading to likely conflict of interest. It is common for organisations to have clauses in their employment contracts which restrict or prohibit having secondary sources of income.

Organisations assume that side hustling is an attempt to make more money. However, when we asked side hustlers about their motivations for holding multiple jobs, their reasons ranged from seeking creative outlets to escaping from the mundaneness of their day jobs to learning new skills. It would be safe to say that the major drivers are non-pecuniary benefits that their full-time job is unable to cater to. Most also saw the side job as something that helped them be more motivated in their main jobs. They saw their side hustle as an investment in their own careers and life, as a route to their next change in job, and as security in case the organisation ran into difficulty. Several spoke of other benefits: they said the side job was a stress buster, added to their self-esteem and confidence, and helped them make good use of their free time.

The opposing perceptions of organisations and employees and acknowledgement of the current context, where organisations are unable to promise lifelong employment, and the ubiquity of gig work, when juxtaposed, highlight the need for organisations to not look at side hustles as a zero-sum game. Having multiple jobs could have the potential for positive spillovers from one domain to the other. For instance, enhanced skills through side projects could be transferred on the job, leading to better performance at work; or a happy employee is likely to be more productive than one who is feeling trapped in the restrictive work contracts.

[Fast-forward to the future](#)

Rather than look the other way to what employees do outside the organisation or keep forcing archaic contracts and rules, it would perhaps be better for organisations to adapt to make the most of the current reality. It may thus be wiser for organisations and leaders to recognise their own limitations in satisfying the entire gamut of needs of an employee. Denying employees' requests for engaging in side activities might leave them disgruntled and unhappy, resulting in lesser commitment and engagement at work.

Individuals with diverse needs

Companies need to recognise that they don't own the employee. It is best to accept that employees are not just employees but individuals with diverse needs, motivations, aspirations, and interests. Rather than create a system where employees are forced to hide what they do in their free time, perhaps it may be more appropriate to create a psychologically safe environment. It would, then, be possible to acknowledge that while the organisation accepts their other parts of work, boundary conditions of the organisation need to be met. Organisations can set boundaries around no use of company resources and proprietary information and time committed to the organisation. Such companies will have an edge over the others. It is time to recognise that stifling opportunities for employees to pursue their passions or building diverse skill sets not only puts the onus back on the organisation to manage the whole individual and his/her career and life but also leaves the employee with little agency.

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