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Creative
Leadership

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A White Paper
issued August 2013

Always On, Never Done?

Don't Blame the Smartphone

By Jennifer J. Deal, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

The use of smartphones to stay connected to work 24/7 is so common that it's now considered the "new normal." People are fatigued and angry about being always on and never done; the lines between their personal and professional lives blurred if not completely eliminated. But our groundbreaking research has uncovered some surprising information about the drivers and the impacts of this new normal.

We've found that professionals, managers, and executives who carry smartphones for work report interacting with work a whopping 13.5 hours every workday, (72 hours per week including weekend work). We've also found that, on average, they have only about 3 hours on workdays for "discretionary" activities such as being with their family, exercising, showering, and all of those chores at home that someone has to do. Startlingly, they don't blame technology for this dilemma that has them scrambling to manage their personal lives. They blame their companies – specifically, poor process, people- and time- management that is robbing them of their equilibrium and ability to recharge.

In essence, technology and the "always on" expectations of professionals enable organizations to mask poor processes, indecision, dysfunctional cultures, and subpar infrastructure because they know that everyone will pick up the slack. Can't make a decision? Call another meeting to "process." Have a fear-based culture? Copy a bazillion people on every e-mail so your backside is covered. Can't manage time properly? Keep staff waiting for a decision and they'll just work all night to make the deadline. This creates meeting and e-mail overload and institutional churn so overwhelming that even the most adept manager has trouble keeping his/her head above water.

So while technology may be a logical scapegoat, it is actually just a new-age mask for an age-old problem: poor management and poor leadership. But now, the stakes are higher as professionals begin to ask, "Where did my life go?"

They start work about 6 a.m. – often before their first cup of coffee. Their work continues without real breaks for breakfast and lunch, and often without a break for dinner. Work continues until they go to bed at night – often as late as 11 p.m. or midnight. Some are in and out of work mode for as much as 18 hours a day. In between, they have to manage everything at home as well, including balancing the needs of their families and households with the demands of work. No, these aren't people living on subsistence wages in a Third World country. This is the 21st century sweatshop, the daily reality for many executives, managers, and professionals (EMPs) around the world who work flexibly via their smartphones.



Many EMPs say they are worn out, feeling they are kept on an electronic leash by their organization. They understand the necessities of work flow wrought by the global economy, and they don't mind working long hours because they are paid well and enjoy their work. They say they get a thrill out of always being needed by their organization, and like the feeling that they are important enough that the work can't get done without them. At the same time, they feel they're the proverbial hamster on a wheel. They may love the running, but they don't love it all the time. And they feel they're in work mode almost every waking minute during the workweek – and our research shows that their perception is just about right.

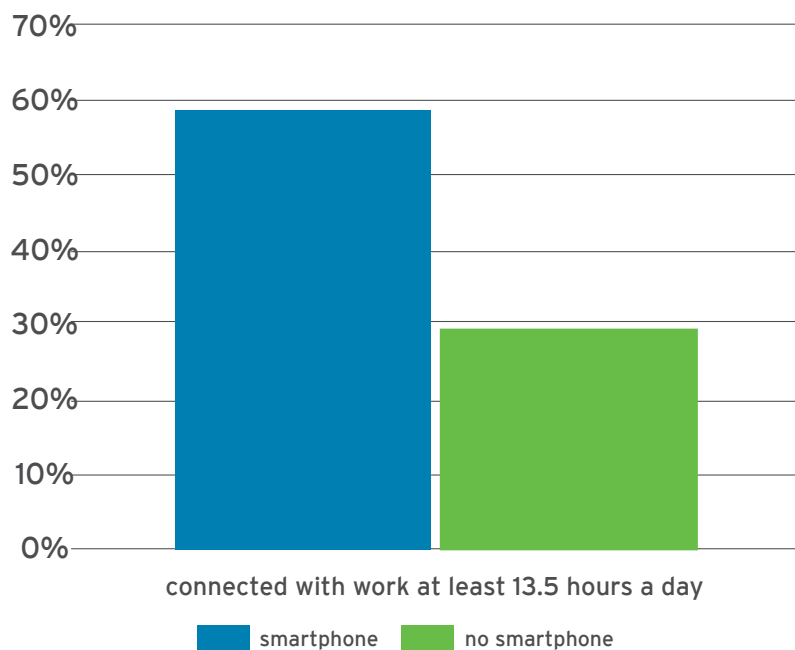
In a 2012 survey of 483 EMPs (executives, managers, and professionals) we found that 78% of our sample used smartphones to enable flexible work. Sixty percent of those who use smartphones for work are connected to work 13.5 or more hours a day five days a week, and spend about five hours on weekends scanning e-mails, for a total of about 72 hours a week connected to work. This is 67% more than the average 43-hour workweek quoted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and is 44% more than the approximately 50-hour workweek respondents to CCL's World Leadership Survey report.

While 72 hours a week sounds like a lot (and is), it sounds even worse when you look at the workweek. If someone is connected to work 13.5 hours a day and sleeps about 7.5 hours a night (the amount recommended by scientists to manage stress most effectively), that leaves 3 hours a day Monday-Friday to do everything else they need to do. Do chores around their home. Exercise. Spend time with family. Prepare meals. Help their children with homework. Shower. Relax?

The Effect of Using a Smartphone for Work

EMPs in flexible workplaces who use a smartphone for work are connected with their workplace for more hours a day than are those who don't use smartphones, regardless of gender, managerial level, organizational sector, or generation. In our sample, 60% of EMPs who use a smartphone for business work between 13.5 and 18.5 hours a day, while only 29% of those who do not use a smartphone to enable flexibility are connected with work that many hours on average.

Percent connected to work 13.5 – 18.5 hours a day



It is generally assumed that EMPs who use smartphones for business are more likely to shift their time and take care of personal tasks during work time, so they aren't working more hours than anyone else, they're just working them over a longer time period. We didn't find that. We found that EMPs who use smartphones are **not** more likely to say that they take care of personal tasks during work hours. In fact, 89% of both smartphone-carrying and non-smartphone-carrying respondents said that they attend to personal tasks during work hours. This means that smartphone-carrying respondents who are connected to work 13.5 – 18.5 hours a day, and non-smartphone-carrying respondents who are connected with work 8-10 hours a day each take time during their day to attend to personal tasks.

Who We Surveyed

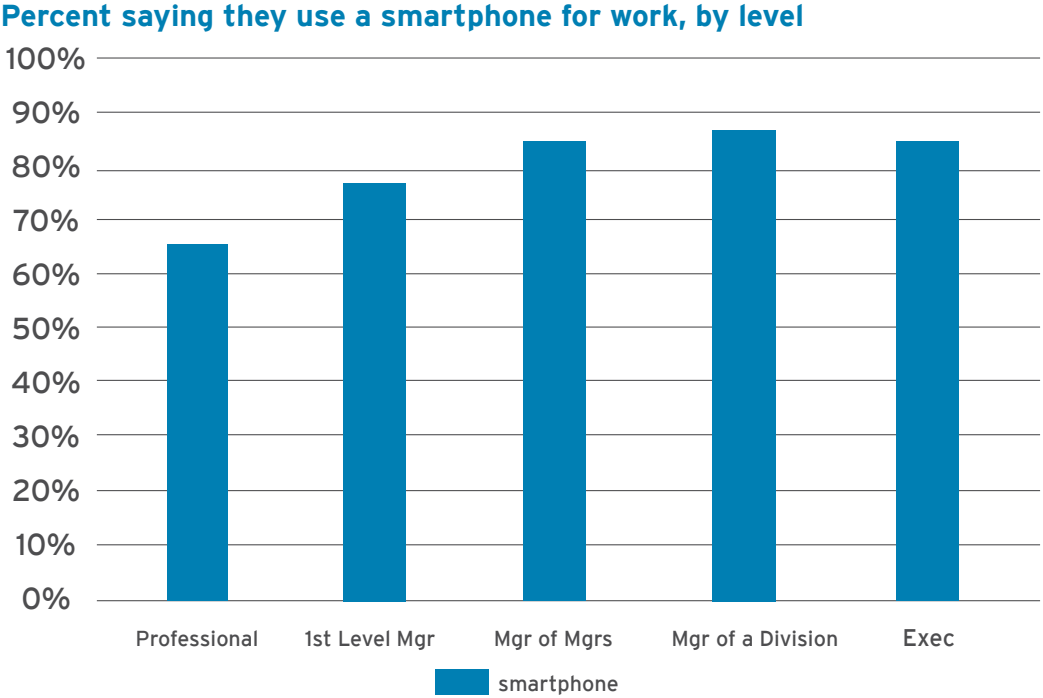
In September and October of 2012, 483 respondents filled out an online survey focused on smartphone use and time-wasters at work. The sample is as follows:

- 52% male, 48% female
- 75% of the data from the USA; 25% from 36 other countries
- 7% aged 25-34, 31% aged 35-44, 21% aged 45-49, 19% aged 50-54, 20% aged 55-64, 2% aged 65 or over
- 53% work for an international organization, 28% for a national organization, 19% for a local organization
- 35% work for organizations that have fewer than 500 employees, 31% work for organizations that have between 500 and 10,000 employees, 33% of respondents work for organizations that have more than 10,000 employees
- 59% work in for-profit corporations, 8% in education, 8% in government, 12% in nonprofit organizations, 13% in other types of organizations
- 28% professional staff, 19% first-level manager, 17% manager of managers, 19% manager of a division or function, 18% are executives

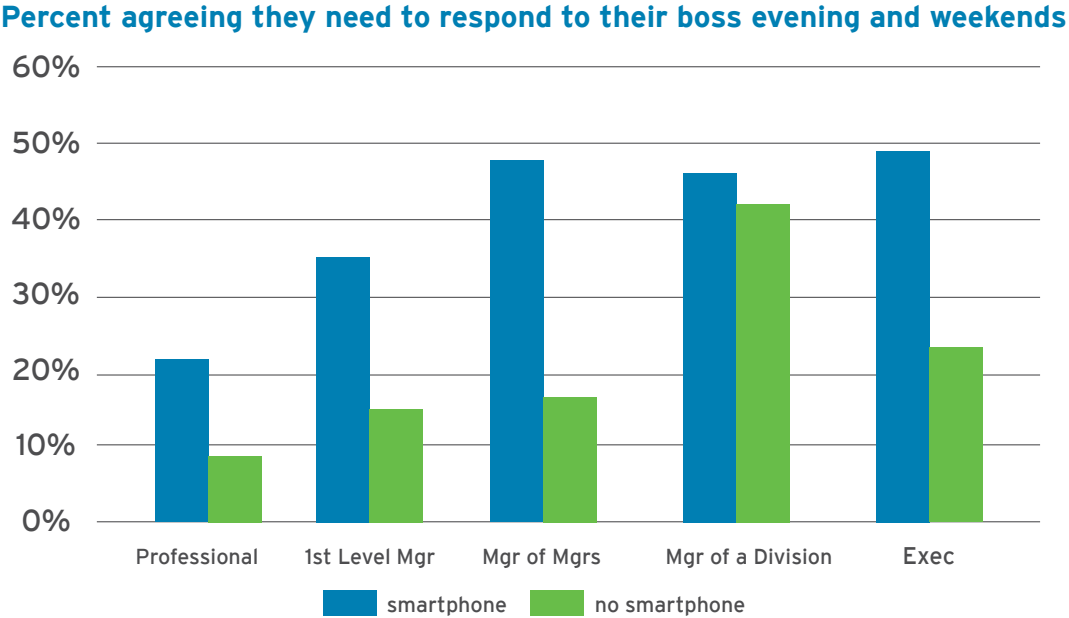
In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted with 21 professional staff, managers, and executives in industries including tech, biotech, retail, and professional services. The interviews discussed in the article come from this sample.

Specific information about the respondents has been changed to protect their identity.

Whether or not someone uses a smartphone for work is related to their level in the organization, with those at higher levels being more likely to carry one than those at lower levels.



EMPs in flexible workplaces who use a smartphone for work are more likely to believe that their boss, team members, and clients expect them to respond during evenings and weekends. This is especially true of higher-level managers who use a smartphone for work. While professionals thought they should respond, it was higher-level managers and executives who felt they had an obligation to answer e-mail. Some of the EMPs we interviewed spoke about how angry colleagues were when they didn't respond quickly, even when it was during off-hours, on a weekend, or a holiday. One executive talked about how her boss was angry when he hadn't received a response from her before 7 a.m. (he'd sent the e-mail at 2 a.m.).



Are EMPs who use smartphones for work actually expected to respond to their boss or team during evenings and weekends, or do they just feel they need to? Some researchers² have found that carrying a smartphone increases stress because people feel compelled to keep abreast of everything going on (both work and personal). Some have suggested that many people feel a compulsion to check e-mail every time the phone buzzes, much as Pavlov's dogs salivated every time they heard the bell, whether or not it was time for food. Unlike Pavlov's dogs, many people check because they feel they must to keep their job. While for some people checking e-mail after-hours may be truly voluntary (and not checking primarily a matter of self-discipline), in many cases it is clearly a job requirement. For example, the following is an e-mail sent by a partner in a law firm to the whole firm, reminding attorneys there that they are expected to be accessible 24/7.

From: William _____

To: Attorneys. Time: 9:21 a.m.

Re: CHECK YOU [sic] EMAILS OFTEN

Now more than ever there are many talented lawyers and law firms competing for our business. Doing really good legal work is not enough. Clients expect that and well they should given what we charge for our services You must all realize that we are in a service business. In this day and age of faxes, emails, internet, etc. clients expect you to be accessible 24\7. Of course, that is something of an exaggeration – but not much.

LESSON NUMBER ONE: You should check your emails early and often. That not only means when you are in the office, it also means after you leave the office as well. Unless you have very good reason not to (for example when you are asleep, in court or in a tunnel), you should be checking your emails every hour. One of the last things you should do before you retire for the night is to check your email. That is why we give you blackberries. I can assure you that all of our clients expect you to be checking your emails often. I am not asking you to do something we do not do ourselves. I can assure you that John _____, Peter _____, Mike _____, Faith _____, Fred _____, etc. all check their emails often.

Yesterday I was working with a relatively new associate on a project which both he and I knew was a rush. It was for a relatively new client whom we were trying to impress. The associate did a nice job under pressure. Before I left the office at about 7:30 I sent an email to this associate asking him to perform a task – fax a draft letter for review and comment. I assumed the task was done. Turns out the associate left the office and did not check his emails until this morning. I assumed the task had been completed. It had not been. In this case it was no harm no foul, but I think we can all imagine scenarios when this could be a disaster.

<http://abovethelaw.com/2009/10/quinn-emanuel-believes-in-c-b-a-check-blackberryalways/?show=comments#comments>

The author of the e-mail says quite directly that they give staff a mobile device so they can check e-mail all the time. He specifically says that the last thing staff members should do before they go to bed is to check e-mail. While it is rare to see such specific instructions sent out in a general e-mail (at least one that gets posted online), this expectation is consistent with what the EMPs interviewed said was expected of them.

When asked if they could realistically stop checking e-mail on evenings and weekends and keep their jobs, respondents said that they could not. Their reality is that businesses – and clients – are now used to people being able to work whenever (and wherever) the organization or the client wants them to. That is the result of the “flexible workplace.”

For example, one of the EMPs interviewed showed that he had received 53 e-mails on a Saturday. These weren't joke e-mails, spam, or FYIs; they were messages that he was expected to read and respond to on the same day. While this might be unremarkable if there was a big Monday deadline, this is what happens to him every weekend. His business uses the 24-hour clock to maintain a competitive advantage. Rather than having managers in different time zones hand off work to each other like a relay team does so the race can continue while other team members are resting, the business simply has the managers work more hours. Executives who were asked about this practice said leaders in many organizations believe relying on the same staff to do the work despite the hours it requires results in substantial cost savings for the organization. They said they had seen no cost-benefit analysis of the practice that took into account the negative effects on health and productivity that are a direct result of working more than 40 hours a week.¹

At this point you're likely saying *Ok, I've got it. Smartphones, which enable workplace flexibility, are making our already demanding lives even more difficult. If I can avoid using a smartphone for work I'll be less stressed and feel less overworked.* But our research found that the story isn't quite so simple.

The Not-So-Simple Reality

Most of the EMPs we interviewed would prefer to work fewer hours, but they understand that the jobs they have chosen come with both a larger paycheck and a higher number of work hours. Though they don't particularly like working so many hours, they don't get upset about it when it is actually necessary, such as to communicate with a team in India. We also heard from them that there's a large degree of *time macho*, as Anne-Marie Slaughter describes it: (Why Women Still Can't Have It All from *The Atlantic Magazine*)

The culture of “time macho” – a relentless competition to work harder, stay later, pull more all-nighters, travel around the world and bill the extra hours that the international date line affords you – remains astonishingly prevalent among professionals today even in industries that don’t explicitly reward sheer quantity of hours spent on the job, the pressure to arrive early, stay late, and be available, always, for in-person meetings at 11 a.m. on Saturdays can be intense.³

EMPs know they have to work long hours, and 60% of survey respondents and all of the EMPs we interviewed said they appreciate the flexibility having a smartphone affords them. They like being able to leave work to go to a child’s performance or sporting event, or to go to lunch with a colleague, all while still being able to keep on top of what is going on at work. They appreciate being able to manage e-mail before arriving at work to make the workday more efficient, and after they have gone home so they and the organization can be more productive.

They don’t see smartphone-enabled flexibility – and the resulting unending connectivity – as the problem.

They believe that the real problem is organizational inefficiencies that are masked and enabled by the flexibility the smartphone allows – inefficiencies that organizations can get away with because the EMPs are (as one interviewee characterized it) kept on an electronic leash that the organization can yank at will. In the past (that not-too-long-ago time when organizations had some difficulty finding you after you had gone home) organizations had an interest in ensuring that a professional’s time in the office was used relatively efficiently because that time was restricted. Yes, time was still wasted, but the organization paid the price for inefficiency, not the individual. People were issued pencils rather than smartphones, and when they put the pencils down and left the office they were (mostly) done for the day.

Today the pencils never get put down. EMPs may be working “flexibly,” but the work never stops, and EMPs are left paying the price for the time the organization wastes. The dark side of 24/7 connectivity that comes with the flexible workplace is that people feel they are **always on, never done**. And they blame their organizations for this – not their smartphones.

Stop Wasting My Time!

While EMPs don't mind working necessary long hours, what they resent – and get truly incensed about – are the unnecessary hours they work. For example, they resent the “emergency” meetings that aren't a result of real emergencies, instead result from executives being unwilling to make decisions. They resent the old computers and outdated software that run slowly and waste their time, so that the company can save a small amount of money. They resent project plans being changed frequently because the leaders above them in the organization can't stick with a strategy. They resent spending time in interminable meetings that are poorly planned and don't move work forward. They resent management's unwillingness to prioritize projects because it doesn't want the political fallout. They resent being asked to do the work three people did six months ago because the other two people left and the organization wants to save two salaries. They resent their project being delayed because of a bottleneck resulting from someone else having to do two jobs. They resent bosses evaluating them for promotion based on whether they are willing to “do whatever it takes” (read as: work all hours in the day and on weekends), when “doing whatever it takes” is a daily occurrence because the evaluating boss causes the fire drills.

EMPs believe that their bosses waste a lot of their time, and the time wastage results from organizational practices that have nothing to do with workplace flexibility or the smartphone itself. Our research shows that people see the big wasters of time at work as fitting into three categories:

Herding cats: too many people involved in decision-making, constantly changing focus/goals from the executive team, not knowing which work has priority

Poor process: unnecessary e-mails, poor project planning, unnecessary meetings, poorly planned meetings

Inadequate infrastructure: slow computers and outmoded technology systems

QUESTION:
What wastes
your time?

ANSWER:
The intentional use
of ambiguity as a
management tool.

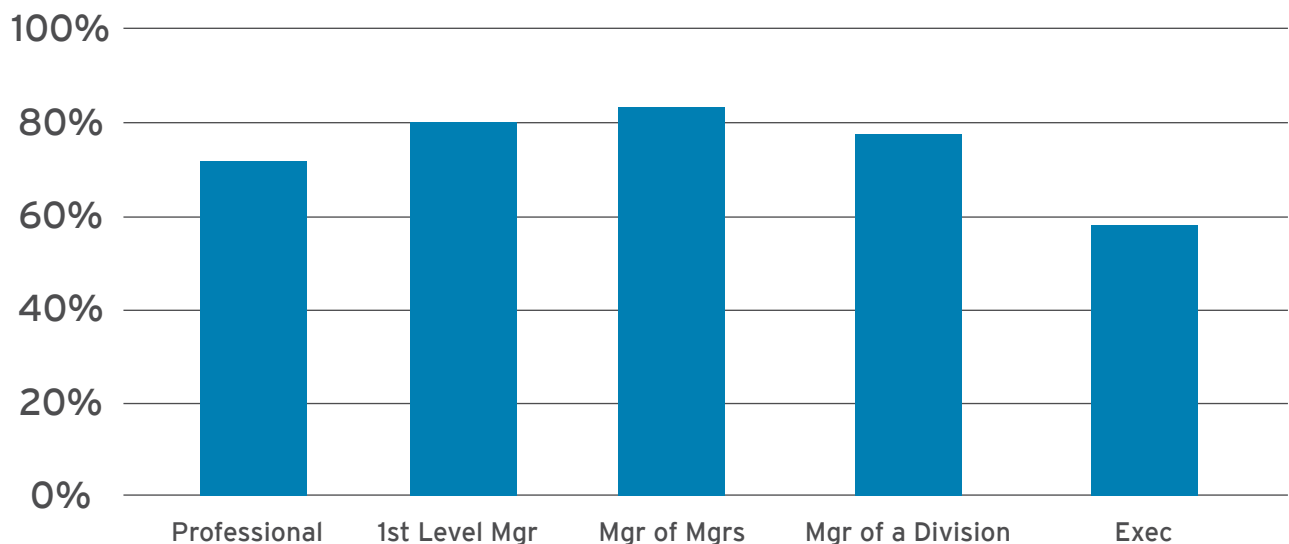
“Herding Cats”

While historically people have thought of organizations as highly structured, top-down, and focused on moving lockstep together in a particular direction, a current common organizational issue is less about too much structure and more about too little. While organizations in the past could have been compared with the Borg (a group in Star Trek who were mind linked and incapable of independent action), interviewees said that getting something done in an organization today is more often likened to herding cats because of the unexpected shifts in direction and lack of consistency.

While this lack of consistency is seen by all levels within the organization, it is perceived differently by respondents at different levels. Overall, 74% of respondents said that the constantly changing focus and goals of executives wastes their time, but managers say it wastes more of their time than do professionals, and executives were less likely to say it wasted their time. One manager hypothesized that this was because executives are not the ones whose time is spent implementing the changes, they’re the ones who changed the focus and goals.

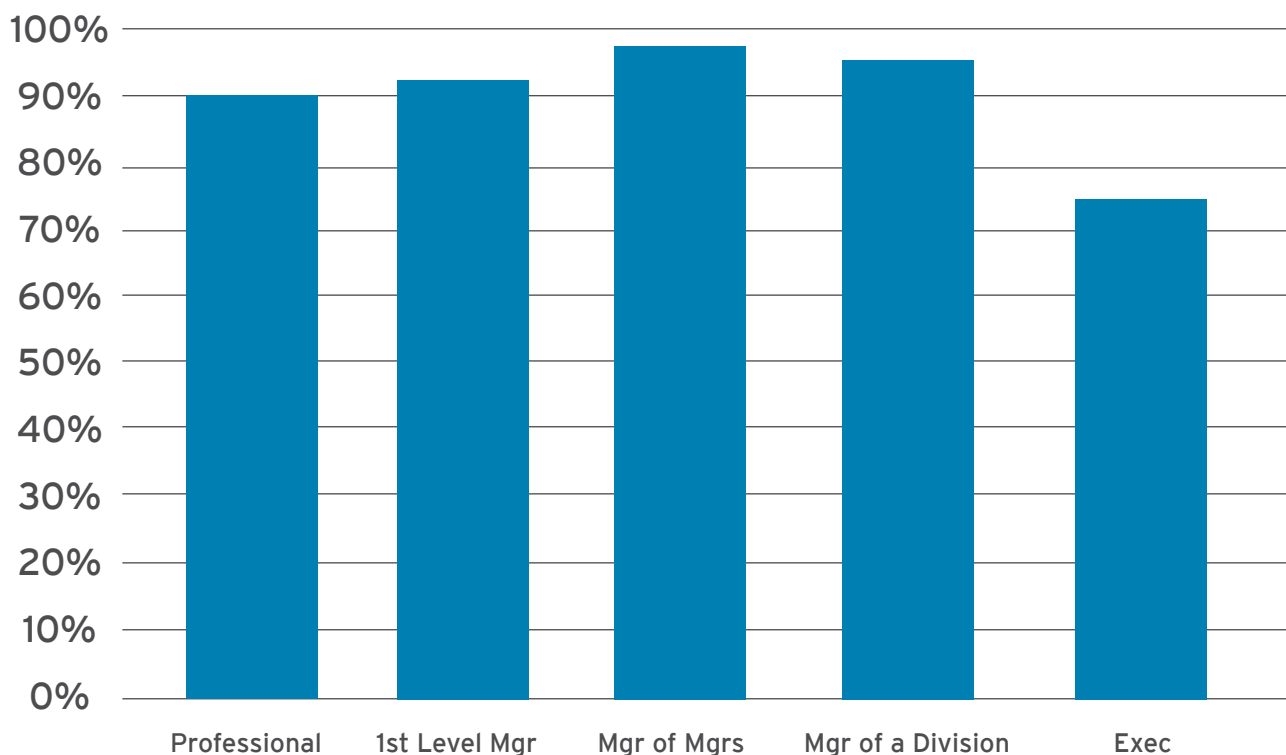
A common result of changing goals is EMPs not being sure what their focus should be, and 63% of respondents overall said that not knowing which work was the priority wasted their time. This was just as true for executives as it was for professionals.

Percent saying changing focus and goals of the executive team is wasting their time



There is a similar issue with decision-making within the organization. While 90% of respondents overall say that too many people being involved in decision-making wastes their time, that is true for 98% of managers of managers, and for 76% of executives. While most believe that too many people being involved in decision-making wastes time, executives were significantly less likely than others to believe that. Many organizations believe that their personnel costs are too high and their employees at all levels aren't productive enough. One executive hypothesized that too many people being involved in decision-making likely is one reason why.

Percentage saying too many people involved in decision-making is wasting their time



Think for a minute about how much time would be saved if these weren't issues. How much time would you get back if you knew who had the authority to make a decision, that person actually had that authority, and none of you had to worry that the decision would be overturned later because one of a dozen other people didn't get a chance to have their say first? How much time would be saved if the executive team was explicit about what it wanted and by when, and didn't either change its thinking or add to the goal once it was in process? How much time would be saved if everyone knew – and agreed on – what work had priority and worked on that basis? We believe that a great deal of time would be saved if even this level of consistency was achieved.

Time Waster

“I literally do the job of three people.” An executive we interviewed talked about how two of her colleagues quit without warning. Rather than hiring replacements, her boss (the CIO) decided instead to have the executive take over the responsibilities of the two who had left, in addition to keeping her own. That meant she and her team were responsible for ten divisions, while her remaining peers were each responsible for three. As a result of her simply having too much to do, work overall was slowed down for the ten divisions, key initiatives were not able to be implemented as effectively as they should have been, and mistakes were made that had to be fixed later. She said she knew she was wasting a lot of people’s time because they had to wait for her to get to them or redo work because she hadn’t had time to give them the direction they needed, but she was stuck because her boss would not hire replacements for the people who had left. ***Eighty-three percent*** of respondents said that situations like this – people having too big a job or too much to do – wasted their time. When an EMP’s job is impossibly large, it impedes the progress of others who depend on that person in some way to get their work done. As a result of the bottleneck of one person with a job that is too big, other people’s time gets wasted because they have to wait. Another consequence of the scope of a role being too big is that EMPs are more likely to make mistakes – mistakes, which then have to be fixed and which, in turn, wastes people’s time and the organization’s money. People at all levels see roles that are too large as a time waster for them.

Poor Process

We were told that poor process is an almost inevitable outcome of herding cats. Poor processes often take the form of unnecessary e-mails, poorly planned or unnecessary meetings, poor project planning, and roles so large they create bottlenecks in the organization.

Ninety-six percent of respondents said that unnecessary e-mails waste their time (4% of respondents apparently believe that all e-mails they send and receive are necessary.)

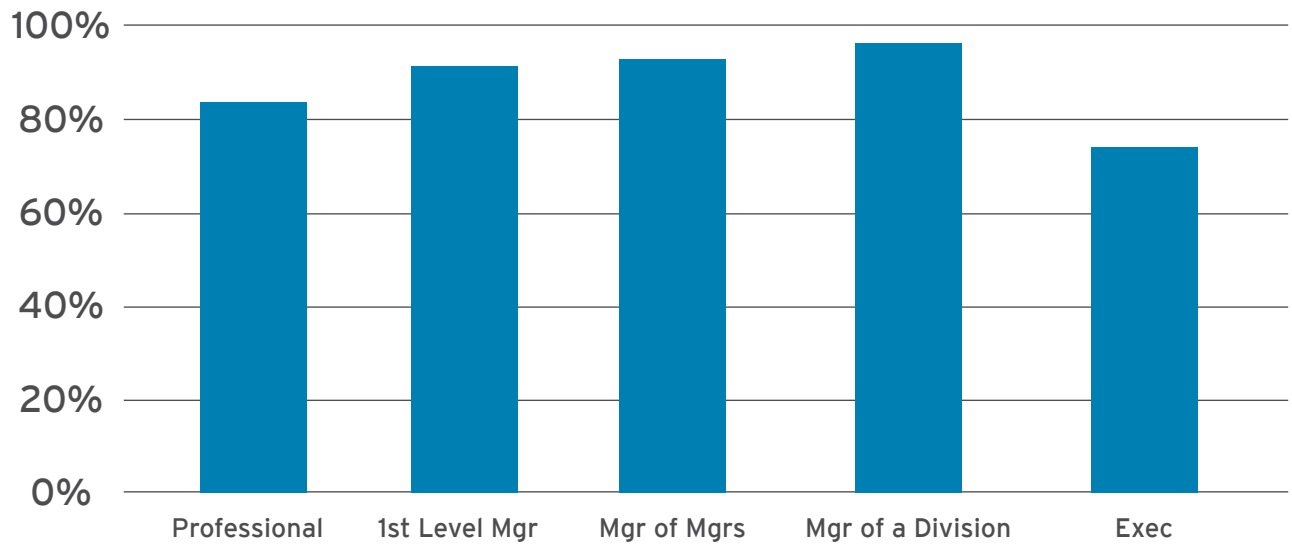
In our sample, 90% of respondents say that poorly planned meetings waste their time, and 87% say that unnecessary meetings waste their time. Whether time is perceived as being wasted in meetings differs by level in the organization with people in the middle of the organization (managers) being most likely to say that their time is wasted in meetings that are unnecessary or poorly planned. Though a majority of respondents reported it, managers in particular reported that they are often invited to meetings they feel they can't turn down, and once they are there find that the meeting is a waste of their time. Executives are less likely than others to have an issue with meetings wasting their time; 74% of executives said that meetings waste their time, and 86% of executives said that poorly planned meetings waste their time.

QUESTION:
What wastes your time?

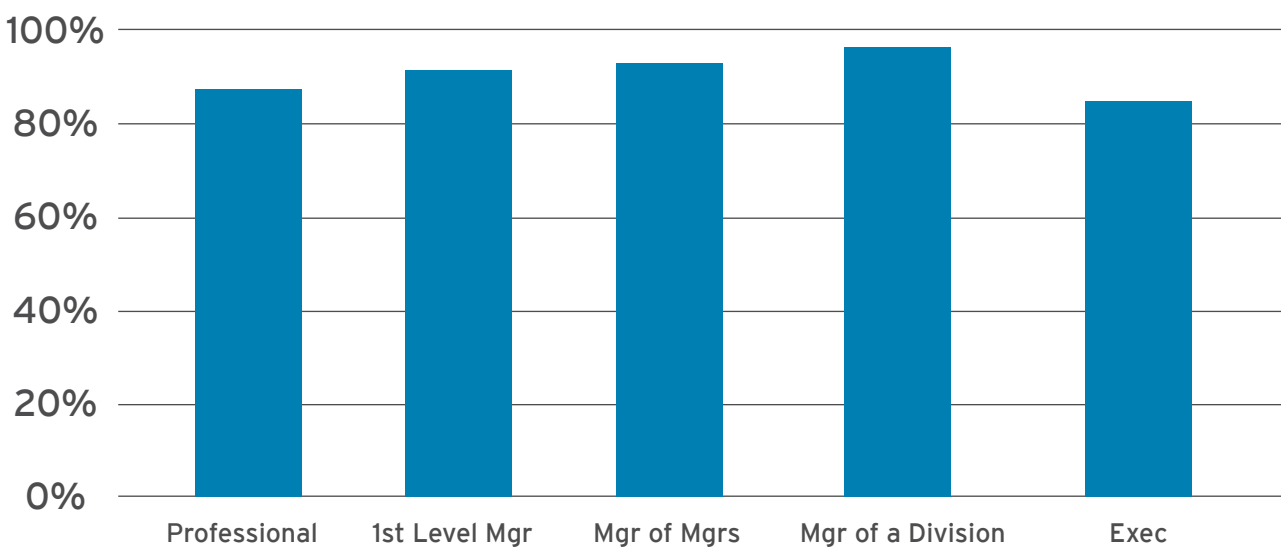
ANSWER:

The amount of e-mail over silly things that could be handled over the phone, and sitting in meetings in which no one can make a decision.

Percentage saying unnecessary meetings are wasting their time



Percentage saying poorly planned meetings are wasting their time



Back-to-back meetings and multiple meetings scheduled at one time appear to be commonplace. For example, below is a typical week's meeting schedule of a tech manager who carries a smart-phone to enable the flexible work her job requires because she manages teams in the U.S., India, and China.

Notice that the manager has meetings starting as early as 7:30 a.m., and going as late as midnight. She is expected to have prepared for the morning meeting, including having read and made sense of all pertinent e-mails that came through the night before from the other teams. During the day she is in meetings about half of the day, and is sometimes scheduled to be in three meetings at once. Her last meeting typically ends at 11 p.m., and sometimes as late as midnight. She pointed out that during this time she's also expected to check where all of the projects are, troubleshoot, manage executive perceptions of the process, communicate with clients about progress, create developmental opportunities for her team, and do her own work as a member of the team. During her interview she said there is time for lunch most days, which she typically spends checking in with staff members and quickly grabbing some food (no time for the walk outdoors that is recommended for stress reduction). All home-related chores, exercise, relaxation, etc., have to happen before 7 a.m., during those couple of hours around 8 p.m. when there are no conference calls, or after 10 p.m.

Sample Weekly Calendar: Manager of Managers
 Meeting times are blocked out. When there are two or three meetings simultaneously, that is indicated.

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It isn't just managers with teams on different continents who have such aggressive schedules. For example, consider a typical week's meeting schedule for an executive (VP in a \$10 billion food and beverage company). This executive works at the corporate headquarters, and does not have responsibility for teams outside of the U.S. He said that about 40% of his meetings were either unnecessary or poorly planned, but he had to be in them nonetheless. Back-to-back meetings all day means that he has to take care of his deliverables in the evenings after he gets home. In between, he tries to spend time with his wife and children and attend to household responsibilities while responding to the constant flurry of e-mail that continues through dinner and until he goes to sleep. So it is the meetings that cause him to have to work "flexibly" in the evenings and on weekends to make up for the time he perceives the organization as having wasted.

QUESTION:
What wastes your time?

ANSWER:
We do everything at once: Things never come off the plate, only on and there is not an awareness at the senior levels of what it truly takes to get the work done.

Sample Weekly Calendar: Executive
Meeting times are blocked out. When there are two or three meetings simultaneously, that is indicated.

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The executive commented on how much each of these meetings cost the organization. He pointed out that for this one week, about \$4,000 of his \$5,000 salary was allocated to meetings. He said he would sit in meetings occasionally and calculate the actual cost of that meeting, and was distressed by how much of personnel costs he saw being spent on meetings.

Finally, 87% of respondents overall said that their time is wasted as a result of poor project planning, and some interviewees wondered if meetings proliferate to compensate for poor planning in general. They said it appeared to them as if people have meetings in hopes that the work will get done during the meetings, rather than actually planning to get the work done and then using the meeting to plan the next stage of the initiative.

Inadequate Infrastructure

Complaints about inadequate technology (both hardware and software) are common in organizations. In our survey, 78% of respondents said that inadequate technology systems waste their time, and 84% of respondents said that slow computers waste their time. One EMP calculated that his computer was so slow it wasted at least 30 minutes every day booting up, loading programs, accessing documents, sending print jobs, saving documents, and shutting down. That is 6.2% of every workday wasted. That means \$6,200 of every \$100,000 in salary is wasted. He questioned the cost efficiency calculation, since a new computer would cost the organization about \$2,000.

QUESTION:
What wastes your time?

ANSWER:
We have old technology that increases work ... The best way to fix it is to take a proactive approach and determine what we need to do business going forward and figure out how much it would cost.

QUESTION:
What wastes your time?

ANSWER:
Printer problems. The computer systems are not reliable, nor integrated.

It isn't just the hardware that's an issue; we were told that software is also often inadequate. Organizations often get used to using one software system (with updates), and don't move to a new system when a more efficient one appears. Younger employees often are most vocal about this because they see how much more efficient they could be, and, therefore, perceive the older systems as wasting their time. Many interviewees complained vociferously about the old technology the executives continued to insist on using, which the interviewees calculated cost them (the lower-level staff) hundreds of lost hours every year. In most cases the executives were uninterested in moving to a more efficient system (they were used to this one), were unimpressed with the lost time, and said that the lower-level staff would just have to work the longer hours.

What To Do About Time Wasters

| TIME WASTER | FIX |
|---|---|
| Slow computers | Calculate the costs of keeping the slow computers, and determine whether it is more cost-effective in terms of staff time and engagement to buy computers that can effectively use current software. |
| Inadequate technology systems | Calculate costs of retaining current technology systems, and determine whether it is more cost-effective in terms of staff time and engagement to invest in more efficient technologies. |
| Too many people involved in decision-making | Provide clear and specific roles to identify who is accountable for making decisions and who is accountable for executing on the decision. See: Who has the D? from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . ⁴ |
| Constantly changing focus/goals from executive team | Develop a simple, rigorously researched strategy – and then stick with it (barring extreme market shifts). See: Turning Great Strategy into Great Performance ⁵ from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> |
| Not knowing which work has priority | Communicate which work has priority, based on the strategy. See: Turning Great Strategy into Great Performance ⁶ from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . |
| Unnecessary e-mails | It is likely impossible to end unnecessary e-mails, so learn how to better manage them. See: Stop Email Overload. http://blogs.hbr.org/hmu/2012/02/stop-email-overload-1.html ⁷ |
| Unnecessary meetings | Require every participant to be told ahead of time what their role is in the meeting, and what the outcome of the meeting is going to be. See: <i>Guide to Making Every Meeting Better</i> . http://hbr.org/product/guide-to-making-everymeeting-matter/an/10755-PDF-ENG ⁸ |
| Poorly planned meetings | Require agendas be provided enough in advance of the meeting so participants can be prepared. See: <i>Guide to Making Every Meeting Better</i> . http://hbr.org/product/guide-to-making-everymeeting-matter/an/10755-PDF-ENG ⁹ |
| Poor project-planning | Require effective project-planning. See: http://hbr.org/1998/03/bringing-discipline-to-project-management/ar/1 ¹⁰ |
| Too big a job/too much to do | Reduce the size of the role through hiring new staff, redeploying staff, streamlining processes, or really eliminating tasks. See: Who has the D? from <i>Harvard Business Review</i> . ¹¹ |

Conclusion

Organizational inefficiency is not new. Organizations have always wasted their employees' time, in one way or another. But in the past, technological limitations largely prevented employees from paying the price for many organizational inefficiencies. Today organizations have a new tool they can use to shift the costs of that wasted time to the individual. How to manage the demand for increased production without needing to be more efficient or hire more people? Issue EMPs smartphones, declare yours a "flexible workplace," and increase the workweek from 8/5 to 24/7

At the same time, people desire flexible work, and accept their smartphones and the 72-plus hours a week they spend in contact with their work. They appreciate the flexibility the hand-held technology affords them, even if they do often feel they are working sweatshop hours. What they resent is their time being wasted. Fundamentally, it's an equity issue. Many EMPs expect that they will need to be available almost every waking hour of the workweek, and often on weekends and holidays. They can deal with that expectation, as long as the organization doesn't also waste their time, and then require them to work evenings and weekends and holidays to make up for time wasted due to well-known organizational inefficiencies. But the organization does waste their time, and when they complain the boss may say supportive things, but they continue to find themselves having to finish work at home because their time was wasted during the workday.

In many cases the leaders who understand the issues are clearly also frustrated, and either think that there is no way to change the situation because of the leadership above them, or just can't find a justification for spending the money or time or political capital to reduce the time wasters. Often the higher-level managers (managers of managers and managers of a function or division) are in an even worse situation than the people who report to them. They are invited to more meetings, receive more e-mail, and have to provide direction to the staff below them in the organizational hierarchy when they themselves aren't getting adequate direction from their leaders.

Some leaders we interviewed shrugged and said this is just what business takes today. They said that people can work long hours, and there is no organizational incentive to fix these problems. Why fix what's not broken? So what if people have to be connected to work so many hours a day? Making changes to technology and fixing jobs that are too big costs money, and fixing decision-making and meeting norms costs political capital. Why spend either when there is no imminent disaster requiring you to do so?

One compelling justification for fixing these problems has to do with talent management. If your organization says that your competitive advantage lies in your talent at every level, and that talent is your first priority, shouldn't not wasting that talent's time and not aggravating them unnecessarily be the second priority? After all, if your organization makes money based on their contribution, doesn't it make sense to maximize their contribution by not wasting their time? Yes, they can work "flexibly" to make up the time that the organization has wasted, but who do you think is more effective, strategic, and innovative, and more likely to stick around when headhunters try to lure them away: talent who feels you respect them and their time, or talent who believes you prioritize everything else above them?



Endnotes

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About the Author



Jennifer J. Deal, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Scientist at CCL in San Diego, CA. She is also an Affiliated Research Scientist at the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. Jennifer's work focuses on global leadership and generational differences around the world. She is the manager of CCL's World Leadership Survey (currently in 15 languages) and the Emerging Leaders research initiative. In 2002, Jennifer coauthored *Success for the New Global Manager* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley Publishers), and has published articles on generational issues, executive selection, cultural adaptability, global management, and women in management. Her second book, *Retiring the Generation Gap* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley Publishers), was published in 2007. An internationally recognized expert on generational differences, she has worked with clients around the world and has spoken on the topic on six continents (North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia). She holds a B.A. from Haverford College, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology from The Ohio State University.



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CCL – Americas www.ccl.org

Greensboro, North Carolina
+1 800 780 1031 (U.S. or Canada)
+1 336 545 2810 (Worldwide)
E-mail: info@ccl.org

Colorado Springs, Colorado
+1 719 633 3891

San Diego, California
+1 858 638 8000

CCL – Europe, Middle East, Africa www.ccl.org/emea

Brussels, Belgium
+32 (0) 2 679 09 10

E-mail: ccl.emea@ccl.org

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
+251 913 204547; LBB.Africa@ccl.org

Johannesburg, South Africa
+277 61753968

E-mail: southafrica.office@ccl.org

Moscow, Russia
+7 495 662 31 39; ccl.cis@ccl.org

CCL – Asia Pacific www.ccl.org/apac

Singapore
+65 6854 6000

E-mail: ccl.apac@ccl.org

New Delhi – NCR, India
+91 124 435 4185/86; cclindia@ccl.org

Shanghai, China
+86 182 0199 8600; ccl.china@ccl.org

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