EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY VERSUS ACTUAL HOURS SPENT AT WORK PLACE – AN HR ISSUE

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Abstract

Advanced developments in technology have enhanced employees' abilities to multitask at work. Yet it has also become a major cause of concern due to the fact that employee productivity has become questionable as a result. There has been comprehensive research, analysis, debate and discussion on the subject of employee productivity. The bigger question is whether do the numbers of actual number of hours spent at work translate into productivity wholesomely? As research indicates, the the correlation is dismal. There are a number of internal and external timewasters which extract away employees' time from being completely productive in an office environment. The following research endeavor, an attempt to explore, examine, and explain the timewasters which act as barriers to employee productivity, and discount the efforts which employees during the actual hour spent at work. Once identified, the timewasters are further assessed, followed by a thorough discussion and analysis of the results. In the pursuit, relevant measures are suggested by which organizations can ensure the gaps between employee productivity versus actual hours spent at work place can be minimized to a significant extent.

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1. Introduction

In the present times, work environments and constantly changing. There is an excessive increase in time wastage at workplace by employees. This time wastage is detrimental to the growth of the company and leads to losses. The advent of internet and social media has become a major cause for the increase in time wastage by employees. This paper aims to identify the major reasons for time wastage, the activities that employees indulge in and proposes the policies which can be used by the HR top strictly implement rules and practices which will help to avoid time wastage.

Employers today want to recruit a workforce which is highly productive. Employers are looking to enhance the productivity of employees by introducing a number of measures which would act as motivators for employees. However, there still remains a major problem of employees slacking at work and wasting time in various activities which lie outside the scope of work. Companies could become more efficient if employees took interest in the company's future. Putting in 8 hours of constant work mght seem difficult for most employees and therefore a lot of them tend to slack. There are a number of distractions to keep them from working full 8 hours. Water breaks, washroom breaks, coffee breaks, lunch break and time spent on social media; all these factors majorly keep workers from working the full hours at work. According to a 2005 study by America Online and Salary.com [1], from 8 hour workday, an average worker tends to spend nearly 2.9 hours in other activities. In fact, companies tend to take into account wasted time while determining employee pay. However, the study indicates that employees tend to waste twice as much time as their employer has expected. Furthermore, the same survey conducted in 2014 [2] indicated that the time wastage was even higher than in previous year. 69% of employees had admitted to wasting time in the 2013 study while the number rose to 89% in 2014 [2]. This rise indicates that there is a rising population of employees who indulge in wasting time in various activities as presented in Table 1.The table indicates the rise from 2013 to 2014 and thus presents an insight into what workers are truly busy doing. Apart from the mentioned activities, other activities include getting distracted by co-workers, taking tea-time breaks, meetings etc. This rising trend is unfavorable for the growth of the company, and thus companies need to reconsider their HR policies in order to tackle this rising problem.

Factor	% Time Spent	
	2013	2014
Surfing the Internet	28%	39%
Social Media	14%	38%
Talking on phone	4%	50%

While the above discussed factors are a major cause for employees to slack and waste time at work, it is important to identify the causes for these wastages. There are a number of reasons which cause employees to slack such as lack of incentive [1], [2], low pay, unsatisfaction at job [3] and simply being bored. As observed from this study, social media and internet play a vital role in the perceived 'time wastage', thus causing a lackadaisical attitude at work.

1.1   Computers and Human Behavior

Social media includes all web and mobile based technologies which can be used for interactive communication between individuals, communities and organizations [4]. With the advent of Internet, the manner in which work is carried out has changed completely. However, its effect of work has been tremendous; while the use of social media and the Internet has been integrated in everyday work such as making use of blogging software, enterprise forums, accounting softwares etc. According to Sharma et al. [5], those employees who are internet-dependent tend to abuse the power entrusted to them and indulge in other activities such as chatting, surfing and online shopping. On the other hand, non-dependent employees make use of the internet mostly for sending emails and to search for specific information [6]. Recenlty, such excessive use of anything has been dubbed as áddiction'which was formerly reserved for substance dependence. However, in present times, internet addiction is human behavioural dependency and has crippled workforces as they waste time on the internet [5]. The loss in productivity caused due to the data deluge has caused a sense of entitlement with employees more concerned for 'me time'. In business capital is not simply created or gained; it is time along with efforts which results in capital. It is when workers slack at work that the capital becomes weak. When employees go back to their desks after taking a water break and they toggle between Facebook and a work spreadsheet, they are wasting the company's time, causing a revenue hit [7].
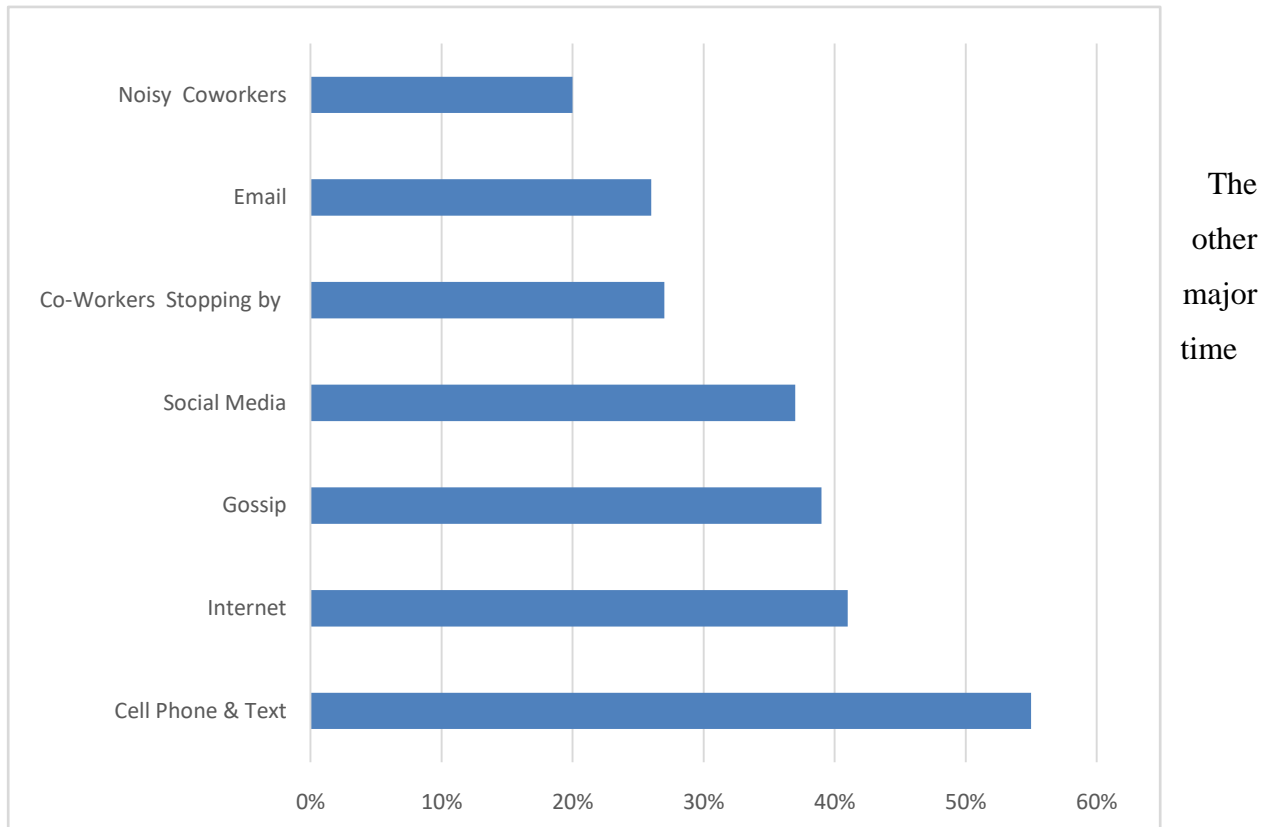
In order to increase the productivity of employees, there is an urgent need to address the problem of time wastage and develop policies along with practices which will ensure that there is minimum time wastage while the company is able to benefit in the most efficient ways from the hired employees.

2. Research Method

In order to assess how significant the problem of time waste at workplace is, a meticulous secondary data review has been conducted in this research paper. The researcher has chosen the secondary method of data collection as it presents with confirmed researches carried out by past researchers in a systematic manner, over the years. Comparing the results of each of these researches helps to determine the rising trend of time wastage via various methods at workplace. The collected data and can be then analyzed, with proposed steps that can be taken by the HR to develop a solid framework which ensures maximum productivity at workplace.

The first identified workplace wasting activity which affects productivity is doing unrelated things while being at work [8]. These unrelated things could range from surfing online, to chatting, and talking on phone. Many argue that workforces are well trained to multitask, however past researchers do not agree to this [9]. According to Rosen [9], multitasking requires individuals to shift their focus and attention which can be detrimental to the organization's work culture. By focusing on more than one task at hand, the judgment of the worker is impaired regarding what is important and what is secondary [9], [10].Some of the top distractions for workers have been detailed in the Figure1 [11]. These top distractions are what causes a lot of delays at work and the distractions cause workers to pay less attention to important work at hand [2]. With the advent of smart phones and tablets, it is nearly impossible to keep a check on how often employees indulge in other work, however, important policies need to be frormulated to keep this in check. Preoccupation leads to distraction and non-productive work.

Figure 1: Top Time Wasters

The other major time

waster identified by Darden [8] is frivoulous meetings carried out managers and heads which result in non-productive time. Many times managers keep repeating the same details repeatedly to drive the point. Furthermore, the time wasted in such meetings can be saved effectively by emailing the staff or via other online tools. According to Ojo and Olaniyan [12], the effectiveness of meeting is disputed as it is considered as one of the biggest time-wasters, especially if not plannd effectively byy managers. They further stress of the need to identify whether the meeting is required. In case the meeting is absolutely essential then it should be restricted to only those whose presence is necessary [12]. Most employees tend to take such meetings lightly and do not pay much attention, especially since, a memo is passed after the meeting is over which essentially recapitulates what was discussed at the meeting. Therefore, meetings are considerd time wasters. Feloni [13] stressed that a lot of meetings which stretch for long periods usually lack any structure or substance. Such meetings can therefore act as time wasters instead of being productive. Sometimes, there may also not be any kind of ground rules set, this also happens when employees do not speak up with the fear of hurting or overstepping boundaries. This thus leads to communication gap and the meeting does not produce any

effective results [13]. All these causes make meetings a frivolous activity which results in time wasting.

  The last time waster identified is indulging in office gossip [8]. As seen in Figure 1, 39% waste time in office gossip which leads to decreased productivity. Not only employees but even supervisors and managers are responsible for imdulging in gossping. It is deemed difficult to be in a cubicle, but stay detached from the work culture. While little gossiping is a part of the culture, the problem arises when it occupies major time of the workers. This results in distractions and unnecessary office politics. It is therefore essential that this gossip culture be discouraged and instead more attention be given to office work. Furthermore, gossip leads to a negative work culture and also causes spread of misinformation [14]. All these are important issues which need to be tackled by the HR department.

3. Results and Analysis

As observed from the above literature review and the research, the issue of wasting time at workplace is detrimental to the development of the organization. In this regard, the HR department needs to develop certain important policies that can help to counter the problem of time waste at workplaces.

3.1 Development of workplace policies is necessary so that the practice of time waste by employees can be curbed [15]. The HR department needs to organize a through discussion on the challenges, so as to motivate the employees to steer clear from committing the most egregious misdemeanor [15]. It is up to the Human Resouurces department on the kind of approach they wish to adopt in this matter. Firstly there is the restrictive approach wherein the HR and management collectively impose restrictions and regulate the staff's movements on a daily basis [16]. Although the general perception is that employees are attuned to multitask, popular research and statistics show that the claim holds no merit [9]. Workplace policies such a stringent Internet usage policy [16], installation of website blockers [16] could prove beneficial in letting employees not lose their focus from work duties. Another alternative for the HR could be to take on a proactive approach [16]. An example of this is the initiation of an employee recognition program [16]. By rewarding high performers within an organization, and giving them incentives

[16] will motivate them to refrain from time waste at work. As it is already well-known and apparent employees thrive on rewards and incentives [16], so usage of appropriate perks is a good step to improve workers dedication and productivity.

3.2. Improvised Working Contracts: Given how the technology landscape is ever-changing, companies HR departments have come to identify the realities of current technology trends and the impact they have on workers [16]. Taking the same into consideration, HR departments are focusing on designing working contracts that are centered on the principle of "work accomplished" than "hours served" [16]. The emergence of this new trend is laudable [16] as it puts more responsibility and accountability on employees. Furthermore, it also exibhits flexibility in the way that workers can engage in non-work related tasks so long as it is abiding to the organizational norms [16]. A provision which allows a worker to go home after a task or project is completed, he or she is most likely to stay invested in complete more work and commit much less time waste (of own and others) [16]. Similarly many employees (millennials spefically) tend to be more productive when they are told or permitted to work for a particular length or time, then take a break to indulge in a recreational activity of their choice [16].

3.3. Employee Awareness: Employees need to know the organization they work in. In order to minimize the role of distractions and timewasters, the HR department must take up a leading position in establishing some ground rules. The HR department needs to come across strongly when communicating with employees. They must exercise clarity and need to convey to employees the organization's expectation, mission, vision, and goals [17]. In order to minimize time wastage on part on employees, the HR department should increase employee awareness with regards to how their workmanship can facilitate the organization in achieving corporate goals via performance evaluation and informal feedback on their work delivery [17].

3.4 Keep Employees Engaged: As cited, indulging in non-work-tasks was found to be the foremost timewaster for employees. With the variety of distractions that readily exist in work environments, it is easy for employees to fall prey to wasting time away from doing work duties [18]. In order to put a stop to this trend, it is imperative the HR department makes sure that each and every employee within the organization is equipped with ample assignments and tasks [18].

They must be exciting and challenging enough for the employees to stay invested in accomplishing them [18]. Seekling employee feedback on the kinds of work and tasks they would like commit to is another viable option [18]. Tell employees to keep track of their time in office [18]. This way they will come to realize that the 15 minutes on social media were actually 45 minutes. Employees are quite inherently pulled towards spending time on social media. The HR department could use it to the company's advantage. For this purpose, productive use of social media should be promoted [18].

3.5 Contain Meetings: In the aforesaid literature, frivolous meetings were recognized as the second worst timewaster in workplaces. The best way to make them productive is by keeping them short and relevant. HR department along with the management needs to realize that meetings ultimately transform into an exercise of tedium [19]. Moreover majority of employees do not look forward to them as something useful [19]. Observers have noted that office meetings have several red flags [19]. Firstly, there is no supervisor or leader to regulate the meeting and keep it on track [19]. Secondly, a definite objective or goal is absent [19]. Consequently the attendees are unable to identify the ideal solution to the problem proposed [19]. Routine meetings are seen to lack purpose [19]. These pointers clearly indicate that HR departments need to invent strategies which ensure the office meetings are contained and stay relevant so that attendees do not use them as a pretext to waste time in office.

3.6. No Gossip Policy: As recognized in the literature earlier, office gossip is considered as one of the most influential timewasters in workplaces. Not only does it adversely impact productivity levels, office gossip has the tendency to alter employee behavior and office dynamics as a whole. The HR department can minimize the occurrence and spread of office gossip by devising a clear corporate protocol on office gossip [20]. Interacting and discussing with employees on the same subject can also help. Tell them how gossip can hamper employee and organizational morale and even lead to lawsuits getting filed [20]. Office gossip not only can hinder employee productivity, it can also stall or even damage lines of communication within the organization [20]. While most employees indulge in office gossip which is seen as 'harmless' [20], still the HR and management must make it a point to discuss the concerns of the practice openly [20]. Workers should be encouraged to convey their thoughts and opinions in a postive manner [20].

4. Conclusion

To reiterate, workplace cultures are continually evolving. The pace has increased due to the advent of technologies such as the internet and social media. Employers along with the HR departments are relentlessly working hard to devise strategies and policies to make sure workers remain increasingly productive and work-focused. There are obstacles however, which are interfering with that pursuit. In this paper, with help from credible and well-documented research literature sources, an endeavor was made to identify and assess the root causes which are short-changing employee productivity in a workplace. As evidences indicate "timewasters" were found to be the culprit of this phenomenon. Top three "timewasters" were recognized, and in that technology and social media were seen as dominating causes influencing employees to waste time when they should be doing "real work" in office. The timewasters identified comprised of doing unrelated things at work – from surfing online, to chatting, and talking on phone. The second timewaster identified was frivoulous meetings carried out managers and heads which result in non-productive time. Lastly, the third timewaster was indulging in office gossip. Each of them singularly and collectively was found to be responsible in negatively employees and affecting their productivity and overall performance in the workplace. So as to prevent the aforesaid timewasters from eroding workers productivity and the workplace, relevant and cohesive discussion and analysis was compiled. In it, credible measures and steps have been elaborated upon which HR departments and managements of organizations can utilize and implement effectively and achieve optimal outputs.

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