GET S#!T DONE!

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COMPLE MATERIAM TUAM

How to hack productivity in the office with New Ways of Working

By **Holger Reisinger**
Preface by Louise Harder Fischer

" *"Get S#!t Done"* is a strong contribution to the debate about the future of work. A joy to read, tangible and to-the-point, mine is already full of sticky notes and dog ears. If you're looking to hack the productivity curve – personally or as a team – this book should be at your side. **"**
Chris Lewis, CEO of LEWIS and author of "Too Fast to Think"

" This book should be on any business leader's "must read" list. It sheds some much-needed light on how to re-think office work to propel us on a new growth trajectory. Jabra's *New Ways of Working* initiative is an extremely valuable contribution to the current debate on office productivity. **"**
Mogens Elsberg, CEO Bluegarden

" The *New Ways of Working* initiative is re-thinking the way we organize work, nudging us toward a more attractive workplace that both drives productivity and engagement. This book counters key challenges we face in the modern workplace with cases and insights, but just as important it is a good and inspirational read. **"**
Peter Green, Global Director, People Strategy & Planning, Coca-Cola Nordic Services ApS

" Finally, a book that illustrates not only the challenges, but more importantly, the opportunities of *New Ways of Working*. As part of a dispersed and virtual organization, this book inspires me on how we better organize and conduct work for the benefit of ourselves and our customers. **"**
Klaus Trolle, Chief Marketing Officer, eMarketeer

" In this book, Holger Reisinger introduces the new way to work – balancing both the cultural and technological transformation as work is no longer a place we go to, but something we do. The visionary blog is now turned into a book, helping thought leaders embracing a digital transformation. Therefore Holger has been appointed NewWayToWork Ambassador to Unify and Circuit.com. **"**
Dr. Stefan Ried, Head of Technology Strategy and Chief Technology Officer, Unify Software and Solutions GmbH & Co. KG

Modi Novi Laborandi
New Ways of Working

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Fulfill your Potential

GET S#!T DONE!

How to Hack Productivity in the Office with New Ways of Working

This book is dedicated to knowledge workers and managers across the world seeking to transform their work lives and to those who embrace work not as a place, but as a way to unleash their full professional potential or that of their team.

This book is based on two-and-a-half years of essays that appeared on blog.jabra.com. They have been edited to fit a book format and updated with the most recent data.

Contents

A Vision for the Workplace of Tomorrow

Productivity is the key to business success; without it, our organizations would quickly cease to exist. However, the relentless pursuit of productivity is also draining our finances, stifling innovation and exhausting our employees. Fortunately, there is another way. In this book we will demonstrate how New Ways of Working can help accelerate productivity, boost business innovation and increase employee satisfaction – all without the need to work harder or longer.

Productivity is the only thing I hear wherever I go. From CEOs in industry associations to international business news reports to politicians talking on my car radio, the words may be different but the message is the same: nations and companies must become more productive – or get out of business.

Organizations respond to this mandate by asking employees to work harder, longer and more efficiently – or outsourcing production to those who can. At the same time, companies direct resources away from creativity, innovation and product development in favor of efficient systems and production methodologies to keep prices down. Managers spend too much time trying to control all these new processes and systems to see that they are implemented, aligned and used.

But is This the Best Way Forward?

While this relentless focus on productivity is well-intentioned and entirely necessary, there's just one problem: it isn't working. Despite all the efforts, global productivity grew a scant 1.2% in 2015[1]. Billions were spent to ramp up productivity – with virtually no effect. At the same time, employees and managers feel more stress, sick days increased and work-life quality plummeted.

The ubiquity of technology and networked services is transforming our lives – from how we work to how we consume entertainment to how we interact with people. How do we apply these technologies to promote our goals in life both personally and professionally?

The Journey Toward Improvement Starts Today

At Jabra, we have an opinion of how we organize work toward fulfilling our full professional potential. We call it *New Ways of Working*, and we believe that with the right combination of culture and technology, we can achieve a more harmonious work/life integration, without longer or harder workdays.

We believe that we humans have an innate desire to better ourselves and the world around us. With clear objectives, those aspirations act as a compass, helping us to navigate through the infinite options that life offers us today.

New Ways of Working is about designing and organizing work for improved productivity. Our research and work over the last several years shows that this can be achieved by making conscious choices and better decisions about the practices we apply each and every day. These, in turn, lead to greater worker engagement and more fulfillment in our jobs.

With this book, we hope to inspire and facilitate conversations on how to organize ourselves to achieve our dreams, whether at work or in our private lives. We hope that by sharing and developing ideas, we all may grow wiser together.

Best regards,
Holger Reisinger

Preface

by Louise Harder Fischer

Information technology and globalization are by far the most forceful drivers of change in organizations. Understanding the causal aspects of these changes is paramount to any business that wants to thrive and excel in the future.

For the past three years, I have collaborated with Jabra in gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying aspects forming the future of work. We have been especially curious about the future workplace for the rising numbers of knowledge workers. Many changes are observable: from long-term to short-term employment; from vertical-oriented work to horizontal work; from coping with one culture to spanning multiple cultures; from command and control to bestowing increased autonomy; from physical co-located to virtual distributed work; from one-size-fits-all IT to end-user malleable general purpose technology.

Decisions – big and small – from management, HR, IT and facility managers have enabled many of these changes: HR in supporting working from home, management in organizing global teams, IT-department in deploying lateral and mobile technologies and facility management arranging open offices. The list of supportive decisions and behaviors is long. While it all has been in the name of improvements, many other issues have risen: interruptions and noise hindering concentration in the open office, too many meetings and difficulties in collaborating in a virtual setting and overflowing e-mail inboxes are just some of the negative elements of a new way of working.

All of the above have slowly accumulated into what has become a tipping point in knowledge work. An increased interest in how to tackle the complexity of the dilemma is evident. At present, many managers acknowledge that the presumptions that used to drive the organization forward are fading and something else is replacing them. It is now evident that hierarchies – perfect in stable and predictive environments, managed by command and control and steered by process design – hinder more than they enable. The individual knowledge worker has taken center stage in value-creation. As a networked individual, he or she best functions when in command and in control of a wide array of work-related decisions, such as how to continuously stay innovative and productive at the same time.

Jabra has, over the course of time, insisted on staying curious about the real challenges in the workplace, acknowledging that deep understanding of what drives people is the key to delivering end-user technology that truly enhance the situation.

GET SH#!T DONE

Thus, I developed the Productivity Cube (see page 16) to crystallize what it is that people continuously balance when developing productive behaviors in an ever-changing context of knowledge work. The basic mechanisms in knowledge work are social interaction and deep reflection. Hence the Productivity Cube shows the causal aspects in knowledge work: location, technology support and work-modes.

This book is a collection of some of the most inspiring reflections made by Holger Reisinger over the course of our collaboration, and shows how to cope with productivity and innovation from the outlook of knowledge work. It is relevant for managers, HR, IT, facility managers and all of us engaged in the future of knowledge work.

In hope of being an inspiration to you all.

1

Why New Ways of Working

We spend the majority of our waking hours working. So why shouldn't work be both enjoyable and productive? Find out how our workplaces have become what they are today and discover New Ways of Working, a blueprint for reinventing our behaviors, technology and workplace culture. With it, we can create a more open, trusting and collaborative workplace – one that helps us derive more enjoyment and satisfaction from our work.

The Secret to Greater Productivity? It's In the Cube.

"Holger, I've found your essays about New Ways of Working highly interesting and eye-opening at times. But I'm wondering.… Is this concept based on some kind of scientific theory – or is it something you just came up with?"

Amy W.

I've been writing about *New Ways of Working* for several years, and of the many questions and comments I've received this one really stood out. I appreciate honesty, and it's one of the most to-the-point emails I've ever received.

So I thought I'd use this first chapter to explain the underlying framework behind Jabra's *New Ways of Working* concept, and introduce a tool to help managers and knowledge workers plan their workdays for increased efficiency, productivity and job satisfaction.

We spend the majority of our waking hours each day on the job, so why shouldn't work be enjoyable? Equally important, it's critical that our organizations be successful. The two don't need to be mutually exclusive. We know that greater employee engagement leads to higher job satisfaction, which results in improved productivity and greater company success.

The foundation of this concept we call *New Ways of Working* is the Productivity Cube, a behavioral model developed by Louise Harder Fischer, Ph.D. Fellow at IT-University of Copenhagen. The Productivity Cube is a graphic representation of everything knowledge workers need to be most productive on the job.

The Cube in Three Dimensions

As you can see from the illustration, the cube features three dimensions: work-modes, technology and workplace culture. Technology is, of course, the tools we employ to do our work. Workplace culture includes the agreed-upon norms that are woven into the fabric of the organization. The final and most dynamic dimension, work-modes, defines the ways we connect to people and information.

THE PRODUCTIVITY CUBE

TECHNOLOGY:
Functional
Social
Enterprise

BEHAVIOR:
Concentration
Conversation
Communication
Collaboration

WORKPLACE CULTURE:
Free
Flexible
Fixed

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There are four primary work-modes – we call them the "Four C's" – we engage in while performing our job duties each workday:

Concentration
A real-time activity where we're zeroed in on a task by reflecting, conceptualizing, synthesizing and decision making.

Conversation
Talking with others to solve or clarify issues, usually in real-time and in person, by phone or instant message.

Collaboration
Interacting with others to share information, experience and insights, usually through meetings and group dialogue.

Communication
Sending and receiving written, text- or sound-based messages from one person to another or others, often not in real-time.

For maximum productivity while completing our daily tasks, it's imperative that each of the Four C's of work-modes be supported by the right technology and workplace culture. For example, let's say you're tasked with producing an important financial report, and, as such, are in concentration mode. The supporting technologies you need to be fully productive could include access to the organization's financial database, a laptop with the most current Excel capabilities and a noise-canceling headset that enables you to work without interruption, among others. The required workplace culture could include the freedom to work remotely or with coworkers who respect a "busy" light indicating that you're tackling a critical task and cannot be disturbed.

Having lesser supporting technologies – say, access only to paper reports rather than the corporate database – or different workplace cultural norms, such as a culture where it's permissible to disturb workers who have requested privacy, would reduce your productivity.

While the example I used above focuses only on the concentration behavior, it of course applies to conversation, collaboration and communication as well.

The Cube as Planning Tool

The Productivity Cube also helps us complete our everyday tasks as efficiently as possible. In fact, it's the "how-to-do" list[2] that we'll discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7. I use it every day and ask that my colleagues do the same.

By now you can spot an obvious question: What if you don't have the right technologies or culture to support the tasks you need to perform?

Greater employee engagement leads to higher job satisfaction, which results in improved productivity and greater company success.

In that case, you need to make some organizational changes, either by obtaining the necessary technologies or working to change your corporate culture. Just as we wouldn't expect a carpenter to complete a job without the necessary hammer and saw, we shouldn't expect knowledge workers to perform their jobs without the right tools either.

So there you have it, Amy. The Productivity Cube is the tool we use to address our *New Ways of Working* objective of increasing productivity and job satisfaction. It works for me, and I hope it will work for you too.

From Production Line to Knowledge Factory: The Past, Present and Future of Work

Organizations everywhere are looking for ways to help employees become more engaged, inspired and innovative. Ride with me as I trace the roots of employee disengagement and search for practical solutions, including changing the way we organize work in the knowledge economy.

Ever wonder how we got here?

Not to this point in the history of civilization. Rather, how we got to a place where 70% of knowledge workers admit to being disengaged from their jobs? Equally important, how can we overcome this issue?

To find out, let's take a trip back in time. Because everyone's favorite time-travel machine, the DeLorean from "Back to the Future" fame, is currently in the shop, we'll settle for a vintage Ford Model T instead.

In a way it's the ideal vehicle for our journey. That's because the seeds of today's discontent were planted about a century ago, around the time Model Ts began rolling off Henry Ford's then-revolutionary production line.

So, let's crank up the engine, climb in and rumble back in time.

On the Road to the Past …
Phew. It's been a long journey, first over highways, then dusty, rutted roads, but we've finally arrived in the early 20th century. A glance out the window shows a landscape dotted by factories.

Since most developed economies of the early 1900s were built on manufacturing, tough, gritty production work predominated. Thus, the way work was organized was ideal for a largely industrialized economy. Company structures were hierarchical, with strategy set at the top and slowly trickling down to the workers. Power was a function of job title. Workers were largely regarded as costs.

It was an age where a command-and-control management structure prevailed and rigid conformity ruled. The how, when, and where of employees' jobs were dictated from on high. Work was performed in a linear fashion – think production line: materials came in

one end, were assembled and the finished product came out the other. Most work was manual and highly repetitive, and workers enjoyed precious little autonomy or say in how they performed their job functions.

Returning Home…

Now let's point our Model T back toward today. As we move into the present, the economic and competitive landscapes begin to change. Information is becoming the new currency, and production work is increasingly supplanted by knowledge work, giving rise to the phrase "knowledge worker." Competition becomes more intense, with greater transparency and a free flow of information.

But as present day comes into view, one thing hasn't changed much: the command-and-control system of organizing work still prevails at most organizations. In many cases, organizational structures remain hierarchical, with job duties narrowly defined and knowledge workers lacking autonomy in how they perform their tasks.

It reminds me of the old saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." We're living in a new age – one where innovation and speed-to-market are critical, new technologies are shrinking the globe, barriers to entry to virtually every industry are disappearing and competition is coming in from all sides. But with the way we organize work stuck in the early 1900s, it's no wonder our workers are detached and our organizations lack speed and flexibility.

> *In today's knowledge economy, we need to view workers as assets – and assets need to be nurtured so that they grow.*

Driving Toward the Future…

So how do we move forward? Here are a few ideas:

Our companies need to reinvent themselves to succeed in rapidly changing times. An example of a company that has done so several times over the decades is IBM – yes, the IBM widely regarded as a stodgy behemoth. As times

>

and technology have changed, IBM has evolved from a manufacturer of business computing devices to a builder of laptops and PCs to, most recently, a provider of cloud computing, virtualization, intelligence and analytics services.

The way we organize work must change too. As far back as 1999, legendary management guru Peter Drucker[3] noted that the biggest challenge of the 21st century would be how to make knowledge workers more productive. His recommendations? Provide workers with more autonomy to manage themselves and make innovation a core component of their job responsibilities. Both require a U-turn from our current command-and-control system.

We also need to invest in our workers. In the past, workers were viewed as costs – and we all know that costs need to be controlled. In today's knowledge economy, we need to view workers as assets – and assets need to be nurtured so that they grow. We need to invest in technologies and training and give our workers added freedom to make decisions, provide new ideas – even make mistakes as long as they're done in the spirit of innovation.

I can't wait to see what the future holds. On second thought, why wait?

Time to fire up the Model T and find out. Road trip, anyone?

2

Work Isn't a Place;
It's What We Do

As much as we hate to admit it, our workspaces and work processes have changed little since the Industrial Revolution. This slowness to adapt to a faster pace of business is hurting us where it matters most: on the bottom line. Explore the powerful notion of the workplace as a productivity enabler and discover technologies, business processes and companies that are pushing the boundaries to make the workplace a more fulfilling, collaborative and productive space.

Taking Harvard Wisdom to the Next Level

Harvard Business Review has calculated the positive effects of moving to new buildings designed for high performance. The numbers are staggering and highly convincing. But I have an even better idea.

I've been an avid reader of the *Harvard Business Review* for years. It's packed with inspiring articles about modern business life written by some of the world's most prominent business leaders and professors. However, it isn't beautiful pictures or splashy infographics that pull me in. To be honest, the Harvard Business Review is as visually appealing as a nuclear power plant. In HBR, just like the power plant, the power lies within.

That's why I didn't react at first when I saw images of some exceptionally hideous office cubicles on the *Harvard Business Review's* website the other day[4]. But once I started reading the captions, the article certainly got my attention.

Faster, Cozier and More Productive
The article was about the effect crammed, uninspiring cubicles and open office spaces have on us as individuals and companies as a whole, and what the pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly & Co. chose to do about it. Lilly built a new, high-performance office environment, and the results have been no less than remarkable.

Let me list the headlines[5]:

> # Total square footage per employee dropped from 212 to 156
>
> # Furniture cost per employee went from $9,100 to $4,900
>
> # Capital cost per employee dropped from $34,000 to $18,000
>
> # Hours lost per employee, per year, to noise went from 32 to 22.8
>
> # Hours lost per employee, per year, to drop-by visitors dropped from 34.8 to 22.8
>
> # Hours lost per employee, per year, waiting for feedback or approval from managers went from 29.6 to 13.6

So, what's the secret of the perfect office space? For starters, the cubicles need to go; they are the sum of all evils. On one hand, they are open enough to let all the noise and disturbing coworkers in. On the other, they are so confined that they prevent open discussion and innovation among the people surrounding you. Instead, you need a combination of open space offices designed for innovation and cooperation, and quiet rooms for work that demands silence and hours of concentration.

New, high-performance working environments not only reduce costs, they also make employees happier and more productive.

Building separate quiet and interaction zones also means that people are readily able to move around so that they are not tied to one table all day. This is good news for the economy. Research shows that employees spend only 35% of the day at their desks[6], leaving a lot of space unused all day. With flexible rooms, you need fewer tables and fewer square feet. At the same time, you use the space for what you really need: quiet rooms and meeting space (which always seems to be in demand in all organizations).

The new open spaces also boost cooperation and knowledge sharing. It's easier to spot the bosses to get quick approvals when you need them. That makes the decision making process faster and smoother.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these new working environments make employees happier and more productive. Not a bad result, given the additional cost reductions you will get from the new designs.

From Spaceship to… Home

Lilly's headquarters marks a trend among some of the most prominent companies right now. To stay ahead of the curve, they're switching the old cubicles to new, environmentally friendly buildings designed to increase performance. Just think of Google's playful headquarters, Samsung's new Gold LEED-certified building or Apple's infamous new spaceship-like headquarters in California.

I know, I know. You are probably thinking, "Yeah, right, but my company can't afford a glorious new building. They didn't even approve our application for new chairs last year!" That's where I have an idea that can take Harvard's (and Lilly's) wisdom to a new level.

Why not discard the headquarters altogether? I'll bet that the most comfortable and productive headquarters of all is at home; that is, if home is supported by brilliant communications and knowledge- and information-sharing systems. Actually, research indicates that employees and teams are even more effective, innovative and productive when working from home, as long as that work is done right.

So here's one from me to all the readers of the *Harvard Business Review* (or this book at least…): let's build the perfect headquarters – a virtual one. It beats Apple's spaceship and Lilly's superhouse every time. After all, there's no place like home.

It's Time to Face the Big, Open Space

We've seen the research and heard all the warnings: big, open offices kill creativity, stress out employees and crush productivity. But that's just half the story. You can actually make open space offices work. All it takes is a closer look at your company's culture and a gutsy choice.

They were the heroes of the financial crisis: the procurement officers who cut costs and gave imperiled companies desperately needed cash on the bottom line. They saved our butts when saving money was easier than selling products – and we thank them!

However, to slash real estate expenses, they also took big, open space offices to a completely new level. In a survey by CoreNet Global[7], an association for corporate real estate professionals, 55% of professionals surveyed reported that square footage per worker has decreased between 5% and 25% over the last five years. Forty percent of the respondents predicted that their companies will reach less than 100 square feet per worker in 2017, which is an all-time low. And the average for all companies for square footage per worker in 2017 will be 151 square feet, compared to 225 in 2010.

Less space is more money saved. But cramming workers together in less space takes a toll on worklife quality. An overwhelming amount of research shows that big, open space offices generate stress, spoil coworker relations and reduce employee motivation. Research from Sweden also shows that the bigger the office rooms, the more sick days employees take.

So, here's the combination from hell: in the coming years, employees will be forced into even less space – which, in turn, will reduce their productivity, wellbeing and innovation.

Get the Best of Both Worlds
Fortunately, tight office spaces and employee productivity can actually go hand-in-hand. The open office may have earned itself a bad name for many good reasons, but it is actually possible to make it work as intended. All that's required is that you make a very important decision – and then start changing your company's culture to fit that choice.

Tight office spaces and employee productivity can actually go hand in hand – if you make the right choice.

Ideally, workplaces need the best of both worlds: open space to facilitate conversation and innovation as well as quiet rooms for concentration and individual work that require heavy-duty thinking. If you can't have both, you need to answer a really tough question: what's most important at your workplace?

When is your company's most value-creating work actually done? Are you most dependent on collaboration and constant interaction? Or are you more dependent on individual work with a high concentration level?

Once you have decided, the next choices will more or less make themselves. First, the design: individual thinking is best done in a library-like environment; knowledge-sharing works better if you dedicate your few square feet to a café-like environment.

When the physical layout is in place, it's time to work on your company's culture. All employees must respect the individual's choice of workstyle. And you must provide options if you need to collaborate in a quiet, work-for-yourself environment and vice versa. That's where things like small, separate rooms for meetings, opportunities for working at home and headsets to reduce noise issues factor in.

Engage Your Employees – and Decide Together
Making the decision is difficult. Of course, we all want the best of both worlds, but an office design that fits everyone… fits no one. That's one of many reasons why you shouldn't make this decision alone. You must make it along with your employees, and you must lay out the ground rules and values associated with working together in the office space. In the library, you will whisper and respect people's time alone. In a creative lab, you don't hide behind a screen with your anti-social solitude.

If you all agree on the basics of your company culture, an ongoing fruitful discussion commences, including such topics as: how can we be even better at taking care of our work environment? How do we ensure that we stay innovative if we primarily work in silence? And how do we get some personal work and thinking done if we are all in constant dialog? In this way, we continuously improve. Essentially, that's the key to any great achievement. Rome – and the perfect open office – wasn't built in a day.

The right choice, a supporting culture and continuous improvement are the ingredients for productivity and satisfied employees. It may take some time to get there, but when you do, it means a lot of money for your company. And we know that money makes everyone happy – especially our friends in Procurement!

Do You Trust Your Colleagues?
… Honestly

Should employees be allowed to work from home? New research shows that most managers say "No." And that's a shame, because evidence suggests that working from home boosts productivity and employee satisfaction. It's time to take a hard look at the facts and put an end to the mistrust and prejudice.

Just the other day, I witnessed an awkward moment at a neighboring table in our cafeteria. While enjoying the cook's lasagna, five of my colleagues engaged in a heated debate over which team would win the soccer championships. One of them made a reference to a TV show he had watched while working from home. The table went silent. All seemed to agree that you just don't do that. Or, at the very least, you don't talk about it. The silence was eerie!

Watching Soccer at Work Isn't Always Bad for Business

The awkward moment really got me thinking. My immediate reaction was that this guy was cheating our company. On the other hand, we all spend time on stuff other than working while at work: calling the dentist, checking out YouTube videos, private chitchat with friends on Facebook. You know, everyday personal stuff.

Also, I know this particular employee quite well. He's a very hardworking guy who never misses a deadline and stays late whenever necessary to get the job done.

Still, episodes like this certainly give working at home a bad rep. Even worse: others might think working at home means having a company-paid day off.

We Are More Productive at Home

This scenario imposes an interesting managerial dilemma: should employees be allowed to work from home?

Well, according to Yahoo CEO, Marissa Mayer, the answer is clearly a "no." In 2013 she instituted a ban on the practice entirely after spying into the internet traffic of employees "allegedly" working from home.[8]

Ms. Mayer is not alone. Several other high profile companies followed with restrictions on telecommuting and work-from-home policies. In a recent study, 50% of all managers opposed working from home, and another 35% merely "tolerated" the concept.

Personally, I believe the answer should be a resounding "Yes." And I have the evidence[9] to prove my point. A couple of years back, a NASDAQ-listed firm with 13,000 employees did a randomized experiment on home working. This resulted in a 12% increase in performance from the work-from-home employees, due to fewer breaks, sick days and less noise. Home workers also reported substantially higher work satisfaction and psychological attitude scores, and their job attrition rates fell by 50%.

It seems that some interference such as watching a little TV or putting laundry in the washing machine at home takes less time than talking with your colleagues at the water cooler or being distracted by noise at work. Research backs this up. Hence, 37% of all employees state that they are more productive and 44% state that there are fewer distractions when working from home.

Then there's the commuting time. A couple of years ago, the British company O2[10] asked the 2,500 employees working at its U.K. headquarters to work at home on a certain day. In total, the employees saved 2,000 hours on commuting that day, and more than half that time was spent on… working more.

The Elephant in the Room
More productive employees, fewer distractions at home and investing time saved on working more… the business case seems clear cut. So if the evidence is there, what's the problem?

The elephant in the room is trust. Do we trust that people working from home are actually, well, working?

Somehow, managers and – let's be honest – the rest of us, tend to believe that our colleagues are slacking off and wasting our company's time and money. However, with the evidence to the contrary, we have a managerial problem – and not an employee issue – on our hands. Workplace trust is a fragile thing, and prejudice is its scary helper. It's time to face the elephant.

> *Do we trust that people working from home are actually working? We should.*

We have to stop conventional thinking and look at the facts. It's time for managers to sponsor and promote profitable new ways of working like working from home. Most importantly, it's time to break the awkward silence when a coworker tells you that they sometime watch TV when working from home.

Statistically, that employee is the most productive!

P.S., What You Might Not Know About the Working-from-Home Dress Code
An enormous amount of data is available on the issue of productivity when working from home. One of the more interesting studies asked employees what they wore when doing so. Roughly half those surveyed answered that they wear jeans and a T-shirt. But what surprised me was that 25% wear pajamas, while 7% prefer to work in either their under-wear or in the nude. Try and erase that image the next time you attend a teleconference with someone working from home!

Collaboration Black Belt: The Secret Art of Managing Remote Teams

It's the mother of all managerial challenges: the remote team. With team members dispersed all over the world, you must generate the glue to keep them – and the project – together. Difficult? Yes. Impossible? Hardly. Here are three tricks that will earn you a "black belt" in remote team management.

Your best people are dispersed all over the world and you have a complicated challenge to solve in a very short time. What do you do? Fly your worldwide team in at an immense cost? Use whatever (mediocre) local resources are available? Or take a leap of faith and create a remote team with your top people working from various locations around the world?

Logically, the latter solution is the best. You'll be able to draw talent for your team from a larger, more qualified pool of candidates and break down geographical boundaries. It's cost-efficient beyond compare, and you'll be able to increase engagement with key member of your organization.

What's not to love?

Oh yeah, all the hurdles you face in assembling and managing a remote team.

Seeing is Believing

Times are changing swiftly, and it's time to get with the program and overcome those obstacles. According to the New Jersey Institute of Technology; 45 percent of U.S. employees work from home and 53 million people work as freelancers, contributing $715 billion annually to the American economy[11]. The remote team is no longer an option but an everyday reality, and we all have to earn those black belts in a hurry. All it takes are a few tricks of the trade from someone who's been there, done that and ended up with the T-shirt that says, "I Love Remote Teams!"

> *It's time to kill the idea of "the remote team." Team members aren't necessarily remote just because they don't rub shoulders.*

But how do you make up for perhaps the biggest disadvantage of the remote team model: the lack of face-to-face interaction? In other words, how do you compensate for the fact that people tend to orient themselves toward others in their immediate physical proximity?

Make It Personal.
Invest time and tools in developing your team's spirit. Instead of shooting off weekly "to everyone" emails, take the time to call each member of your team once a week. It doesn't have to take more than five minutes. The important thing is that you create a sense of belonging, make each member feel special and interesting and demonstrate that you care!

Make It Virtual.
Instead of firing off written memos or holding conference calls, make your interactions virtual, through videoconferencing, whenever possible. Being able to actually see each other's facial expressions can help bring additional clarity to your discussions; these expressions can help anchor the meaning of what's said and reveal what coworkers are thinking beyond mere words.

Make It Social.
Stick to your workers like social glue. Remote team members don't get to meet up at the office printer or by the coffee machine where, as we all know, many a creative idea has been developed. You need to make up for the lack of small talk and co-create an informal "space" where you and your remote team members can hook up. Make it virtually social – have a Hawaiian shirt day, where you get to show off your cool prints or shorts. What you do doesn't matter as long as it's informal and easygoing fun. Just avoid cultural no-no's and keep your bare feet off the table.

It's What You Call It

It's time to kill the idea of "the remote team." Team members aren't necessarily remote just because they don't rub shoulders. They are actually closer than ever before – always available for a face-to-face meeting on your smartphone, tablet or PC.

So let's skip the old terms and not call it anything but a "team" going forward. This type of working should be the norm in the future. There's nothing remote about that!

Money Saved on Remote Working Should Be Spent on "Social Glue"

Working from home increases productivity and can save companies fortunes. By reinvesting some of that savings into gluing the members of your remote teams together into well-functioning teams, you can boost productivity and, yes, even profits.

Old-school managers might hate it – but employees and the procurement department love it: remote working.

It's the simplest and best deal in the world. You work from home (or your car, summer cottage or wherever makes you happy) instead of commuting all the way to the office, thereby avoiding wasting time in traffic, noisy colleagues, mind-numbing meetings and all the other stuff that seems to be inevitable parts of modern knowledge worker life.

The arrangement is worth a lot of money. Research shows that most employees spend the time saved on commuting by working more. Productivity is generally higher at home, and companies save a substantial amount of office space, because more employees can share fewer square feet, parking spaces and other infrastructure.

It's money in the bank! But there is a catch…

Reinvest In Your Staff

Most companies tend to take the money and direct it right toward the bottom line. I have a better idea: reinvest the money in employees instead. Why? To build "social glue."

Working from home is efficient, but it also detaches us from our coworkers. That may decrease our sense of belonging and commitment to the company's vision, targets and goals, which is not good for business.

Research shows that strong teams with a common goal and shared values are the most efficient ones, outperforming all the competition

> *Research shows that strong teams with a common goal and shared values are the most efficient ones.*

in the market. The experts call this group the "in-group" because it's a band of brothers (and sisters), where you can be yourself along with like-minded individuals.

This is also known as the cult paradox. We feel more individual and free when we're part of a group – as long as it's the right group for us. You may be a dentist, a postman or a mechanic. But you really don't feel like you are the best version of yourself until you join the other guys and ride your Harley-Davidson in the Harley club, meet for soccer practice or share stamps at the annual stamp fair. Then you are an individual at peace, feeling comfortable in a perfect team.

Increase Customer Loyalty, Productivity and the Bottom Line
This type of togetherness fosters commitment and engagement with the team and the company, and it's worth a lot of money. According to Gallup, companies with engaged employees enjoy 38% higher customer satisfaction, 22% greater productivity and 27% bigger profits than companies with a majority of disengaged employees[12].

That's why it's important to reinvest in our staff. Working from home makes them happy and productive. Securing their team feeling with a common purpose makes them profitable and committed to the company, customers and bottom line.

What does it take to create this happy, high-performing virtual group? Not much, actually. It starts with a common vision and purpose: why are we here together? Then, we need to build informal relationships, break down barriers between people in the group – especially if they rarely meet – and finally, make each member feel indispensable as an individual, yet still be rewarded for their efforts in the group.

It may sound easy, but like anything worthwhile, it requires an investment. Of course, with all the money saved on real estate, we finally have the chance to do what's right. So let's get on with it!

Introducing Most Productive and Collaborative Company in the World

We all know that Disney is great at branding and Tesla excels at innovation. But which company is the most collaborative and productive in the world? The answer is surprising, but comes with a catch.

Scholars and industry specialists agree that the ability to collaborate with partners, customers and colleagues is the key to success for large, global organizations. However, there is plenty to dispute when it comes to which company or organization is the world's most collaborative.

We all look to Disney for inspiration on branding, Toyota for lean management, McDonald's for supply chain management and Tesla for innovation. But which company sets the benchmark for outstanding collaboration skills?

As a frequent speaker and blogger on how work life will look (and feel) in the future, I am often asked this question. Which company is a beacon of light when it comes to collaboration? Up until now I haven't been able to decide. However, just like any other great question, it does call for an answer. So here it goes (and please read this through, because like any other good riddle, there is a catch…):

I believe that the most collaborative company in the world is… 37Signals.

Geek Territory with an Attitude
Never heard of them? I'm not surprised. 37Signals has only about 50 employees, all of whom create project-management apps. You may have heard of some of their products, most notably Basecamp, Campfire and Highrise. The company was co-founded and is run by Jason Fried, who was named in the *MIT Technology Review TR35* as one of the top 35 innovators in the world under age 35[13].

The name 37Signals comes from the 37 signals from outer space that some regard as potential messages from extraterrestrial intelligence. So yes, we are in geek territory here. However, it's not just the employees and products that are heavy duty, state-of-the-art technology. The company's work practices and procedures offer a fascinating glimpse into the future.

Very early on, 37Signals made an important decision about how it would operate. Although based in Chicago, nearly all employees work from home. Only about 10 of them

live in the Chicago area; the rest are dispersed all over the world, from Germany to South America. The company only hires people who fit the company's philosophy, and where they are situated in the world doesn't matter.

The company's basic philosophy is that employees should do what they are best at – and nothing else. They work relentlessly to rid the company and all work procedures of stuff that kills productivity and wastes time.

An Office Like a Library and "No-Talk Thursdays"

The company's Chicago office is referred to as "the library," and it is truly dead silent. People whisper and go outdoors to talk. The belief is that there is no need to ask your coworkers questions all the time. Any questions you may have cannot be as important as the work your coworkers are doing. Instead, all questions are posted on social wikis, chat rooms and discussion boards where everybody – all over the world – can participate when they have time and it fits into their work rhythm.

To top off the "library" theme, the company even initiated "no-talk Thursdays," where talking isn't allowed in the office at all. During the summer, everyone works four-day weeks instead of five, so employees can spend some time outdoors.

One might think that these work practices would be ineffective and costly. They aren't. 37Signals makes a lot of money and is more productive than most other companies. Here's why: everything the company does leads to results. If you don't talk, you produce more. If you only participate in discussions when you are not productive anyway, you don't lose time being disturbed by others when you are in "flow." If you work from home, you save time commuting and benefit from a higher quality of life – which makes you even more productive.

The four-day week? Well, the company discovered that if employees have less time to work, they're better at focusing on doing the right things. With fewer hours in the workweek, they simply squeeze out the stuff that doesn't matter as much. The savings accumulated as products became simpler and projects that had gone astray were abandoned earlier in the process, saving money and time.

> *The company discovered that if employees have less time to work, they're better at focusing on doing the right things.*

Focus is also the core of 37Signals' work model when it comes to promoting people. The company never promotes someone who is particularly good at something. After all, why would you, say, take a person who is good at making furniture and force him or her to stop making furniture and instead merely manage others who do?

Find Your Own Way – and Prosper
I'm sure you're thinking that 37Signals sounds like 50 individual one-man bands more than a single, collaborative unit, but that's not the case. The chat room is exceptionally active, registering millions of lines of chat. And all employees meet two to three times a year for a full week, spending time together, focusing on conversation and relationships and abandoning ordinary work and the digital workspace entirely during that week.

When I present 37Signals' work model to others, most are intrigued, but soon after conclude that working there must either be heaven or hell. You may be thinking the same thing. And that's the catch of my choice for the award for most collaborative company in the world. It's not 37Signals' daily life you should imitate. It's the company's willingness to be committed to its choices and implement them – fully!

Most companies don't go all the way. We try to collaborate, concentrate and have conversations at the same time. We create big, open space offices with no room to talk privately. Or we put people in small rooms where they are able to concentrate on their work, but forget to bring them together to re-energize, innovate and bond. Or we force people to work from the office, when they would be much more productive at home. And we rarely provide them with the necessary tools or training to help them collaborate and share information in the most effective way.

We should all do a 37Signals: Find our way of working, agree on it and then implement it mercilessly. That way, our companies would make earn more revenue and our employees would work more efficiently (and less).

Definitely not a bad idea!

P.S., 37Signals has changed its name to Basecamp to reflect the company's focus on its most important product. Check out Basecamp online; it's quite a unique company in so many ways.

"Start Sleeping on the Job or You're Fired!"

Scientists have long understood the benefits of a quick nap, such as greater productivity, better decision making and improved overall health. But catching some Zzzzs while on the job? Meet a pioneering company that's working to change our attitudes about stealing a few winks in the workplace.

It wasn't long ago that napping at work was a great way to get fired.

But if a U.S. company has its way, getting a few minutes of shut-eye on the job may just make you a better employee.

Allow me to introduce MetroNaps, perhaps the most courageous company in the world. That's because MetroNaps is determined to eliminate one of the biggest taboos in the workplace: dozing on the job. It's the kind of organization that embodies a *New Ways of Working* philosophy that's crucial to business success in the 21st century.

MetroNaps bills itself as "the premier provider of workplace rest systems." Climb inside one of its futuristic-looking EnergyPods, don a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, tune in to soothing music and drift off to sleep. Twenty minutes later, you awake refreshed, invigorated and prepared to tackle the remainder of the workday.

Boosting Productivity…
While stealing a few winks on the job has long been a no-no, research shows a strong link between napping and increased workplace productivity. According to sleep scientists, our brains are wired to achieve maximum productivity only if every 90 minutes of work is followed by about 20 minutes of recharging. Without that break, stress builds and productivity plunges.

That means that a 15- to 20-minute nap is all that's required to dramatically increase productivity and alertness, enabling recharged workers to far outperform their less-well-rested counterparts. Plus a bit of afternoon repose provides a healthier, longer-lasting energy boost than caffeine from coffee or soda.

All this should come as welcome news for today's organizations, which increasingly need to tap into the potential of workers to get more done in less time while remaining satisfied in their jobs.

… And Overall Health

In addition to increasing workplace productivity, napping can address one of today's most pressing health issues: insufficient sleep. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average adult needs seven to eight hours of sleep a night[14]. Yet 35% of workers report getting less than seven hours of sleep a night and nearly 40%[15] say that they unintentionally doze off during the day.

That's a problem, especially since researchers know that sleep is a big contributor to improved health, better decision making, sharper brain activity and a stronger immune system.

And then we haven't even discussed the matter of stress. Research leaves no doubt that people who lack good sleep and sufficient rest experience higher levels of stress .

…allowing a short nap while on the job seems like an idea whose time has come.

At a time when companies are employing all kinds of strategies to help improve employee health and productivity – everything from building wellness centers, paying for fitness club memberships and providing reduced cost insurance coverage to fitter employees – allowing a short nap while on the job seems like an idea whose time has come.

Overcoming the Taboo

Now MetroNaps just needs to convince the skeptics. Its co-founder even admits that when the company began in 2004 people thought he was crazy for encouraging sleeping on the job. But he argues that for decades it was OK to go outside for a smoke break, why shouldn't be OK to take a few minutes to nod off?

He has a good point, and others seem to agree. You'll find MetroNaps' sleeping pods in many universities, airports and corporate workplaces, including Google, Cisco Systems, Procter & Gamble and NASA, according to the company.

What do those organizations know that the rest of us don't? It's time for everyone to begin realizing the virtues of napping while at work.

I'm up for one right now. Are you?

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Collaboration vs. Concentration

The modern workspace is a cauldron of noise, commotion and interruptions that distract us from vital concentration time. Equally frustrating, much of our work time is consumed by meetings that are either unnecessary or counterproductive.
As knowledge workers, how do we strike the right balance between individual concentration and collaboration with peers? Investigate strategies for taking back our vital work time and creating a more dynamic and productive workspace.

The Most Annoying Thing in the World

Concentrating at work is not easy, especially if you work in an open office space environment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's our colleagues who keep us from devoting our full attention to the task at hand. Fortunately, there are ways to get the peace and quiet you need to perform at your best. And don't worry, they don't include building individual offices for every employee.

I was introduced to quite a drama the other day. An old friend from my university days shared the best gossip I've heard in a long time. The core of his story was a love affair gone entirely wrong: guy falls in love with his old buddy's girlfriend. They talk about it as mature adults and come to an agreement; he should keep his distance and not ask her out. But he didn't keep his promise, and it exploded into arguments, slammed doors, friendships broken, etc. Oh, and in the end, none of them got the girl.

How do I know this? My old friend works in an open office space right near one of the ill-fated Romeos, who had spent the past few weeks trying to resolve the matter via his telephone – providing everyone in the office with front-row seats to the whole drama.

This got us talking about how little privacy the open office affords for either work or personal matters. It's also why most employees hate open office spaces and noisy coworkers who, by far, are the largest nuisance when work needs to be done. Our brains simply can't cope with noise when we really need to concentrate. It's just like if you're driving a car and trying to find your way to some unknown destination. What is the first thing you do? You turn down the radio and ask the kids in the back seat to keep quiet for a while.

> *Our brains simply can't cope with noise when we really need to concentrate.*

Noise Kills Productivity and, if You're Unfortunate, You Too

A couple of years ago my company helped analytics specialists YouGov design a survey about distractions and noise in the workplace. We discovered that 36% of the respondents are disturbed by people talking loudly across the office space, 29% have difficulties concentrating because of noise in the office and 27% are disturbed by coworkers' questions or remarks. Finally – and to me most surprisingly – 12% are disturbed by coworkers eating crunchy vegetables. I guess they prefer the stick rather than the carrot!

The distractions and noise are bad for your productivity and your company´s bottom line. In a TED Talk by Julian Treasure, founder and chairman of The Sound Agency and author of "Sound Business," he cites research showing that people have the capacity for about 1.6 human conversations[17]. This means that if you're forced to listen in on your colleagues' conversations, you're only left with just 0.6 for the inner voice that helps you do your job. Studies show that office workers are up to 66% less productive in an open office plan than when left on their own[18].

The impact on our bodies is even more worrisome. Studies show that as noise levels go up, our heart rates rise as well. A study from schools in Germany showed an average noise level of 65dB, and at that level, teachers have a heart rate close to the one doctors see before a heart attack.

Kill the Noise Before it Kills You
There are several things we can do to rein in the noise. The expensive solution is to modify the buildings by either installing sound suppressing elements in the offices or – better yet – building quiet rooms workers can use when they need to concentrate. Quiet rooms are better than individual offices for everyone, because this floorplan leaves space for people to be together when they need to work together and to withdraw to another area when they must concentrate.

Alternatively, you could gather everyone and decide on some common ground rules for talking and making noise in the office. Or you could permit employees to work from home when they really have to concentrate. But this, of course, requires that they have no other tasks that demand their presence in the office that day.

The Luxury Solution
Finally, there are headsets. Modern headsets have many helpful features. Wireless headsets make it possible for people to leave their desks to go somewhere else when taking phone calls. Other types of headsets enclose the entire ear and block out virtually all outside sounds, which is great if you like listening to music when you work. Finally, state-of-the art headsets have noise-cancelling technology that removes the noise so it never reaches your ear.

I actually had given my old pal a pair of noise-cancelling headsets as a birthday present about a year ago. Given the above story, I bet you're now thinking, as I did, "Why didn't you use them when you were disturbed by your colleague´s many phone conversations?"

When I asked, he smiled and said: "The truth is, I chose to listen in. I just had to. These conversations have been the subject of all gossip around the water coolers for the past few weeks, and I wanted to be part of the discussions. Plus, it was great entertainment, too."

"Got a Minute?"

With all the great communication and collaboration tools in today's workplace, you'd think we could share knowledge and information more efficiently. Instead, our days are punctuated by untimely interruptions and requests for information from coworkers. It's time to take our time back.

"Got a minute?"

Those may be the three most frightening words in the workplace today.

That realization came to me while having lunch with a friend recently. As we enjoyed our sandwiches, he began recounting the number of interruptions and requests for information he'd already received that morning. "I spend so much time responding to people that I don't have enough time to do my job," he despaired.

Unwittingly, perhaps, my friend stumbled upon one of the paradoxes of modern-day collaboration. While great new technologies make collaborating with coworkers easier than ever, we're doing it less efficiently than ever.

It would be easy to blame the technology for this, but I think that's misguided. Some of the explanation lies in our current organizational structures. Flatter organizational charts that are meant to drive quicker decision making are pushing the need for alignment and coordination to all levels of the company. And when you toss in the "need-it-now" mindset that comes with having to make snap decisions, you have a recipe for inefficient collaboration.

> *While new technologies make collaborating with coworkers easier than ever, we're doing it less efficiently than ever.*

Half of Your Workday… Gone!

This inefficiency comes at a steep cost. In one study, employees claimed that time lost to interruptions accounted for 40% to 60% of their day[19]. That's between three and five hours every day! Factor in the loss of momentum caused by the initial distraction and the time needed to restart, and you're talking serious time and money.

Interruptions also sap morale and damage job performance. In a recent Jabra survey of knowledge workers worldwide, we found that 43% of workers state that interruptions from colleagues are affecting their job performance negatively.

We can't allow rampant interruptions and requests for information to become business as usual in the workplace. Despite organizational charts becoming flatter and the workforce more dispersed, we can do some things to restore respect for others' concentration time.

Begin Building a Truly Collaborative Culture.
We need to develop norms that guide when and how to communicate and collaborate for maximum value and minimal intrusion. Building a truly collab- orative culture begins with establishing trust among coworkers, recognizing that others' time is as valuable as our own and taking responsibility for our actions. Articulating shared social norms around how we behave and use technology is similarly critical.

Practice What You Preach.
Another step on the path to a collaborative culture is easy: if you don't want people to interrupt you, don't interrupt them. Be respectful of "do not disturb" statuses or busy lights. With today's option to turn off email notifications, a polite message that says "I can see you're busy, but I have a request. Please let me know when you have a few minutes to talk" goes a long way.

Block Off Some "Me Time."
Of course, a new culture won't spring up overnight. In the meantime, make a practice of carving out time to devote to important tasks that demand your energy and attention. Set your presence status to "busy" or "do not disturb." In some cases, you may need to politely explain why you've done so and let would-be interrupters know how and when you will get back to them.

Our jobs are stressful enough without the added burden of continual interruptions. Let's take a stand – and take back our time.

Think IKEA… and Reclaim Your Workspace

Accidental noise, gigantic rooms and humming machinery all stand between you and productivity. Getting the office plan right is key to a workplace that's fit for human habitation.

"I am sure you can hear the drop of a coin on the concrete floor at least 25 feet from where it landed." I could hear the despair in his voice. My friend Michael's company just moved into new offices – beautiful, spacious ones – and now he was having a difficult time getting the soundproofing of his large industrial open plan office to work. I've offered to accompany him to IKEA for some basic supplies and to provide ideas to mask the sound and lines of sight in his new space before his 75 employees make the move.

Office layout planning and soundproofing is one of the challenges of business life. It is no longer just about getting a table, a chair and a set of drawers for each employee and placing them in a room. Today's open plan offices take a bit more planning if you want your staff to feel invigorated by the office environment, and indeed, if you expect your people to get anything done during the day.

In a study of corporate office workers by the American Society of Interior Designers, more than 70% of respondents said that that a reduction in noise would increase their productivity[20]. This doesn't surprise me one bit. I have seen similar survey results in our own research. Most of the sounds around us are accidental: street noise, colleague chatter and machines like the Xerox humming away. When you lay out the office plan, you need to take this into consideration so that you get only the noise you want and not accidentally end up in the office equivalent of Grand Central Station. Fortunately, it does not have to be very difficult to make your office work.

Granted, IKEA is often noisy, crowded and relatively better known for testing relationships than for office layout. But the Swedish furniture chain does one thing particularly well, which every office planner can learn from: it exploits every square inch of space to create a comforting and homey feeling, without mindlessly cramming items into a room.

Planning, Planning and People

Now, I am not advocating to feng shui your office, but you need to keep a couple of things in mind when planning a space where human beings can thrive. Because even though we want to make the most out of the space available, there are basic human needs and psychological aspects to take into account. The environment has a huge impact on the

way we work at the office, and a little interior design nudging can form a basis for the behavior you want to encourage.

> *A little interior design nudging can form a basis for the behavior you want to encourage.*

The four behaviors you need to look out for and encourage are stimulation, socialization, belonging and retreat. If you plan your office landscape based on those principles, you can create a productive environment. If not, then you may end up with a workplace where, in no time, your employees will beg to work from home or the coffee shop across the street.

The Office Village
The Japanese have long worked with an open plan office technique, which did not make it to the west for years. They base this plan on the way water runs. The corridors have open spaces at each end – planned disruptions if you will – meant to create ripples and encourage workers to meet casually and create a dynamic, comfortable environment.

Similarly, you should consider placing the desks in ways that allow for collaboration in teams: open, but not so open that people are constantly disturbed. Here, line of sight is important. Break it often. Offer some shelter from the main walkways. Visual noise is as counterproductive as audible noise. In addition, you will tie the team closer together by providing them a space to call their own.

This brings me to the point about clean desk policies, which were originally invented to keep confidential documents out of sight. Pictures of babies and small personal items make your employees feel a sense of belonging, and no office needs to be so clean that it shows no sign of human habitation. I say allow it.

The possibilities are endless, but you have to think about people first. Therefore, when you get your new offices, I suggest you make sure that you get furniture that is flexible and can be reshaped. This is another good reason why I love IKEA, and why I am taking Michael there. I am sure we will find some great furniture to make his employees thrive.

Hush! How to Harness the Power of Silence in a Successful Business

You lose more than 66% of your productivity through accidental noise in the office. That corresponds to more than half your day disappearing into thin air. It does not have to be that way. Small changes in the office can have a major impact on your productivity, sanity and bottom line.

I recently learned a new word: schizophonia. Never heard of it? Well, neither had I. But let me explain: according to Julian Treasure, an expert in how sounds affects us, schizophonia is a state of confusion experienced when what you hear and see does not match for a longer period of time – say, a full workday. It is an interesting concept, because about 70% of all office workers work in open plan offices, and many of those use earbuds with music to cancel out the noise of chattering colleagues.

This in itself, however, is not a viable solution to noise in the workplace. While drowning out sounds with music may help, we tend to play the wrong kind of music in the attempt to block out our peers. I am not one to judge what kind of music you or your employees should listen to, but whether it is Pavarotti or P. Diddy, it is a known fact that music with lyrics reduces productivity even further.

While drowning out sounds with music may help us focus, we tend to play the wrong kind of music.

Too Many Voices in Your Head

Treasure touches upon this in one of his highly recommendable TED talks[21], stating that we can only follow 1.6 conversations at the same time. When you are typing, it adds up to one conversation in your head and 0.6 of the song lyrics in your earbuds. Or, as is more often the case, the other way around. So, essentially, if you are writing and listening to music at the same time, you only hear 0.6 of your own voice. That does not sound very productive, does it?

Yet open offices are not going away, even though they've been shown to reduce productivity by 66%[22] compared to a silent environment. Listening to music through earbuds simply places a layer of noise over an already noisy environment, and you cannot get rid of your carrot-crunching, next-desk neighbor because she is also your greatest resource in accounting.

What's the solution? First, if you have a problem with noise in your office, you need to speak up. Noise is bad for your health, sanity and productivity. Chances are, if the noise is bothering you, you are probably not alone. Allow me to suggest a few changes to the environment, technology and behavior in the office which, with varying degrees of difficulty and expense, may decrease noise and thus improve the working environment.

Here are five ways to achieve silence and success:

Stash the Stuff.
Ideally, the copier, fridge and coffee machine should get their own rooms. Noisy machinery accounts for much of the noise in the modern office. A water cooler or coffee machine encourage conversation. That means everyone nearby gets to overhear many conversations each day, and because we can only cope with 1.6 conversations at a time, that is a lot of disturbing noise influencing productivity. Move machines and venues for noisy, social gatherings away from the open plan.

Block it Out.
What you see is what you get interrupted by. Offering natural breaks in your field of vision, using bookshelves or room dividers, for example, can block out a bit of the noise, but more importantly, also block some of the visual noise: people constantly moving back and forth. This is highly effective, as you are suddenly awarded a hint of seclusion, which makes a huge difference to your productivity by limiting the schizophonia caused by the visual input your brain receives.

Cancel the Noise.
As an alternative to music, noise-canceling headphones offer a filter for sound. While passive noise cancellation shuts out noise by fitting tightly to your ears, active noise cancellation offers sound waves of their own that cancel out the sounds of the surroundings, essentially offering complete silence. Of the various different kinds of headphones, some allow you to accept calls and listen to music, while others are equipped with a busy light that informs your neighbors of your need for solitude.

Quiet the Colleagues.
As mentioned earlier, if the noise bothers you, it probably bothers your colleagues as well. So, perhaps you can come to an agreement: no talking in

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the office after lunch, desk meetings can be held in another room, lengthy telephone conversations can be taken off the office floor, for example. These measures can increase your productivity and provide everyone with the feeling that their need to work is being respected.

 # Get Away.
If all else fails, have a place to escape to: your home, the coffee shop or the library perhaps. Please note, however, that this is not a solution that will stand the test of time. If it is, you need to implement one or more of the above, or you may end up putting your health at risk.

I am going to put up my own fight against schizophonia by changing my lyrics-filled music to the natural sounds that Treasure recommends, just to see if the sounds of waves or birds will enhance my own productivity.

That's It…I'm Finished – With Meetings, That Is

Meetings are the corporate get-togethers we all love to hate. For every productive one, it seems there's at least one or more that unnecessarily waste our valuable time. Here's how you can reduce the number of meetings you need to attend.

Have you ever wondered how much time we spend in meetings?

I just ran across some numbers that astonished me – and will likely surprise you as well.

Bain & Company, a respected management consulting firm, found that 15% of an organization's collective time is spent

Approximately 15% of a company's time is spent in meetings.

in meetings, a number that has steadily increased since 2008[23]. Senior executives spend more than 40% of their time – two full days a week – in meetings with three or more coworkers. And many meetings, Bain found, are often scheduled "just because."

We're Wasting Too Much Time and Money

All the meetings we attend come at a staggering cost. Companies in the U.S. alone waste more than $37 billion in salary costs related to unnecessary meetings, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics[24].

So here is some unsolicited advice for anyone who wants to invite me (or anyone else, for that matter) to a business meeting:

Think Hard Before Punching the Invite Button.
Outlook makes it easy – maybe too easy – to send a meeting notice. Before you organize a meeting, ask yourself: Does this absolutely require a meeting? You may find that you can accomplish the goal by making a few phone calls or sending an IM or two.

>

Save "the More the Merrier" for Parties, Not Meetings.

If you do need to organize a meeting, ask: Which people absolutely need to attend? Invite only those whose presence is vital to resolving the issue at hand.

Tell Me Why I Need to Attend.

In your meeting invitation, clearly explain why you're calling the meeting, why attendees' presence is needed and what you expect to accomplish. Invite attendees to opt out if they don't feel they can contribute in a meaningful way.

Sweat the Details.

Meetings don't run themselves. Conducting a good one means getting the details right: Have a clear meeting agenda. If reading is required, send the materials upfront. Keep the meeting focused and start and end on time. And if participants aren't paying full attention, demand that they do so.

My time is too valuable to waste on unnecessary, unproductive business meetings – and so is yours. I've seen the light. If I receive a meeting request that doesn't meet the four criteria above, I'll politely decline to attend. I invite you to do the same.

The Only Two Meetings a Year You Need to Attend

Meetings are the killer of modern work life. Fortunately there is a better way. We should only meet twice a year and really get to the bottom of things – and then let the specialists take care of the rest.

Several years ago, I visited a Danish company that wanted to eliminate the insane amount of time it wasted on meetings – a pain that many other organizations share. The company had already created some strong points of view around better time management and prominently displayed advice through posters on meeting room walls. These were all standard best practices: start on time, prepare an agenda and follow it, stop discussions when they are not leading somewhere, make sure you agree on your conclusions, etc.

Unfortunately, good advice isn't always followed, and the campaign didn't work. So the company decided to take a completely different approach. Executive management dropped half its meetings. This empowered senior management to make more decisions rather than push them upstream. However, responsibility for evaluating and making more business decisions equates to additional work time. With the need to spend more time on work, senior managers found themselves needing to spend less time in meetings as well. Over time, other employees found themselves with the added responsibility of making business decisions, so that senior and executive management were provided with solutions rather than additional problems.

This domino effect carried on all the way through to the lower levels of the organization. Decisions were still made, only more efficiently and more locally. People felt more owner-ship of business decisions and took greater care to take more informed action, even at lower levels in the organization.

With fewer meetings, productivity began to rise.

Meetings Are a Waste of Time.
In a survey reported in *IndustryWeek,* 2,000 managers reported that at least 30% of time spent in meetings was a waste of time[25]. Think about the time you spend during meetings. How much of that time is spent setting up, making introductions, dealing with technical issues or waiting for information that is not yet ready? This time could instead be used making actual decisions that affect and drive business.

>

Meetings Are Bad for Information Sharing.
Status update meetings don't actually help get work done. A Clarizen/Harris Interactive survey found that 67% of participants reported spending up to four hours per week merely getting ready for a status update meeting – not including the time spent to have something on which to actually provide an update[26].

Meetings May Lead to Bad Decisions.
Our brains only have a limited amount of cognitive – or "executive" – resources. Once these resources get depleted, the likelihood of making poor decisions or choices increases. If some meeting attendees are not mentally peaking, the larger group is at a disadvantage. Even worse, if meetings last too long, the entire group runs the risk of depleted resources, leading to greater likelihood of poor decision-making. This means that three- or four-hour project meetings are inherently counterproductive.

Use Meetings to Get to the Bottom of Things

So should we just quit meetings altogether? No. But we should use them for something more productive than the way we use them today. Take advantage of technology to share status updates or make decisions. Innovation doesn't require an assembly.

Instead, use meetings for in-depth discussions that go beyond simple planning. Face-to-face meetings encourage maximum bandwidth between people: we see facial expressions, we get inspired and we form stronger bonds.

Only in meetings can we manage to get into real dialogue and embrace differences of opinions on the core part of our businesses that really matter. Here we must find common ground on the important things: Where are we going? What are the main obstacles? Do we have the bonds that make us trust each other to help all of us get there?

> *We need to use meetings for something more productive than the way we use them today.*

But we only need these kinds of meeting a few times a year. Once the big picture and the strong bonds between the members of the group are in place, the rest should be left to smaller teams and specialists. If we start in alignment on purposes and goals, people should be entrusted and empowered to make the right decisions for the entire team. We can innovate and inform each other using online tools and technology, which encourages a modern workplace and makes business more effective and productive.

This is exactly what is now happening at the company I visited several years ago. We should all do the same!

4

Communication and Technology

Despite countless glittering technological advancements over the past three decades, our primary method of sharing information remains one mired in the past: email. Yet in an era that demands faster, more robust and precise collaboration, email is a poor collaboration tool. Explore new methods and better technologies for finding, retrieving and sharing the information that is so vital to achieving greater levels of productivity.

RIP: the Email (1971-2017)

Emails are no longer the best way of sharing information or communicating with peers. It's time to move to the next level and let emails die in peace and loving memory.

Even though some internal networks were operational in the early 1960s, it's generally acknowledged that the first email was sent by Ray Tomlinson to himself in 1971[27]. After a slow start, I guess it is reasonable to say that the email has become one of the most successful technological breakthroughs since that time. According to technology market research firm the Radicati Group, we will send some 132 billion business emails every day by the end of 2017[28].

Given its long heritage and current tremendous success, email seems here to stay. But if it were up to me, the age of the email would be over. It's time to let the old workhorse retire and look to new and more productive communication platforms instead. It's time to put the email to rest.

> *The challenge with email is that it's reasonably good for sharing information, but it's an incredibly poor collaboration tool.*

The challenge with email is that it's reasonably good for sharing information, but it's an incredibly poor collaboration tool. It is great for confirming and documenting decisions, but it is less ideal if you have not yet reached a conclusion to the matter. In that case, emailing back and forth can be time consuming and fruitless compared to engaging in an actual conversation. Unfortunately, billions of people around the world see it the other way around. We use email to collaborate. And with the invention of the cloud, where we all have access to our shared files 24/7, we have found smarter ways of problem-solving and sharing information.

Misunderstandings, Unnecessary Discussion and Wasted Time

This unfortunate mixup is stealing our time and resulting in unnecessary frustration. According to McKinsey, an average worker spends an appalling 2.6 hours a day – or 13 hours a week[29] – reading and answering emails. And lots of research shows how emails are more often misunderstood or misinterpreted than leading to clarity and progress.

At the same time, emails have liberated most of us from the burden of thinking for ourselves. We don't have to talk to anyone anymore. You just send out an email, and your informative work is done. On the receiving end, you don't have to take responsibility for keeping yourself informed either. With a gazillion emails in your inbox, no one can really expect you to read them all, can they?

A brave bunch of frontrunners have already figured out that this is the road to disaster. These pioneers are already testing life after the email for the rest of us.

Some have started off with the most destructive element of the email: the copied email string. You know, where anyone, with a swift click on one key, can include most of the company in an email string about a subject that should have been dealt with in a meaningful conversation between two people at the very beginning. Broadcasting of emails is a major time killer. That's why Peter Hughes, director of collaboration at Cisco, is said to have banned the string-mail practice altogether, even issuing fines to the perpetrators[30].

Other companies go after the traditional emails. French IT company Atos SE plans to ban emails altogether[31]. However, given the dependency on emails, the company has issued an extended timeline where emails can still be sent but should be brought down to a bare minimum. The company has even appointed a set of ambassadors – called Zero Heroes – to help their colleagues stop the practice. Others have decided to quit emails one week a month or shut down the email servers at specific periods of time every day.

What's the Alternative?
Well, there are two, really. For communication purposes we need the old real-time conversations – but in a more suitable digital format. Video messaging and meetings are much better at conveying ideas, thoughts and emotions. And if you simply must broadcast your thoughts, use Twitter or Shortmail, which limit your rants to a tolerable 140 or 500 characters, depending on which you choose.

For information sharing, all documents belong in the cloud, and for day-to-day chatting, the format must be social and searchable. According to McKinsey & Company, using social media technologies, such as wikis and workplace collaboration tools such as Yammer, echo.it or Chatter instead of email could improve productivity by up to 30%. When you have a searchable repository of social messages, people wouldn't have to send emails asking questions that have already been answered.

The technology is there and the initial results from the pioneers are encouraging. So, just like the workhorses of the past got a well-deserved rest when motorized vehicles became widespread during the early 20th century, so also should email retire in honor in favor of more efficient technologies. The email is dead. May it rest in peace!

The 28-Hour Hamster Wheel

Knowledge workers spend 28 hours a week answering emails or looking for information. But research shows that there are better and faster ways of generating your business results. It's time to dismantle the hamster wheel, stop hiding behind our screens and start having meaningful conversations instead.

I guess that the lyrics of traditional boy/girl break-up love songs seldom have much to offer in solving today's management challenges. But just the other day, Cliff Richard's old hit "We Don't Talk Anymore" was playing on my car stereo, and it got me thinking.

My company, like most others, spends a great deal of time on emails. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the average knowledge worker spends a whopping 28 hours a week emailing, requesting and sending information back and forth[32]. I receive more than 200 emails a day and often have to spend my evenings answering them all, just so I can get my other work done when I'm back in the office.

Twenty-eight solid hours! That only leaves about 12 hours for actual work that week. And I can't help but think that so much time spent on emails is not time well spent.

They Don't Get It

Don't get me wrong. Technology such as email is great for connecting people. It's fast, convenient and can be done almost anytime. But the question is, is it perhaps a little too convenient? Has emailing replaced something more important in our (business) life?

> *Emails are not for opening conversations. They're for confirming decisions, putting final touches on details or storing information for later use.*

Recent research seems to indicate exactly that. In fact, emails are not opening conversations, but ending them. Emails are for confirming decisions, putting final touches on details or storing information for later use. But emails are not very well suited for getting to a decision or creating new ideas. That requires a level of spontaneity and emotional connection that can never be achieved in emails.

Recent studies from New York University's Stern School of

Business show that as few as half of recipients get the tone or intent of an email. And most people "vastly overestimate" their ability to relay and comprehend messages accurately. And, even more interestingly, a Syracuse University study shows that misinterpretation is at its highest when the email comes from a boss.

In short: you may write it. But they don't get it.

And that's where Cliff Richard's song comes in. Conversations are the lifeblood of any relationship. When you stop talking (and start emailing…) your relationships start dying – in your personal as well as in your professional life. Slowly, but surely.

The Power of Conversation
Emotion and innovation is the power of a face-to face conversation. Here, completely new elements pop up in the conversation. And from people's facial expressions, you instinctively know if your coworkers understand what you're saying and if they agree and if your "brilliant" new idea is actually good or bad.

True working knowledge contains values, personal experience, expert insight and emotion. And you can't convey that in an email. It's in the talks in the cafeteria and hallway, the bull sessions around the watercooler, the phone visits and the shoptalk over coffee, that knowledge crucial for your business is created and shared.

Twenty-eight hours of emailing and searching is too much. So let's dismantle the hamster wheel, stop hiding behind our screens and start having meaningful conversations instead. Personally, the next time I'm contemplating writing someone an email, I will make good use of the old kindergarten traffic school warning: Stop and think! I will consider whether an email is really the best tool of communication for this particular situation or if I am better off starting a real conversation instead.

Statistically, it will solve the problem faster. The result will be far better. Everyone will be tuned into the same solution. And it may even leave me a little extra time for humming along to old '70s hits on my car stereo as well.

Why You Should Call Someone – NOW!

Has chat and email numbed our person-to-person conversational skills to the extent that we never talk anymore? We stand to gain significantly from the "meaningful conversation." That is, communicating the old-fashioned way: by phone.

I can't deny it: I write A LOT of emails. But I've recently noticed an interesting trend, especially among younger employees. In two-out-of-three cases when they have a question, they would rather start an online chat than pick up the phone and simply call someone.

This is my own observation, but I spoke to a friend, Howard, about it a couple of weeks ago. Howard is CEO of a major public relations outfit, a fast-paced industry that relies on building relationships and pitching clients' stories to major news outlets. In recent years, he's witnessed the same trend. It's forced him to spend lots of time implementing policies for effective voice and face-to-face conversations in a business where a lack of impactful conversations on your part only benefits the competition.

Granted, chat and emails are easy and quick. But why don't we feel inclined to speak to one another? In a symbiotic relationship, like the one Howard has with the media, you'd think that both sides would welcome the personal interaction. If anything, it should make the media mill spin faster.

But no matter how easy it might be to just chat or send an email, it's bound to distance us from one another, and distance is not good for business – not Howard's, not yours and certainly not mine.

> *You put your most important business relationships at risk if you fail to interact, whether by voice or face-to-face.*

We Need to Talk!

I venture that you put your most important business relationships at risk if you fail to interact, whether by voice or face-to-face, because it is very easy to delete emails or ignore a chat – either intentionally or by mistake. But when we talk to one another, we create an emotional bond that will only be strengthened the more you do it – a bond that makes a difference for several reasons:

It is immensely gratifying in the working environment to have great customer and partner relationships.

Written communication makes it easier for recipients to immediately turn down any requests, compared to over the phone or in a personal meeting with someone with whom they have a business relationship.

Chat and email provide you with none of the peripheral knowledge and subsequent opportunities you'll receive from regularly talking with clients and partners. When you listen, you often learn a great deal: What are they working on now? What are the main difficulties? Which things could you possibly help with? How would you pick that up in a chat? Reading between the lines of a written message can only get you so far!

Conflicts and disagreements are also more easily and immediately resolved if you nip them in the bud. Such resolutions and solutions are easier on the phone, because intent is better conveyed in person than by chat. Talking simply saves time and a considerable amount of unproductive writing back and forth.

Pick Up the Phone
I think that there are several reasons for this shrinking use of personal interaction, but the pace of the modern business world is one of them, plus the fact that heavy use of chat and email has made us accustomed to distanced connectivity.

I will call Howard right now to get his tips on how we can do it better, and the next time you make a pitch or follow up with a client, you should call someone, too – just like we did back in the day. I guess you can call it going back to the future.

Shifting Workplace Trends Highlight the Microsoft and LinkedIn Marriage

The deal between Microsoft and LinkedIn has as much to do with keeping up with changing workplace trends as it does with the stated objective of empowering productivity.

Much has been said and written about the recent Microsoft and LinkedIn deal. According to the companies, this is the perfect marriage of two organizations that share a common objective of connecting and empowering the world's professionals to be more productive.

When I listened to their joint statement to investors, the logic seemed to make sense. Which it should, given the $26.2 billion pricetag.

Of course, and as always in high-profile tie-ups, there are concerns. Was the price too high? And what about the massive amount of data that's now concentrated in the hands of a very big company? Those and others are legitimate questions, but I'll leave them to the financial markets, regulators and privacy advocates.

The combination addresses a pair of powerful workplace trends that are affecting the way we organize work today.

From my perspective, this combination addresses a pair of powerful workplace trends that are affecting the way we organize work to maximize productivity, overcome obstacles and accommodate new workers.

Connect with the "Master Minds"

In a world of rapid globalization, increased competition and greater regulation, our day-to-day work is getting ever more complex. We need people with varying skills and greater competencies to tackle these tasks quickly, creatively and effectively.

Yet we often tend to confront business problems by bringing in people we know and are comfortable with. Sociologists refer to these contacts as having "strong social ties," while one of my colleagues refers to them as "the usual suspects." Opposite them are

professionals with "weak social ties" – people we don't know who have a diverse array of opinions, personalities and skills. Some refer to them as the "master minds."

There's nothing inherently wrong with inviting familiar colleagues to join in on the problem solving. After all, they have some expertise in the matter at hand. But do they represent the best resources available? Not usually; those resources are often found in our weak ties.

That's where the real potential of the merger lies. If Microsoft can tie its productivity tools to the vast resources available in the LinkedIn database and enable us to more readily identify those weak ties, we as organizations can better connect with the differing perspectives and critical expertise we increasingly need for success. Let me put it another way. LinkedIn's 430 million users make up a massive virtual Rolodex. By combining it with Microsoft's array of collaboration tools, we suddenly have a lot of outstanding resources right at our fingertips.

Collaborating With the Extended Workforce
The second issue this merger addresses is the rapidly changing face of our workplaces. A recent survey of 200 large organization found that temporary workers represent, on average, 22% of their workforces – and growing. Software maker Intuit says that it expects more than 40% of the American workforce to be freelancers by 2020[32]. That's more than 60 million people.

If these trends continue, most of the people working for our companies in the future won't be employees at all. They'll be self-employed or work for us only temporarily before moving on to another "gig." The HR prophets call these workers "the extended workforce." They're part of an ever-expanding network of freelancers, consultants, outsourcing partners and vendors that don't work from a single location, but rather from anywhere. This trend is picking up speed as more millennials shun traditional office jobs in favor of these nontraditional ad-hoc ones.

This merger should make it far easier for us to identify, connect and collaborate with these workers to create the virtual teams that will define the workplaces of our future. In one session alone, we can search LinkedIn for the people with the skills we need, hold a quick Skype for Business video interview with each, pull the team members together and have all the tools we need for collaborating – all from a single, integrated platform.

Success in the business environment of tomorrow will be marked by an increased need to connect and collaborate. From that standpoint alone, the combination of Microsoft and LinkedIn makes complete sense. Will it work in practice? We'll soon see.

Start Collaborating and Get Twice the ROI on Your UC

Companies that invest in unified communications solutions report tremendous returns on investment for their efforts. In fact, you can double that investment if only you take full advantage of the technology. All you have to do is start collaborating instead of just communicating.

Deploying unified communications is almost like playing the lottery – except that everybody wins every time. At least that's what most companies making UC software told us when the UC market was swamped with the first wave of fancy technology five to 10 years ago.

Unified communications is basically the tool (the little green icon at the bottom of your screen) that brings audio and video conferencing, messaging and presence together into one single integrated application. Among other things, this comes in handy when employees are working somewhere other than their office desk, which an increasing number of them do nowadays. They are in meetings, at home, traveling, waiting in meeting rooms, airports, hotels and the like. Mobile phones, Wi-Fi, cloud services, social networks and connected devices enable them to work from anywhere. When they are equipped with a UC solution, they can easily bridge that gap between devices and become more productive.

UC technology keeps its promise of better and cheaper collaboration and communication, and the stats are impressive. A Cisco study of one recent implementation shows a return on investment of 103% over a three-year period and a payback period of just one year[34]. According to Aberdeen Research, 79% of all companies see a return on their UC investment within the first 12 months[35]. My own company, Jabra, also demonstrates valuable results. For example, our clients with UC-optimized headsets reduce overall call handling time by 33%. If you have a call center with 1,000 employees making an average of US $20 per hour, UC can save you a nifty $264,000 a week.

Collaboration Is the Key to Ultimate Success
However, there is an important "but." Normally "buts" are bad, but this one constitutes a wonderful opportunity. Therefore, follow me on a quick trip down memory lane because somewhere down the line we lost an additional "C" that used to go along with unified communications' "UC&C." It's in that last "C" that we find the really big bucks.

The missing "C" stands for collaboration. While unified communications allows us to communicate seamlessly across multiple devices, it's still just a channel to get a hold of

GET SH#!T DONE

colleagues or information about them. That's great if you want something done yourself. But if you could use these wonderful tools to collaborate and create and invent new things together, you'd multiply your investment.

Surprisingly, a lot of the technology solutions that companies invest in are already capable of making employees work in collaborative – and very productive and innovative – virtual teams. But for some strange reason, many companies do not take full advantage of the solutions.

Skype for Business, a popular instant messaging system, enables you to see a team member's presence, conduct audio calls, video conference calls and present information to all attendees. But these features are rarely used. I have even heard reports of some companies limiting the use of the messaging feature because they felt it was not used for work but as a personal means of communication only.

It's time to find and activate the missing "C" in "UC&C." In the future, it's not about sharing documents and information one-on-one, it's about making your investment work and setting collaboration free. You wouldn't make people's private Facebook accounts the primary company communication platform either – knowing that employees are banned from attending via their company owned devices!

> *In the future, it's not about sharing documents and information one-on-one, it's about making your investment work and setting collaboration free.*

Doubling Your ROI with UC

In your new UC&C setup, information will be shared in groups, just like in a big brainstorming session, where ideas, news and information are spread virally like on Instagram, Facebook or LinkedIn, but this time it happens within your own company. The more people who interact, the better the outcome.

There are benefits for everyone. In a report by the international analysis consultancy Frost & Sullivan, a company that has UC&C installed and working, its engineers were able to improve product development and reduced costs associated with innovation. Sales and marketing professionals saw improvements across sales performance, customer retention and their ability to respond to competitive threats. Investor relations and public

relations staff reported that collaboration helped them increase shareholder value and shape corporate reputations and the human resources teams found collaboration tools useful in recruitment, retention and training activities.

This is where the big benefits are waiting for companies who dare to go for the high (right) C of UC&C. According to Frost & Sullivan it'll be worth your while. It calculated that organizations going from "basic collaborators" to "advanced collaborators" double the effect of their investments[36].

All it takes is using the technology you already have to facilitate a group sharing culture, where all employees are part of a continuous, digital discussion about almost anything. That way you don't just win the lottery. You win it twice.

CEOs, Forget "Technology" and Start Talking "People"

The top 1,500 CEOs of the world have named technology as the top factor impacting their businesses. I believe that people shaping the technology – and the way they behave – are much more interesting.

It was all over the news – and with good reason. For the first time ever, the 1,500 top dogs in IBM's annual CEO survey chose "technology" as the most important external factor that will impact organizations and businesses in the coming years[37].

As far back as anyone can remember, the two top spots on the official CEO horror list have always been "market factors" and "people skills," the classical duo straight out of the Harvard Business School curriculum. Suddenly, after years of financial crisis, globalization, major changes in the workforce and plummeting revenues, the majority of the CEOs name "technology" as the top driver of their business decisions in the coming years.

It's easy to understand why. New advances in biotechnology, nanotechnology and IT have revolutionized, and will continue to revolutionize, the way that we work, live and play. The new networked social economy with its smart mobile devices, wearable gadgets, Big Data and new democratized communications platforms have revolutionized products, operations and business models within less than a decade.

Back to the Future

So there you have it: the top echelons of the business society are back on track, looking the future straight in the eye and already planning how to cope with – and profit from – this new and challenging über-technologized world. Still, I have this strange feeling inside. I may be committing the sin of hubris, but I am not convinced that technology is the real challenge. Instead, it's what technology does to people!

No matter the grandeur of our techno- logical advances, new technology can never be better than the people who use

> *No matter the grandeur of our technological advances, new technology can never be better than the people who use it.*

it. It's not until they adapt to the technology and behave as intended that we have actual progress. Technology is about human behavior – not nuts, bolts, bits or bytes.

We've seen major technological advances many times before. Just think of the IT bubble in the late '90s. The technology companies all went bankrupt and most of the inventions became redundant and disappeared. They're long gone, but the mindset lived on, and business was never the same again. I believe the same thing is happening. Facebook may be worth billions on the stock exchange, but my kids are already looking for other ways of expressing themselves.

Technology is About Behavior
My point is this: technology is just…technology. And what we are seeing now is not a technological advancement; it's the birth of an entirely new generation of people with exceptional skills of adaptation, multitasking talent and a completely new and open way of engaging with people, companies and brands. It's not the technology that should concern CEOs; it's the new breed of homo sapiens called the Generation M (for Millennials or Mobile), that should be on the top of IBM's CEO focus list.

The challenge is twofold. First, the CEO must bridge the ever-widening gap between the adaptation skills of Generation M and the rest of the workforce, while they all wait for us old-timers to retire and leave the world (and, I guess, also the space) to the fittest.

After that, the smartest CEOs should redesign their work streams, create new workspaces (not places) and define the new social norms that will fit with the super workers of Generation M. The companies that adapt to the Generation M mindset first will be the ones to rule their industries and beat all of the competition.

A piece of advice from me to the CEOs of the world: free, of course, in the spirit of the young, ultra-sharing Generation M'ers. And a plea to the young people who will revolutionize the world (and pay for my pension): Please take me along for the ride. I know I'm only in adaptability mode 2.0, but I would really like to be part of the spectacle. It's going to be grand!

5

People and Organizations

The face of the workplace is evolving with breathtaking speed, driven by changes in demographics, technology and ways of working. Yet too many workers report being unhappy, disengaged and checked out of their jobs. Our organizations pay a high price for this level of dissatisfaction. As managers it's our challenge to reverse this trend – not with additional technology, but through such strategies as providing additional employee autonomy, focusing on happiness and the freedom to work remotely.

Two-Thirds of Employees
Just Don't Care!

An astonishing seven out of 10 employees are disengaged and bored with their jobs. In addition to damaging company morale, productivity and the bottom line, this dissatisfaction takes a staggering toll on innovation and our global economic well-being. Let this be a wakeup call for leaders everywhere to take action.

I have bad news for corporate leaders everywhere: Most of your workers just don't care.

They don't care about their jobs. About your organization. Or your customers.

That's the depressing conclusion I've come to after reviewing a Gallup workplace survey of U.S. companies and quoted extensively in *Forbes*[38]. The study found that an astounding 70% of U.S. workers are disengaged from their jobs.

You read it right. Seventy percent!

That means that seven out of 10 workers are going through the motions, putting in their time and then leaving. They're unhappy in their work, and invest neither energy nor passion into it. Some are so disengaged that they even work to undermine your organization. You know who they are. The manager who "checked out" years ago. The assistant who responds "it's not my job" when asked to fill in for a coworker. The employee who's more interested in checking emails and Facebook than participating in the staff meeting.

On the other hand, just three out of 10 are engaged – the ones who feel inspired, work with passion and feel a profound connection to the organization. You know them, too. The accountant who double- and then triple-checks everything before sending the quarterly report to the printer. The sales rep who calls on a prospective customer outside her sales territory despite knowing she won't earn a commission on the sale.

The High Price of Disengagement
This overwhelming level of worker discontent comes with a steep price tag. According to the article, the most disengaged workers cost U.S. companies between $450 billion to $550 billion a year in lost productivity.

Since the U.S. accounts for roughly 20% of the world's economy, a little math indicates that global revenue lost to highly disengaged workers is truly astounding – more than $2 trillion.

Financials aside, if seven out of every 10 of your employees simply don't care, imagine the negative influence they exert on the three who do. Or the brand-tarnishing impact they have on your customers. Or the additional expenses they rack up with sick days, on-the-job accidents or just poor quality work.

Globally, consider what we're missing out on because of employee disengagement. Imagine the innovations and scientific breakthroughs that don't occur because of worker complacency. The new and potentially time- and money-saving technologies that never get to the drawing board. Or never make it to market for that matter.

Now imagine how profitable our organizations would be if we could cut that 70% rate of disengagement merely in half, to 35%. Global productivity would zoom. Morale and customer satisfaction would improve dramatically. Brand awareness would soar.

> *As managers, it's our responsibility to provide a work environment that drives worker engagement.*

The Fix Begins With Us

How do we address this issue of worker disengagement? Let's begin by recognizing disengagement for what it is: A failure of management. As an eternal optimist, I believe that people truly want to work, be engaged and create value for their organizations. As managers, it's our responsibility to provide a work environment that drives employee engagement. We need to sharpen our leadership skills and put the right people in leadership roles. We need to create corporate cultures that make employees feel valued, empowered and connected. We need to organize work so that it's inspiring, challenging and meaningful.

We need to start now.

I invite you to join me in exploring this issue further. Together, we can make a difference by winning the hearts and minds of our workers.

Because seven out of 10 disengaged workers are seven too many.

The Rise of the Chief Happiness Officer

Companies the world over are desperately fighting declining productivity. Until now, cost-cutting, managerial control and new systems have been the solution. But I believe there's a better way. It starts with hiring a new person whose only job is to build employee motivation. I give you: the Chief Happiness Officer.

I regularly attend networking meetings for senior executives. Here we discuss the topics and challenges facing our companies and borrow ideas from each other. Over the past few years one topic has predominated: how do you increase productivity in your company? Unfortunately, few ideas have come up worth borrowing.

Several surveys have revealed that productivity is a major concern across companies all over the world. According to McKinsey & Company, 58% of the world's companies are proactively addressing productivity issues[39]. And according to business school INSEAD, nine out of 10 companies have declared that boosting productivity will be their top priority in the next three to five years.

For many companies it's a matter of life and death. Productivity equals competitiveness. And if you are not competitive, you are not in business.

The Productivity Paradox

It seems quite simple. After all, we have plenty of approaches to make people work both harder and smarter (as the highly paid consultants like to say). The executive toolbox is filled with lean management, Six Sigma, sourcing to low-cost countries and endless amounts of technology that force the work pace up and control all aspects of the company in a never-ending search for business excellence.

But, strangely enough, productivity plummets in companies that are using all the tools from the executive toolbox. Researchers call it "the

Modern-day business excellence tools are basically big sticks aimed at pushing employees forward. But no one likes being pushed around.

productivity paradox," which I guess is a scientific way of saying: "We can't explain what is happening."

Here's my take on it: offer a carrot, not a stick. Modern-day business excellence tools are basically big sticks aimed at prodding employees forward. However, no one – regardless of their level in the organization – likes being pushed around. It kills motivation. And once motivation is down, your business is in a downward spiral. No paradox; just plain old dissatisfaction. This challenge centers around people, and therefore must be solved by people.

The Chief Happiness Solution
Enter the Chief Happiness Officer. I am convinced that in time all major companies will have a member of the executive board whose only focus will be raising productivity through employee motivation. In the old-school companies, he or she would be called the Chief Productivity Officer. In less formal/new-school companies, he or she will be known as the Chief Happiness Officer.

The CHO will base his or her work on two very simple psychological aspects: motivation and engagement. If you are happy, you are more motivated, and if you invent your own solution to a problem, you become engaged and are more likely to implement it. That's the reason why happy people don't get divorced. And that's why overweight people are three times more likely to actually stick to a diet if they have created the diet in cooperation with their dietician. The same goes for employees.

Companies need to create productivity solutions with their employees, not impose solutions on them. If we get working involved in making the productivity solutions they'll be implementing, we'll help them rediscover their work satisfaction and boost their work motivation at the same time.

In the future, the Chief Happiness Officer will be responsible for improving managerial-employee dialog. She will create new, efficient business processes in cooperation with the employees. He will keep assuring the managers that trust is better than control. He or she will continuously calm down the finance folks and the trade unions and reassure them that employees are actually capable of making their own decisions and that everything will be OK. And he or she will make people love – and not loathe – every piece of technology and every new system we implement to improve productivity.

I know this may seem far-fetched. But trust me, it will happen. Because positive thinking has, since the beginning of time, always outperformed negative thinking. And motivated employees will always be more productive than employees who are only at work to bring home the bacon.

Start Being Happy – It Will Double Your Productivity

I have had a look at some of the work done by the psychologist Shawn Achor. He suggests that by making a few changes and adding a regime of gratefulness, you can be both happy and double your output. Here are a few easy steps to change your perception of reality and achieve the much-craved happiness at work.

My new hero is the psychologist Shawn Achor. I caught his TED[40] talk about happiness in the workplace, which really struck a nerve. When you have some spare time, I recommend that you spend it watching his 10-minute explanation of how we change the lens of reality and achieve greater happiness and productivity at work. One of his points I found interesting was that happiness is an inside-out or outside-in process and how you get the process of being happy started.

Achor's research suggests that only 10% of external factors have an influence on happiness. The remaining 90% is based on how you view the world – and this is where the good news starts! Because according to research, changing language and behavior by consistently focusing on the positive instead of the negative can change the world and not only make you happier but also increase productivity by a staggering percentage. For example, Achor mentions that happy salespeople sell 37% more than average.

> *Consistently focusing on the positive instead of the negative not only can make you happier but also increase your productivity.*

So, how do we get there? First, according to Achor, we have the process of achieving success and happiness all wrong, which I, in retrospect, can see is probably correct. Usually, we say that good productivity leads to success which leads to happiness. However, in reality, once you achieve your goals, your perception of success has changed, and you need to pursue even greater exploits to get the same result. In effect, you have moved the goalposts of what it takes for you to reach a state of happiness. Instead, Achor recommends that you reverse the process and start with focusing on creating a happy baseline, and the success and increased productivity will ensue.

How to Be Happy

In my time as a leader of people, I have noticed three components that my staff seems to agree makes them happy. The first one is choice: the freedom to plan and execute their work, or at least have a significant influence on the way their day is scheduled. The second one is skills: working with skilled professionals, being their peers or superiors, developing skills that matter to the organization and creating a place and a function within the professional ecosystem. The third is perhaps the most important, and the one we all strive to serve and that is purpose: serving a higher cause, spending time changing the world, greatly or just a bit.

A recent survey in *Forbes*[41] about which U.S. professions were the happiest echoes some of my observations. I was struck that compensation in terms of financial rewards matters very little in the greater scheme of things. The top 10 happiest professions do not even mention compensation, but instead highlight collaboration, autonomy and mastery as the greatest sources of happiness in their profession.

Our Happiness Checklist:

Be Grateful – Often.
Achor's research suggests that starting the day with a positive, praising email to a coworker or business partner resets our minds and starts our day on a positive spin. This also inadvertently creates a ripple effect as the recipient of the email also starts the day on a positive note. He also recommends a diet of writing down three new things that you are grateful for every day for 21 days. This rewires the brain to focus on the positive.

Pay Attention to Rhetoric.
Then there is the wording: positive wording goes a long way. I'm not talking about sugarcoating, but rather turning a regular evaluation and feedback session into feedback that aims for growth for the individual and for the organization, for example. Take some time before each meeting to prepare for something positive to contribute to the conversation, instead of solely focusing on solving problems, which is usually what meetings are about. This is hard, and I think it's something I'll need to work hard on in the future.

Make Room for Collaboration and Selfishness.
Collaboration with skilled peers and superiors makes most of us happy, as the Forbes survey attests, and this is an area in which we should put a lot of our

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efforts. Creating room for a bit of selfishness is not shameful either: personal drive and individual goals should also be respected. If a top performer needs to develop in a beneficial direction, he or she may even pull the rest of the organization to new highs in terms of performance and productivity.

I believe that implementing happiness into the organization is a laudable goal. Happy people not only make for better company, they're also more productive, energetic and creative, which is something we all need, every day. In fact, I think I'll start by writing a nice email to a colleague right now.

Forget the Eight-Hour Workday. Work/Life Integration is Here to Stay

The days of putting in a 9-to-5 at the office and then heading home and unplugging are over. Work/life balance has been replaced by work/life integration. Here's how to combine job and family time for less stress and more success.

I shouldn't have been surprised at what I was seeing, but I was.

While meeting with my assistant, Tina, to review my work schedule for the first months of the upcoming new year, we couldn't help but notice how many meetings were outside what we used to consider "normal" working hours.

The schedule was filled with early morning teleconferences, evening dinner meetings and more than a few Saturday evening flights overseas.

At one point I even quipped, "Do I have *any* meetings during the workday?" As we laughed, I was struck by how quickly times have changed: Our jobs are no longer the typical 9-to-5 ones that our parents or grandparents worked.

Absent, too, is the notion of "work/life balance" popular a decade or so ago, where walls existed between work life and personal life.

> *It's no longer about when, where or how many hours you work. It's about getting your work done, regardless of time and place.*

A confluence of factors has made these concepts relics of the past. Business is more competitive, faster-paced and more global, requiring 24/7 availability. Technology makes us more accessible and enables us to work from anywhere. And the millennial generation that is invigorating our workforces is less bound by "traditional" ways of business.

Together, these forces have obliterated the wall that separated work time from family time. Now, the workday never really ends for most of us. We routinely review reports and return texts and emails after dinner. Conversely, we

do things during work hours that would have been inconceivable years ago: run a few errands, take personal phone calls and even browse Facebook from the office.

It's clear that "work/life balance" has been replaced by a new paradigm: "work/life integration." It's no longer about when, where or how many hours you work. It's about getting your work done, regardless of time and place.

Integrating… Without Shortchanging
How do we meld work and family without giving short shrift to either? Here are some ideas that have worked for me. The list isn't exhaustive, and I'm sure there are plenty others.

Accept the Change.
We first need to acknowledge that "work/life integration" is a new way of working, and isn't going to go away. The goal isn't to work more hours; it's to work the same number, while allowing enough flexibility for family and personal pursuits. By balancing the two, we reduce the stress and anxiety over spending too much time on one or the other.

Take Responsibility.
The autonomy work/life integration provides requires increased personal responsibility. Without a boss monitoring our every move, we must be mindful of our commitment to our employer. Just as we would while in an office, we should strive to get our work done well and on time and respond to the needs of our coworkers in a timely way.

Get Organized.
Success in integrating work and family requires organizing our schedules so that we're working during the times we're most productive. For me, that would be mornings and while I'm on airplanes. By scheduling the bulk of my work then, I take less work home and have the flexibility to tackle a workout or some personal chores during afternoons, when I tend to be less productive.

Set Boundaries.
There will always be times when our work and personal lives collide, so it's important to set boundaries. Ultimately, healthy work/life integration means knowing when to say no. This makes it acceptable for me to step away from

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work to, say, attend my son's musical presentation at school, especially when my coworkers know I'm available to respond to an important email in the evening.

Use Technology.
We can't be in two places at the same time, but videoconferencing and other technologies enable us to at least bridge the gap. If it's not critical that I physically attend a meeting, or if I just can't be there, I try to participate by video, which increases my feeling of presence.

Be Flexible.
Above all, work/life integration requires flexibility, both on the part of employees and organizations. No one likes a 9 p.m. conference call. But if the trade-off is a Monday afternoon spent with the kids, it's one worth making. For their part, organizations need to grant employees the flexibility and autonomy to make work/life integration a success. The notion that "You're on company time" no longer exists, and shouldn't.

As my calendar – and likely yours – can attest, work/life integration is the new normal today. By thoughtfully integrating the two, we can take live happier, more fulfilled and more productive lives – both at work and at home.

In the Future Your Employees Will Not Be Your Employees

Your future employees are most likely to be freelancers with specialist skills traveling from project to project. They will challenge your organization and traditional thinking. But they will also make you more productive and competitive.

By now you may have noticed my keen interest in how new technology, changes in demography and the mindset of future generations will change the way we work and how our companies adapt to these changes.

Since employees are the core of most companies, they are always at the center of my rants. However, one important trend seriously messes with that point of view. According to several surveys, most of the people working for us in the future will not be our employees at all. They will be self-employed or work for someone else, and will only temporarily happen to be working for us.

Most of the people working for us in the future will not be our employees at all; they'll only temporarily work for us.

The HR prophets call them "the extended workforce," and they are part of an ever-expanding network of freelancers, consultants, outsourcing partners, vendors and other types of nontraditional workers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of temporary employees in the U.S. rose by 29% between 2009 and 2012. A survey of the 200 largest companies found that temporary workers represented, on average, 22% of their workforce, and that percentage is growing. A recent study conducted by softwarecompany Intuit estimates that more than 40% of the American workforce will be freelancers by 2020[42]. That's more than 60 million people.

Technology Leads the Way
We've always had freelancers and some level of outsourcing, but there are several reasons why there will be an explosion in the numbers of this type of worker in the coming years.

First, new technology makes it possible for people to work from anywhere. And a significant number of people are determined to utilize this facility to live exactly the lives they choose to live. Working from home or where their favorite surf, vista, climate or whatever they crave is counts for much more than the security of a steady job.

The super workers of the future are looking for the toughest challenges, not a steady job. They want to be free to switch from project to project and to solve their work tasks with whomever they prefer in the gigantic, worldwide web of freelance specialists, which is held together by social media.

Companies are also pushing talent into the extended workforce. Most companies are actually not very good at keeping employees happy with new, challenging projects or work. In an Accenture survey of 1,088 U.S. workers, only 34% of respondents reported feeling that they could easily move to other roles or jobs in their organization where their skills would best be utilized[43].

Good News for Us
The extended workforce is great news for companies all over the world. Because freelancers are free to choose whom they want to work for and which projects they want to take on, they are likely to be happier and thus more productive than your average employees.

At the same time, the flexibility for you is tremendous. Without much ado, you can assemble world-class top specialists for any job you need done. They will be masters at collaboration and will bring in additional skills when needed. And when your problem is solved, you no longer need to pay them for their services, nor will you have the burden of finding new projects challenging enough to keep them happy until the next time you need their special skills.

Top people and high flexibility are the ingredients for success, so unsurprisingly numerous studies verify that using an extended workforce makes companies more competitive. In an Accenture study, 55% of executives surveyed described the contingent workforce as highly valuable for their businesses[44]. When ManpowerGroup surveyed 41,000 employers in 35 countries, 34% of the respondents said that non-permanent members of an organization (including outsourced workers and consultants) were an important element of their organization's workforce strategy[45].

At the same time, access to these new super employees is becoming radically easier. New online platforms enable you to find exactly the skills you need. Online independent contractor talent platforms such as UpWork and TopCoder are growing rapidly, with more than 1 million workers.

Get Your House in Order

So, where's the catch? Well, with the extended workforce and the contact points in place, thousands of experts are just waiting for you to call. But it will require something from your company. Your organization probably needs to introduce a completely new, and more open, collaborative work style to embrace specialists who are not part of your own organization. You must start partnering with networks of specialists with skills you may need some time later. And you must ensure that your organization has the software and collaboration tools needed to stay in touch with the knowledge nomads of the new economy.

If you get that right, you are good to go. Have fun with your 60 million new (almost) employees! I'm sure you are going to accomplish great things together.

Is Someone Looking Over Your Shoulder?

During the past few years, controlling our employees to make sure they aren't slacking off has reached a whole new level. Yet new research shows that the effort has a completely opposite effect; it is actually killing productivity instead!

I recently visited a webpage comparing different software solutions that monitor your employees' online activities. The site also offered a quick calculation showing how much money you can save by controlling your employees' behavior, which amounts to around $2,000 per employee per year.

While some of the functionality these software products offer makes sense (like prohibiting employees from visiting virus-ridden web pages, for instance), others left me baffled. Most noticeably, almost all of the software solutions can monitor ingoing and outgoing internet traffic, so you can observe employees working from home, locate the position of field workers and track which software programs employees use and for how long. In short, you can spy on your employees' behavior.

Preventing employees from slacking off seems to be an integral part of a modern management style these days. A recent study actually shows that 50% of all managers were opposed to "working from home" and another 35% only "tolerated" the concept. And while 49% of managers stated "inability to talk face-to-face" when asked why, a stunning 22% stated "no accountability," and another 22% stated "slacking off" as their most common problem with remote workers[46].

Control is also an integral part of modern open office space design. With all employees together in one room, managers have a clear view of what's going on. In theory, that should make employees more productive and ensure that they use the proper procedures when working. At least that's what numerous academic papers are still claiming, indicating that while trust is good, control is great.

It's Not Working

I find the mere idea of controlling employees to make sure they are working disturbing. Personally, I would hate to have my superiors controlling my every move. And fortunately, new research shows that such control doesn't work.

While controlling employees may make them do more, they are not necessarily doing the right things. Typically, employees overcompensate and spend too much time making sure

they are noticed to please their superiors. They start sending more emails, especially to their managers, so that they appear active. And they log on to their computer without actually using it – thereby cheating the company's IT systems by logging in to prove that they are active. All in all, they spend time doing stuff that does not create value – just to meet the control measures set by management.

> *While controlling employees may make them do more, they are not necessarily doing the right things.*

The idea of overcompensation is fully integrated into our way of working. In a career-related article, *TIME Magazine* advises remote workers to "…make replying to your managers' emails a high priority. Get back to them promptly so that they trust you're working, not sleeping or playing video games."[47]

The Transparency Paradox
The phenomenon is called the transparency paradox. According to Ethan Bernstein, an assistant professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at Harvard Business School, it gets worse the tougher the control measures become. Bernstein has studied the transparency paradox for years, conducting a series of field experiments in a Chinese mobile phone factory. He concludes that heavy control makes employees conceal their activities through "secret codes" and other costly means[48].

Conversely, however, creating zones of privacy increases performance. When you leave people alone for a while, they start thinking. Sometimes they come up with ideas that might make the company more productive, more innovative or a nicer place to work. All of this almost never happens in a super-controlled environment. Privacy creates value.

We have seen similar results from surveys conducted with knowledge workers. Managers may hate the concept of working from home. Evidence shows, however, that most employees are more effective when not continuously disturbed by coworkers. That is, of course, unless employees have to overcompensate by bombarding their colleagues with emails in order to demonstrate that they are not doing something other than work.

Interestingly enough, research as far back as the 1950s indicates that control measures are not necessarily good for value creation. Somehow, decision makers have been more concerned about how you can make control measures work in the corporate environment.

Maybe it's time to face the facts and focus more on motivation and trust and less on control. Get rid of the control software and use the money on a great face-to-face meeting where you can create a compelling vision for your company along with your employees. And then leave everyone alone so that they can actually get some real work – and thinking – done!

Workers (Not) Gone Wild:
The Case for Employee Autonomy

The days of the boss continually looking over your shoulder are over. By granting workers added autonomy, organizations are increasing employee engagement and boosting productivity.

I had a crazy thought the other day – one that had me questioning my business sense, if not my sanity. Let me explain.

For a long time we've been exploring the topic of providing employees with additional freedom to do their jobs how, when and where they'd like.

After discussing this issue many times the past week, I spent part of my weekend helping friends chaperone a birthday party for their kids. If you have kids – and even if you don't – you know what happens when you set two dozen of them loose in a yard: Soon they're everywhere imaginable: Rolling through the lawn, stomping through the garden, swinging from tree branches.

Yesterday, in a quiet moment, the two – increasingly empowered employees and kids playing with reckless abandon – somehow collided in my mind. The kids got replaced by my colleagues – and the result was pandemonium in the workplace. Deadlines were ignored, product launches skipped and chaos reigned.

I awoke in a panic. Later in the day, I met with our *New Ways of Working* research partner, Louise Harder Fischer, who is also an external associate professor at Copenhagen Business School and a Ph.D. fellow in productive practices in the modern workplace at IT University Copenhagen. I needed to know: Was this a foreshadowing of doom? Would additional worker autonomy unleash untold anarchy on the organization? And how could I prevent it?

To my relief, her first words were, "Of course you should be granting additional autonomy and flexibility to employees. Every organization should be doing it." Phew.

Trust More, Oversee Less
Since we were already on the topic, I wanted to examine the issue in more depth. I needed to know from her why organizations are making this change, the benefits they expect and, perhaps most important, how to prepare for this shift.

We discussed how organizations today have come a long way from the days when they exercised strict control over everything from where employees worked to the technologies they used. Competition – both for customers and quality employees – and advances in technology have required organizations to become increasingly flexible and worker-friendly.

There's enormous value in providing employees the latitude to do their jobs as they see fit, Louise explained, and the evidence is more than anecdotal. Studies show that employees with greater autonomy are happier, more creative and increasingly engaged in the workplace. This results in higher productivity and reduced employee turnover. In fact, for most employees, the freedom to do their jobs as they see fit isn't just a perk; it's an expectation.

There's enormous value in providing employees the latitude to do their jobs as they see fit, which results in higher productivity and reduced employee turnover.

She even provided a few tips all organizations should use to empower employees.

Define What is Important and Communicate it Clearly.
For autonomy to succeed, leaders must articulate a clear vision, set reasonable expectations and ensure that the work employees perform aligns with corporate objectives. Because a hands-off approach means less ability to monitor work and make mid-course corrections, performance expectations must be clearly communicated upfront and continually reinforced.

Be Sure Empowerment Works Both Ways.
Empowered employees need to be self-motivated employees. Moving to a more autonomous workforce shifts the burden for individual preparation and training from leaders to employees. Thus, workers need to be responsible for recognizing where they lack skills and proactively seeking out resources and training to do their jobs effectively.

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Control What You Can… and Then Let Go.
Enabling employees to work how, when and where they want requires leaders to accept that there are things they can't – and shouldn't – control. "Avoid the temptation to micromanage!" Louise stressed to me. Instead, have confidence that "workers will figure it out. They will do the right thing," she repeated. She even relayed a story about a client who trusts his employees so much that he actually encourages them to return personal phone calls and browse Facebook during work hours.

Mentor and Coach as Needed.
Leadership is as important as ever with a more autonomous workforce, but in a different way. Instead of peering over workers' shoulders, leaders should act as coaches, mentors and facilitators. With their skills and understanding of the organization, they can provide valuable advice, support and encouragement; coordinate necessary communication between more autonomous employees; and act as problem-solvers.

I'm glad to know that I haven't gone crazy; that allowing workers to do their jobs their way makes good business sense and is an idea worth pursuing.

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Customer Service

Everyone within the organization creates value, but none more than our customer service representatives. Yet they are often regarded as a cost center that could be slimmed down, automated or eliminated altogether. It's time we regard the human customer service experience as a powerful opportunity for brand-building. We'll investigate new ways of recognizing customer service, discover technologies for augmenting humans in customer service and follow the example of organizations that are taking customer service to new levels.

Meet the True Value Creators
in Our Companies

In the debate about which area of the organization creates the most value, customer service rarely makes the short list. But it should, and here's why.

"Anyone who thinks every day or every call is just like the previous one obviously hasn't put on one of these headsets."

That comment, one of several shared with me by the head of a customer service department, dispels misconceptions and sheds light on a vital component of our organizations – one that operates largely in the shadows and rarely receives the recognition it deserves.

The fact is, customer service reps are the unsung heroes of our organizations. They're the corporate equivalent of army special forces – the ones we rely on to fix something that's gone wrong and prevent it from getting worse. They toil behind the scenes, in near anonymity, rarely receiving even a sincere thank you.

"Forget about the script; there isn't one. We're talking about people, not robots."

Contrary to what we, the ones on the other end of the line, may believe, customer service jobs are hardly routine. While there are similarities among the issues they face, no two interactions are the same – or the solutions required. Service reps don't sleepwalk through the day or apply a standard template to resolving issues. Sure, they make use of scripts, but only for training and beginners. Mastering their craft requires plenty of practice, rehearsing particular types of calls and listening to recordings of good and bad conversations, all to learn and improve.

The average customer service representative resolves more than 30 issues a day, which

> *Customer service representatives are the corporate equivalent of army special forces – the ones we rely on to fix something that's gone wrong and prevent it from getting worse.*

takes up about three-and-a-half hours. The rest of the day is spent meticulously documenting issues raised and solutions offered, lest they appear again. The average call lasts about six minutes, and each must be resolved to the customer's satisfaction[49].

In their jobs, time is of the essence. Among customers' biggest complaints is the all-too-familiar message that says, "All of our representatives are busy…." By the time they reach a representative, customers want their issues resolved – immediately. Service reps need to create on-the-spot solutions, and without the benefit of time to analyze, take polls or deep-dive into research. They possess the vital human touch that's vital to quick problem-solving. Their decisions are based upon equal parts training, experience, instinct and savvy.

They have the resources to do their jobs, but not much more. On average, organizations dedicate just 12% of their marketing budget to satisfying existing customers.[50]

"When you've worked an eight-hour shift in this job, you know it."

Reps are keenly aware that they represent the "face" of the brand. Although not necessarily part of the job description, they need to stay upbeat and positive. That's because 73% of consumers note that friendly customer service representatives can actually help them fall in love with a brand.

Customer service jobs are challenging and mentally taxing. Not only do service reps defuse difficult situations, they also make the complex simple, explain, counsel, reassure or just listen and empathize.

They're true value creators within our organizations.

Do We Still Want Humans in Customer Service?

In the quest to reduce costs, many organizations are automating customer service functions. But removing the human element from customer service can be bad for business. Here's why.

I couldn't believe what I'd just heard.

I was on the exhibition floor at Enterprise Connect Conference in Orlando when I overheard a marketing executive proudly announce, "We're automating 97% of our customer service functions…."

I had to keep myself from jumping in and explaining what a colossal mistake this would be. Some functions simply should not be automated, and customer service is one of them.

Yet it seems that more and more organizations are choosing to do so. When was the last time you called and didn't get frustrated by the labyrinthian maze of "Press 1 for this… Press 2 for that…" options?

Sure, some customer service processes can be automated without inconveniencing or angering customers. Allowing them to, say, check account balances, add or drop services and make payments online are relatively easy, low-cost, high-return activities.

As the e-tailing group, a noted ecommerce consulting organization, notes: *"While automation can be expedient, the resulting impersonal tone and risk of poor information are formidable."*

Had I interrupted our friend in Orlando, I would have given him

> *Some customer service processes can be automated without inconveniencing or angering customers. But removing the human element from customer service altogether is pure folly.*

and his colleagues three reasons why removing the human element from customer service is pure folly.

Reason 1: Humans Solve Problems.
The most important part of customer service is resolving customers' issues. Because humans have the ability to listen, understand, seek out information and apply accumulated knowledge and past experiences to situations, they're far better problem-solvers than any machine could ever dream of being.

When an issue requires resolution, the risk to the organization is too big to entrust the task to a machine. At that point, the organization is at an important crossroads and can choose from two options:

Delight the customer with friendly service, and 73% will fall in love with your brand.

Anger the customer with poor service, and 91% will leave (and tell up to 15 people about it while heading out the door).[51]

Given the choice, I'll take the human any day.

Reason 2: Humans Can Empathize.
What also makes people such outstanding problem-solvers is the uniquely human emotion of empathy. It's the warm-and-fuzzy feeling you get from a soothing voice that assures you that the rep understands your problem and can fix it.

As the e-tailing group noted, the impersonal nature of automated machines makes them poor choices to handle vital customer service functions. The computerized voice that intones "I'm sorry you're having trouble with your selection" isn't sorry at all because it doesn't have feelings and can't empathize with my situation.

And while we've all witnessed what computers are able to do these days, a digital voice will never express empathy the same way as a human voice does.

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> **Reason 3: Humans Want Choices.**
> Finally, there's a very basic reason why customer service efforts must include the human touch. Consumers want choices in how they receive service, and some prefer to talk to another person – even if it's to handle a mundane task like checking a checking account balance. Denying them the opportunity to do so is misguided. Sure, it may be more expensive to the organization, but it's certainly less costly than losing a customer.

I'm glad I didn't make a scene at Enterprise Connect by barging in and sharing my opinion. If you're the marketing executive standing by booth #1508 at the Gaylord Palms Convention Center, now you know.

Finally, a Company that Takes Customer Satisfaction Seriously

Who hasn't been on the receiving end of a forgettable customer service experience? Everyone has a horror story to share. Based on a recent experience, though, there may be hope for better service.

I had the most gratifying experience while on hold the other day.

Yes, you read that right.

While patiently waiting to discuss an erroneous charge on my credit card bill, an automated voice informed me, "Your experience is important to us. If you'd like to participate in a short survey after this call, please press 1 now."

Being invited to take a survey sounds like an odd reason for celebration. But the experience suggests that my credit card company is taking customer satisfaction seriously. Instead of – or perhaps in addition to – metrics such as calls handled per hour, time spent on a call and time-to-resolution, the company is also seeking hard numbers that shed a light on customer satisfaction.

Frankly, it's a welcome change, and one that's long overdue.

We've heard plenty about the price of poor customer service – and the numbers are pretty grim. A full 89% of consumers say they've stopped doing business with a company after a poor experience. Worse, 95% of disappointed consumers say they'll share their story, and with up to 15 people.

Bridging the Reality Gap

Losing a single customer is unfortunate, but potentially losing 15 more is a nightmare – and something no company can afford.

My credit card company appears to understand that fact. They're trying to avoid falling into the

> *Losing a single customer is unfortunate, but potentially losing 15 more is a nightmare – and something no company can afford.*

"Customer Service Reality Gap," a place where 80% of companies profess to deliver outstanding service[52], while only 8% of their customers agree[53].

That they're eagerly seeking my feedback about the outcome of my call indicates they have confidence in the ability of their customer service representatives to deliver an outstanding experience.

It's probably a good wager on their part. That's because 73% of consumers say that friendly customer service representatives can actually make them fall in love with a brand. In my case, the credit card company believes that the one-to-one, human interaction between service rep and me will win the day by resolving my issue quickly and to my delight.

Plus it's 2-1/2 Times Better for Business…
For them, my satisfaction is good business, especially when you consider that 81% of organizations with strong customer service operations outperform their competitors[54].

And by falling in love with their brand, I'll likely spend more. According to the Harvard Business Review, customers who had the best service experiences spend 140% more than those who had the worst[55]. In essence, my credit card company is saying, "If Holger isn't just happy – but actually thrilled – with the service we've delivered, he's more than twice as likely to reach for our card, and not someone else's, for his purchase."

The fact that my credit card company is focused on my satisfaction is something for which I'm grateful. But it's just the beginning, and I think they can do even more.

With the trove of data they've accumulated about me – how much I spend, where I spend it, the fact that I fly to Munich every week – they can personalize my experience even more. They can get me discounts for certain purchases, provide extra points for others, better monitor my account against fraud… the possibilities are endless.

Then I'll really fall in love with their brand.

Five Reasons Why You're Waiting on Hold for Too Long

At a time when customer service calls are more complex than ever, the workers who take them are more distracted than ever. Here's why this matters to you, and what can be done about it.

Ever called a customer service number and experienced an excruciatingly long hold time? Or once you got through, the rep seemed frazzled – or often needed to consult notes or with others to find your answer?

The reasons may trace back to the employee's work environment. Call-centric workers have long indicated that distractions in the workplace are preventing them from being as productive as they can be.

New research we at Jabra recently conducted[56] seems to back up their claims.

Call-centric employees are indispensable, both to their organizations and us as consumers. More than merely offering a means of contact or friendly service, they harness the power of conversation to deliver a wide array of vital services over the phone – everything from resolving our issues and taking emergency calls to providing IT or HR support and offering accounting and financial advice.

Yet a survey of 3,200 call-centric workers across seven countries finds their productivity negatively affected by workplace factors beyond their control. Apart from the business issues it causes, this reduced productivity has far-ranging ramifications for all of us consumers who rely on these workers.

Noise, Obnoxious Colleagues and Too Much Work
According to the study, the five issues that most negatively affect performance and productivity in today's call-centric workplace are:

Too Many Interruptions from Colleagues.
Whether seeking advice on resolving an issue or just wondering if they caught the big game last night, interruptions from colleagues tied as the top complaint among call-centric workers, with 25% citing it as the biggest issue they face.

>

Noise Level.
Noisy office environments make concentration difficult and reduce productivity. A noisy office tied colleague interruptions as the top complaint among 25% of call-centric workers.

Too Many Emails.
Receiving too many emails during the workday causes stress and reduces call-centric worker productivity. 22% of call-centric workers cite an overabundance of emails as the biggest issue they face.

Too Many Calls During the Day.
Being asked to handle too many calls during the day also impacts productivity, and was cited by 19% of call-centric workers as their biggest issue.

Lack of Personal Privacy.
Workspaces that are too small reduce privacy and have an impact on call-centric worker productivity. 19% of workers surveyed cited a lack of personal privacy as their top issue.

Why This Matters (to Everyone)

At this point, it would be easy to dismiss these findings with a cursory, "I don't work in a call-centric workplace, so this doesn't matter to me."

But it does, and here's why.

While conventional wisdom suggested that email, chat, text and other technologies would make phone calls obsolete, that hasn't happened. Quite the opposite, in fact. Before, a detailed conversation with your bank, consultant or lawyer was almost certainly held in a face-to-face meeting. Today, these complex interactions often take place over the phone.

Add to this the vast amount of information available via the internet. With it, consumers have become more knowledgeable about the topic at hand and able to ask more complex questions. A full 73% of decision makers in call-centric environments have seen an increase in the complexity of customer interactions.

Thus, at a time when conversations are more complex and valuable than ever, the people charged with conducting them are more distracted and have less time to prepare for and

concentrate on them. This is unwelcome news for all of us consumers, because it shows up in bigger hold times, longer searches for information and slower resolution times.

What's An Organization to Do?

Overcoming this issue is possible but won't be easy. After all, distractions in the workplace have been business-as-usual since the dawn of time.

The organizations that will be successful will be ones that invest in helping their workers better concentrate so they can deliver outstanding service over the phone. With the average organization dedicating only 12% of its marketing budget to servicing existing customers, there is plenty of room for action[57].

The organizations that will be successful will be ones that invest in helping their workers better concentrate so they can deliver outstanding service over the phone

Organizations need to recognize the importance of call-centric customer service and organize it under the right strategic leadership. Then they need to invest in the right package of supportive technology and back it with behavioral and cultural changes to eliminate distractions, increase job engagement and satisfaction and drive greater productivity.

Because the power of conversation is important to everyone.

Will Avatars Take Over In Augmented Reality Customer Service?

Get ready for the next big thing in customer service: Augmented reality. By bridging the gap between self-serve and representative-based service options, it promises to revolutionize the way we interact with tomorrow's organizations.

In the near future, the person we turn to for help fixing our computer or how to assemble our IKEA furniture may not be a person at all.

It may be a computer-generated avatar – one that knows a whole lot about us and will be able to effortlessly guide us through complicated processes that previously required human interaction.

At least it appears we're heading in that direction. Self-serve customer service is already here and knowledge bases are all over the internet, which makes augmented reality customer service the next logical step. Rapid advances in 3D and virtual reality technology, combined with the increasing role of big data, will make the customer service experience of the near future look and feel a lot different than it does today.

> *Rapid advances in technology, combined with the increasing role of big data, will make the customer service experience of the near future look and feel a lot different than it does today.*

Which would be a good thing. The augmented reality customer service experience of tomorrow will bridge the gap between self-help service and human-based assistance, enabling organizations to provide better service without hiring additional staff. Customer service professionals will still play a role, of course, but they'll take on a higher-level position as expert problem-solvers of last resort[58].

Putting On a Human Face
The "face" of the augmented reality experience would likely be a computerized representation of a human, or avatar, that could do nearly everything a person can do. To humanize an otherwise computerized conversation, the avatar would take on a persona

that appeals to you, or, if you link to customer service through a social media account, your avatar may be a virtual representation of… you.

Whatever form it takes, your avatar-as-service-rep will possess an enormous amount of data about you and have an encyclopedic understanding of your preferences, purchase history, site-search history and more. With this, along with a continuous feed of data about commonly encountered issues – also called machine learning – your avatar will be prepared to provide highly intuitive, fast and knowledgeable service.

So if your wash machine is making a disturbing clunking noise, for example, you'll whip out your smartphone (or whatever its successor may be), turn on the video and link to customer service. Your avatar will appear, and from his database will diagnose the problem and provide a tour of how to fix it, complete with step-by-step instructions and 3D video. It'll be as though he's right there in the room with you, peering over your shoulder and guiding your every move.

This represents a major advance over today's awkward method of troubleshooting by phone, chat or email, which relies on your description of the problem and is clumsy, time-consuming and error-prone.

Augmented-reality customer service wouldn't be limited to troubleshooting. Virtual assistants could help us cook a fancy dinner, prepare our taxes, write a great term paper – the possibilities are endless. With the ability to actually show, rather than tell, they'll make our lives a lot easier.

But Will We Accept It?
To be sure, augmented reality wouldn't be appropriate for every customer service interaction. Decisions that involve the uniquely human emotion of empathy – like choosing whether to waive late charges on an overdue bill because of a medical emergency – would still be entrusted to humans.

Which brings up some interesting questions. Even with the many benefits augmented reality customer service could provide, will we as consumers accept it? Will we be scared off by the fact that it knows so much about us? Or will we put privacy aside in favor of outstanding, personalized customer service?

Is our desire for help from an actual human being so strong that we'll reject this mode of service? Or will we instead embrace the prospect of learning from a computer-generated persona?

I guess we'll know soon enough. I just wonder what I'll look like as an avatar.

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Better Ways of Working – Now What?

As knowledge workers, we're often asked to do more with less – and do so in a workplace that's noisy and full of distractions. An impossible task? Hardly. By applying the principles of *New Ways of Working*, we can create a work environment that fosters both individual concentration and close collaboration, enabling us to get more done without putting in longer hours or sacrificing our much-needed personal time.

Get it Done, Faster, with a "How-to-Do" List

To-do lists are ideal for prioritizing tasks, but not so great at helping us accomplish them. Supercharge your productivity by transforming your humble to-do-list into a how-to-do list.

Want to cross more off your to-do list – in less time?

Turn it into a "how-to-do" list.

That's the revelation I had while reminiscing about a fantastic sailing trip I took not long ago.

It was a dream voyage – a few friends, a week of sailing and an opportunity to visit interesting new places.

Because we would be crossing some unfamiliar waters, preparation was vital. We spent hours poring over navigation charts to plot our course and define the tasks we'd need to perform each day. We also identified the tools and technologies for getting us to our destination and back safely, securely packing a compass, maps, charts, GPS and even an EPIRB emergency locator beacon.

Those preparations, combined with favorable weather and friendly people, resulted in an unforgettable trip.

While reflecting on the journey, I had my revelation: that extra level of preparation – outlining not just the necessary tasks but also how to address them – could also pay dividends in the workplace.

The Trouble with To-Do Lists
This brings us back to to-do lists. Sure, they are indispensable tools for organizing our work, and I'm always amazed at the wide variety of them. They're in Outlook, on our smartphones, on paper calendars, or, in the case of one of my colleagues, scrawled on a sticky note and pasted to his desk every day.

The trouble with ordinary to-do lists is that while they nicely summarize and prioritize what we need to get done, they don't provide guidance on how to complete those tasks most effectively.

We need to transform the to-do list into a "how-to-do" list. As a logical extension of a to-do list, a how-to-do list enables us to identify all the resources – such as technologies, devices, supporting work environment, other knowledge workers and more – we need to successfully complete our day's tasks.

This allows us to neatly organize our tasks to make the workday more productive. Plus it can be especially helpful to employees who work in noisy areas, such as open or activity-based work spaces.

A "how-to-do" list allows us to neatly organize our tasks to make the workday more productive.

Using a how-to-do list we can organize tasks to avoid, or at least minimize, work-related interruptions, water cooler gossip and myriad other workplace intrusions that rob us of three-to-five hours of productivity[59] per day. For instance, a desk in the middle of a chaotic environment is not optimal for writing a report or conducting a videoconference. A how-to-do list helps us identify and book in advance a quieter location for completing these tasks.

We can also choose when we do our best work. We know that our brains are wired so that mornings are better for tasks that require concentration while afternoons are better for collaborating with others.[60]

A Closer Look

Turning your to-do list into a how-to-do list is easy. Simply record the tasks to be completed that day, as you'd normally do, and then take things a step further by identifying the resources you need to accomplish each task.

As an illustration, let's look at my how-to-dos for a recent task. Among the day's work was to review a proposal for a new product and evaluate its feasibility. Knowing that I would need some time to concentrate, I booked a quiet room to read the proposal without interruption. Anticipating that I may have questions, I checked the report writer's availability status online in case we needed to discuss it, and I sent him a short instant message to alert him that I may be contacting him. And because he works remotely, I made sure my wireless headset was at the ready.

I did the same for the dozen or so other items I needed to get done that day. The process only took about 10 minutes, and it helped me develop a clear roadmap for smoothly completing everything I needed to accomplish that day.

I'm convinced that a "how-to-do" list makes me more productive, and I'll bet it can do the same for you. Give it a try!

The Ultimate Guide to Work Happiness

The Zone is that magical place where you're euphorically happy and crazily productive. Getting there isn't always easy, but with a little planning, you can make it happen.

Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi often wrote of the intersection between productivity, creativity and pure happiness, a place where workers and athletes alike flock to produce impressive results. Whether you call it the zone, flow, the groove or something entirely, it is that magnetic place where you are at your best and where you produce high-quality and high-value work.

I don't get to sail much these days, so I don't reach athletic Zen nearly as often as I'd like. But a couple of weeks ago, I spun records as a guest DJ in a Lucerne club as my not-so-secret alter-ego, DJ Nordic. That evening, I again experienced the exhilarating flow I used to feel when working on the boat with the team in high winds. The music, the happy dancing crowd and the ambiance made the tracks and the time fly by. It was great, and it is good business, too!

> *The zone is that magnetic place where you are at your best and where you produce high-quality and high-value work.*

Large and innovative companies like Google have made a science out of creating spots[61] where employees can achieve work flow together or alone, playing with colors, shapes, themes and space to create a place where this magic can happen. For example, Google has invested in ski gondolas at its Zurich office, a pub-like meeting room in Dublin and a sidewalk cafe in Istanbul, and the company claims that the product of these efforts can be measured in double digits.

It Doesn't Take a Budget to Create Happiness

Most companies, however, have neither the budget nor the headroom to build ski gondolas. Workers must settle for the occasional quiet room or quiet corner. In some cases, working from home or outside of the office in a coffee shop, for example, are the only options for finding the ever-elusive flow. I have found some guiding principles that can help us get there:

Find the Right Surroundings.

It's probably not your office. But it may be your living room or a coffee shop. To me, environment is crucial. I find that I get into the zone easier when I have people around me but at some distance – my office with the door open usually does the trick. However, I have friends who need absolute silence and others who work their magic in the kitchen when the kids are in bed and the only sound is that of the humming dishwasher.

Find Your Props.

It may be that your best work is not done on your laptop, but on your 2-in-1 devices or on your tablet. I like working on my laptop with a pad and pen handy, which enable me to make a note or calculation without having to grapple for a pen and risk falling out of the zone while I look. Or indeed, later find that the key calculation is in the trash because I'd scribbled it on the back of a grocery receipt.

Silence or Sound?

I am a music man myself, so I like nothing better than the tunes; they often shoehorn me right into the zone. I find that the sound/no sound question is critical and actually the big divider on which people have the strongest opinions. I have a friend who says that music has her humming or singing along in her head, losing focus. Others, like me, get carried away on the emotional highs of music, which puts them right where they need to be. It is deeply personal, so choose your flavor.

Find Your Ultimate Rhythm.

I love evenings, and get my best work done after 8 p.m. While I find that I can get in the zone at all times when the task is fitting, evenings are my best time. I can get plenty of super good work done in 90 minutes before I have to come up for air with a break and maybe then do another stint of an hour or so.

Find Your Level.

Not all activities can get you in flow. Flow demands that you find the activity that is just hard enough so that you need to concentrate, but not so hard that it will interrupt your train of thought. Doing something for the first time will not get you there, for example. Finding a task that is too easy will lead you to drop your focus, disengage and you may end up losing a hand in the machine.

>

Flow is all about an emotional state of undiluted focus. It's not always easy to attain, but it can be realized with some practice, and it gets easier as you go. There are plenty of paths to the zone and you will have to find yours. Once you get there, it will be worth it.

Five Tips to Stay in the Zone at Work

Interruptions are a sad fact of life in today's office environment. They rob us of personal productivity and cost our organizations plenty of time, money and missed opportunities. Here's how to avoid interruption and reclaim our time.

Today, I had a confetti day. You know, one of those days where you're constantly interrupted, making it impossible to complete even the smallest of tasks. The name comes from the fact that the interruptions rip your day into little pieces, ensuring that your to-do list at 5 p.m. is at least as long, or longer, than it was at 8 a.m.

Sadly, confetti days occur too often these days. Office workers are interrupted – or actually interrupt themselves – approximately every three minutes, academic studies have found[62]. While not every distraction may throw us off course, the accumulated distractions inevitably pull us away from what we were doing. And once off track, it can take as long as 23 minutes to get back to the original task[63], if we can even do so.

> *Interruptions are more than just frustrating to the individual disturbed; they also cost the organization plenty in money and lost opportunities.*

While any interruption is frustrating to the individual disturbed, it also costs the organization plenty in money and lost opportunities. We can do better, and here's how:

 # Shoo People Out of Your Physical Space.
Politely telling people in your physical space that you are busy or need to concentrate will help some. Only rarely will people intentionally interrupt you if you have told them you are under pressure to perform. Actually, your coworkers will go a long way toward protecting you from interruptions and shielding you from outsiders by taking care of questions and issues themselves.

>

Set Your Presence Indicator to "Busy."

This is a no-brainer, but few of us do it. Place a "don't disturb" or "busy" tag onto your status indicator on your UC client. This deters colleagues who are about to send you a message from doing so. Since no one intentionally wants to be rude, they will often wait or send you an email if it is urgent.

Fire Up the Music.

This is my personal favorite. Not only can the right music really help you focus, it also masks some of the office noise around you. This works even better when combined with a noise-cancelling headset like the Jabra Evolve. I'm not saying this just because Jabra pays my bills. I can't tell you how many times I've felt the need to don my trusty Jabra Evolve 80 and drown out the noise with some sweet Spotify tracks. In fact, I wrote most of this very post while soothing tunes from Morcheeba washed gently over my ears.

(Don't) Pick Up the Phone.

I actually received this tip from my IT guy, who does much of his work on the go. He says that 90% of questions ultimately solve themselves if the person asking the question is forced to leave a message. Thirty percent of all interruptions are questions from coworkers, and at least some of them should be able to wait an hour or two. While this may not be the case for you or me, not feeling like you have to take every call is a good strategy when you have to get things done without interruptions.

Go Somewhere Else.

Not being around to get interrupted is, as you may expect, an effective way to not be interrupted. Finding a conference room or working at home, if possible, will save you from much distraction. Of course, this is not always possible, because sometimes you need your workstation or just the feel of your desk to make you productive.

Unfortunately, confetti days are a fact of the modern workplace. You can avoid many distractions by making use of some simple tips and tricks. However, if all else fails, you need to do what I will be doing in a minute: Wait for the house to get quiet and then work from the kitchen counter.

Conclusion

Today's fast-as-light business climate demands a relentless pursuit of productivity – one that while vital for survival, also drains our finances, stifles innovation and exhausts our employees. Fortunately, there is another way. *New Ways of Working* is a rallying cry for a radical transformation of how we organize our work and get more done. At its heart is the power and autonomy of the individual. *New Ways of Working* is about surrounding people with technologies, processes and a culture that helps them achieve their full potential by feeling more appreciated, engaged and fulfilled in the workplace. Business success today – and tomorrow – isn't reserved for those who work harder; it belongs to those who adopt *New Ways of Working*.

Appendix: Have You Realized Your Potential Yet?

Most of us are good at our job. But how do we know, if we are as good as we could be? Well, in my experience, if you want to perform at your best, first you need to understand your own work behavior and build on that. Maybe you are the Guardian at work or the Game Changer. Perhaps the Genius or even the Guru. One thing is for sure: you have potential. Now let us find out what it is!

Ideally, every day and every assignment should be fun and thrilling. But, as we all know; some days are harder than others. However, if you feel, that things could be more fun and much less challenging than they are. Then perhaps you're stuck in a way of working, which does not make the most of your abilities – and your capabilities. Which means you have probably not yet realized your full potential.

For a long time I have been interested in the concept of 'potential'. How to recognize it. Make the most of it. I think what really provoked me was a term coined by the psychologist Shawn Anchor, who discusses the disadvantages of *"the cult of the average"*[64]. What he refers to is, how when crunching large amounts of data about a certain group of people, there will always be a couple, who differ from the average. But we ignore them, because from a scientific point of view the average forms the best basis for a new truth.

But what if we studied the outliers instead of deleting them in our studies. Think about the potential in knowing how these non-average outliers perform and behave. What they might be capable of and if we learned from them – what we would be capable of.

There is of course a huge difference between ability and capability. While ability describes what you are able to do now, capability describes your potential. In that sense new ways of working is a matter of making our capability or potential turn into an ability.

I don't care where you fall on the line. It doesn't matter to me, whether you are above, below or on average. We all have potential and we all have talent. Period. Often, however, it can be hard for us to recognize this. Perhaps we take some skills for granted. Perhaps our strengths lie in something that we never thought of as a skill, like being good at collaborating, something which could make a huge difference to your company and career. Most of us have a good idea about, where our strengths lie. But when managed to fully realize our potential, we will be able to contribute more and for the benefit of your life and the world around you.

Having repeated this conversation in the office for quite some time, some of my clever colleagues had an idea: Let us come up with a tool that can help people identify their capabilities – a simple tool to a complex question: What is your work potential?

Knowing this will be the first step towards growing as a professional and as a person. And therefore, we are proud to invite you to learn just that at www.jabra.com/campaigns/ nwow, where you can test your professional potential.

> *What is your work potential?*
> *Test it at;*
> *www.jabra.com/campaigns/nwow*

Maybe you are the Guardian at work. Or the Game Changer. Maybe you are the Genius in your team. Or perhaps you are the company Guru. I think most of us know deep down, what we are good at or which tasks we like more than others. But often, this insight requires assistance. Therefore, we have set up the Work Potential Test as an online multiple-choice test, which can assist you in unlocking your potential with advice and suggestions on exercises that can optimize your way of working. And at best help you grow as a professional.

The test gives guidance towards attaining the optimal combination of abilities and capabilities. Because perhaps, the capabilities and potential in your office will come out better, if you swapped tasks around a bit. This could even help your team unfold their full potential too.

The Productivity Paradox

Many organizations have employees that are using nonproductive ways of working, yet initiatives that improve productivity are too often achieving the opposite. New technology and office designs are introduced as a positive influence, but are instead detracting from productivity. The challenge is overcoming this paradox to achieve the 'flexible, productive and wise work' that is within reach. Businesses need a better understanding of human behavior offering elements of autonomy on the individual level and transparency on the collective level, and an acute awareness of when communication methods or a way of working are not delivering the intended benefits.

Jabra's philosophy on *'New Ways of Working'* is the idea of organizing work towards realizing people's full potential. Jabra wants to advocate managers and employees alike to make a conscious choice of work-modes depending on the task whether collaboration, concentration, conversation or communication:

> **# Concentration**
> is about making good decisions by turning information into knowledge
>
> **# Communication**
> is transference of knowledge independent of time and location
>
> **# Collaboration**
> is the most powerful tool to turn complex problems into valuable solutions. Bring new knowledge into play with colleagues or business partners
>
> **# Conversations**
> between two people, who genuinely listen, understand and talk to impact behavior, is the most effective tool to elevate the value of human interactions

Organizations should continually ask themselves: Who is responsible for productivity in the modern workplace? How do we enable better productivity in the modern workplace? How do we measure the impact of better productivity?

Join the "New Ways Of Working" Initiative

Jabra's *'New Ways of Working'* initiative is a joint initiative that involves everybody who is struggling with changes in how we work, how we organize work and how we motivate employees and colleagues to be part of the journey. It advocates a reflection on how to best design work for improving the four Cs; concentration, conversation, communication and collaboration, and in turn becoming more innovative, productive, and successful.

Follow our blog and join us in the discussion at www.blog.jabra.com

How Jabra Meets These Challenges

A lot of issues with today's working environment are about two common factors: sound and technology, as this research also shows. Jabra works specifically with audio and unified communications solutions that improve the modern work space and enable individuals to hear more, do more and be more. The modern challenges are reflected in the products that we take to market.

If you are interested in learning more, please go to: www.jabra.com/business/

Connect with Jabra on social media:

LinkedIn - linkedin.com/company/jabra

Twitter - @We_are_Jabra

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