

South Africans average only three productive days per week

Most respondents to a new Microsoft Office survey say they're working longer, but are less productive. The research showed that South Africans say that 38% of the time they spend at work is unproductive. In addition, ineffective meetings, lack of team communication and procrastination are among the top South African time wasters, according to results of an online Microsoft Office survey announced last week.

Survey respondents also said that, as they grapple with the need to work longer hours and the desire for better work-life balance, they rely heavily on technology tools to help optimize their personal and team productivity.

The Microsoft Office Personal Productivity Challenge (PPC), which drew responses from more than 38 000 people in 200 countries, rated workers' individual productivity based on their responses to 18 statements about work-related practices. Locally, survey participants revealed some interesting conclusions about the nature of productivity in their workplace, including these (U.S. findings are in parentheses):

- South Africans work an average of 45 hours a week; they consider about 17 of those hours to be unproductive (U.S: 45 hours a week; 16 hours are considered unproductive).
- More than half the SA participants, 55%, said they relate their productivity directly to their software (U.S: 61%).
- South Africans spend 5.6 hours each week in meetings; 69% feel meetings aren't productive (U.S: 5.5 hours; 71% feel meetings aren't productive).
- Only 34% said they are using proven scheduling tools and techniques to help them gain more free time and balance in their lives in South Africa. Likewise, 60% said they don't have work-life balance, and being unproductive contributes to this feeling. (U.S: 31% said they are using proven scheduling tools and techniques; 66% said they don't have work-life balance.)
- South African women had an average productivity score of 72%, compared with 71% for men (U.S: women, 70%; men, 68%).
- Workers said they receive an average of 49 email messages per day in SA compared with 56 in the US.
- The most common productivity pitfalls in South Africa are ineffective meetings (46%), lack of team communication (36%) and procrastination (37%) (US results: procrastination, 42%; lack of team communication, 39%; ineffective meetings, 34%).

Microsoft Corp. developed the PPC assessment as a way for workers to evaluate their work habits and receive tips on how to be more productive in their day-to-day activities. Dr Larry Baker, president of the Dr Larry Baker Management Center Inc. in Atlanta and an associate professor at Shorter College in Marietta, Ga., developed the survey questions.

"In my three decades of studying what makes workers productive, I've found the most crucial skills are their ability to efficiently communicate across all kinds of boundaries, share important documents and manage the increasing volumes of information," Baker said. "These new survey results confirm those trends and highlight the opportunity for workers to get better training and tips on how to get the most out of software tools they use. Clearly, this is a focus area for Microsoft where it can help people be more productive with the Office products."

With increasing workplace demands and people relying more heavily on technology tools to help them stay on task, it is clear why survey participants identified the following work arrangements as helpful in increasing their productivity:

- They are able to quickly find electronic documents when they need them.
- Features such as a spam filter help them manage their e-mail more effectively.
- They provide advice, rather than taking on other people's responsibilities.
- Using technology is a major factor in their ability to manage time efficiently

"It's exciting to see that so many people around the world took the Personal Productivity Challenge and shared their feedback about the productivity issues they're facing today in the new world of work," said Heather Third, business group manager: Information Worker for Microsoft South Africa. "With so many people saying they aren't as productive as they could be and that they rely on technology to achieve their productivity goals, Microsoft has a great opportunity to provide the tools to help them quickly and effectively meet their needs."

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