asana

Anatomy of Work Index:

How people spend their time at work

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Foreword

The way we work is evolving

From flexible offices to the way organizations communicate—workplaces, and the teams within them—are seeing significant change as businesses look for new ways to improve productivity and stay ahead of their competitors.

At the forefront of the changing workplace is the emergence of collaboration tools and software platforms, providing more ways for teams to coordinate effortlessly than ever before. That trend is here to stay. IDC predicts that the market for collaborative applications will increase to $26.6 billion by 2023.[1]

But with more communication and collaboration channels, information is also becoming increasingly fragmented. Responsibilities are unclear and many teams, and their work, have become siloed. People at every size of company—in every industry—are spending hours in unnecessary meetings, responding to emails, replying to messaging pings, searching for documents and files, and duplicating efforts.

This is work about work. And worldwide, companies are doing too much of it, causing them to waste time, effort, and resources at the cost of productivity, and ultimately, employee engagement.

To better understand how workers are spending their time, the factors shaping their habits, and how organizations can more effectively manage individual and team processes, we analyzed the behaviors and attitudes of more than 10,000 knowledge workers in Australia, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, U.K. and U.S.

The key takeaway: The majority of employees' time (60%) is spent on work about work, almost twice the amount they believe they're spending on it (35%). This leaves employees with limited time for thoughtful deep work. According to our research, respondents spend just 27% of their time on skills-based tasks—the specialized craft they were trained and hired to do, such as market analysis or coding.

We believe there's a better way. One that takes the guesswork out of work, allowing teams to be more confident, move faster and achieve more with fewer resources. And in fact, when teams feel set up to execute effectively, they're more than three times as likely to feel proud of their effort and inspired to meet their goals.

Are the ways teams work together actually working? The Anatomy of Work Index explores this while outlining how teams can better orchestrate their efforts and accomplish more faster.

1.

Global overview:
How time is spent at work
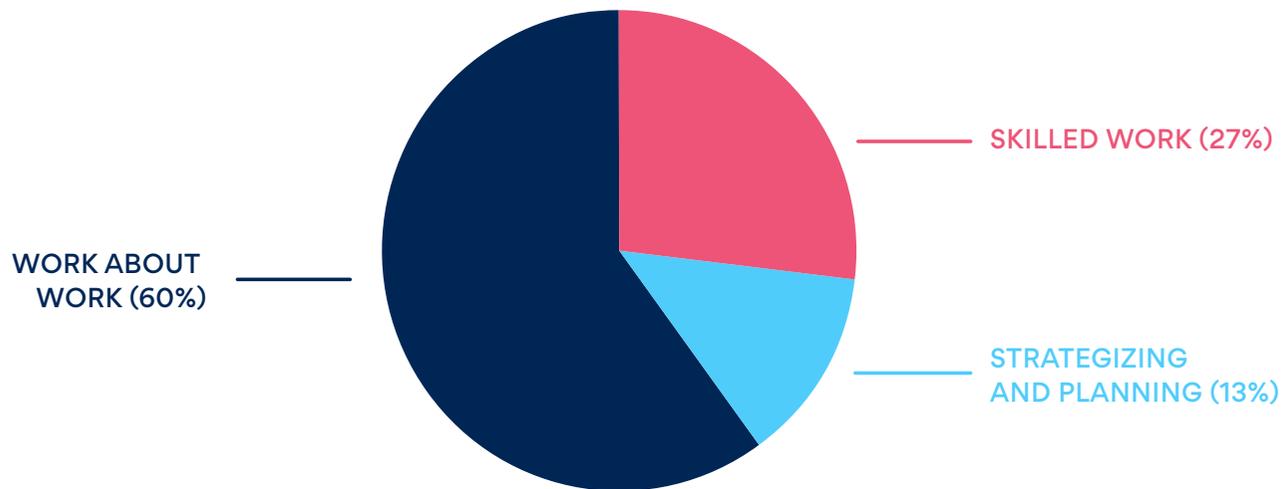
More hours, less time on meaningful work

In today's always-on digital workplace, governments and organizations around the world are implementing measures to mitigate the impacts of our long office days. In Japan, the government has introduced a legal cap to prevent people from working more than 45 hours of overtime per month. In the U.K., the Labour Party has committed to introducing a four-day working week, if elected.

Yet, the majority of global employees are still putting in long hours to manage workloads and execute on deliverables, often at the expense of true productivity gains.

The average knowledge worker devotes 60% of their time to work about work—activities such as communicating about tasks, hunting down documents, and managing shifting priorities.

As a result, just 27% of time is dedicated to the skilled craft that employees have been trained and hired to do. The remaining 13% of time is dedicated to strategic planning and forward-looking analysis.

35% of global knowledge workers take one or fewer breaks per day

—

30% of global knowledge workers regularly work late from the office or at home

—

In Japan, more than 80% of workers work late from the office or at home

—

Nearly 80% of workers in Germany start their working day before 8:30am

Breakdown of activity per week

- WORK ABOUT WORK (60%)
- SKILLED WORK (27%)
- STRATEGIZING AND PLANNING (13%)

The vast majority of knowledge workers (88%) agree that time-sensitive projects and large initiatives have fallen behind or through the cracks due to the volume of tasks they have on their plate. This challenge is exacerbated by a lack of clarity on organizational priorities and the allocation of tasks, with 71% of respondents believing that their organization sets unrealistic deadlines.

Part of the issue is that many organizations don't have the right processes in place to plan, organize, and execute tasks or manage workloads.

The pressure to complete efforts in a short time frame is magnified by the amount of lower value, but time-intensive tasks that teams do.

"I tend to work almost 24/7, not necessarily formally but you can't get away from work. Emails and mobile phones are some of the best and worst inventions ever."
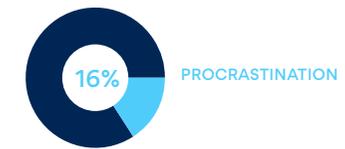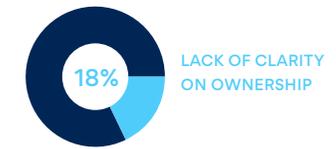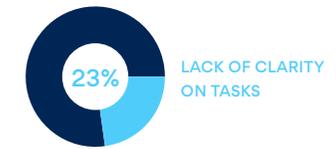
– IT manager, U.K.

Responding to a constant barrage of emails and notifications is the primary reason that nearly one-third of employees regularly stay late in the office or work from home after hours.

The top factor driving all countries bar Japan to work late, is responding to constant emails and messages:

Aus/NZ – 45%
—
Germany – 41%
—
Japan – 27%
—
U.K. – 45%
—
U.S. – 48%

Biggest drivers causing people to stay late

41% RESPONDING TO CONSTANT EMAILS

36% UNEXPECTED MEETINGS

34% CHASING FOR APPROVAL

23% LACK OF CLARITY ON TASKS

18% LACK OF CLARITY ON DEADLINES

18% LACK OF CLARITY ON OWNERSHIP

16% PROCRASTINATION
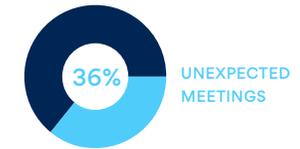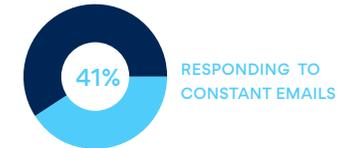
Growing workloads = more stress

Faced with growing workloads and increased work about work, many teams struggle to find a balance over bottlenecks and burnout.

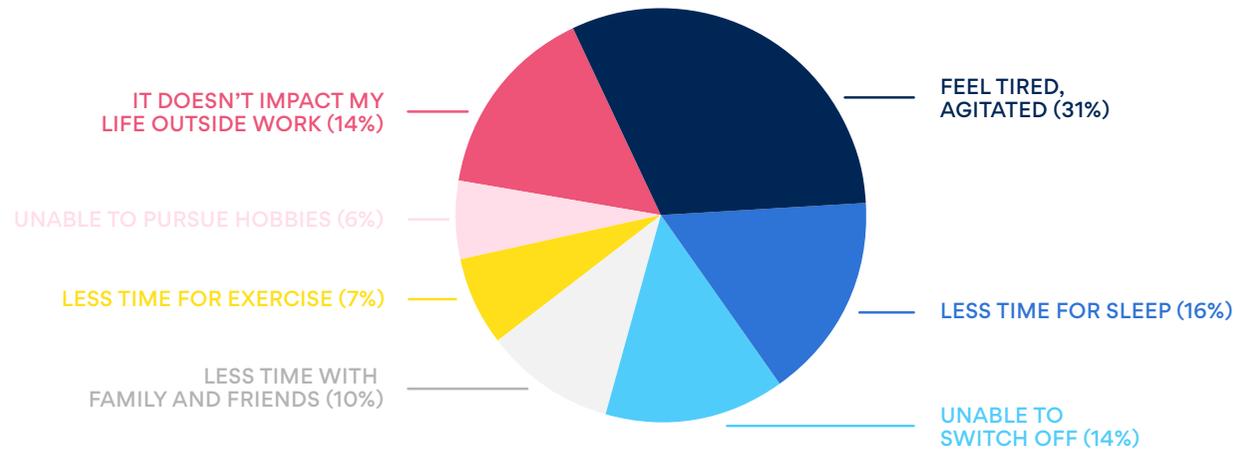Unbalanced workload growth is the primary source of stress for a quarter (26%) of employees. When organizations don't manage individual and team workloads effectively, employee performance and retention are negatively affected.

According to the World Health Organization[2], burnout—a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress—has become so prevalent that it's now classified as an occupational phenomenon.

In a previous study of 6,000 knowledge workers across Australia, U.K., and the U.S. conducted by Asana and research firm 4media, more than 80% of respondents felt overworked and close to burnout, with nearly three-quarters (74%) experiencing burnout twice a year or more. When employees are stressed, more than four in five (82%) say they feel less engaged with their job.

In today's always-on culture, companies have a greater responsibility than ever to implement support systems aimed at alleviating these sources of stress. Creating coordination processes is part of the solution—and fostering a culture of clarity is essential.

The impact that stress & feelings of burnout have on life outside of work

IT DOESN'T IMPACT MY LIFE OUTSIDE WORK (14%)

UNABLE TO PURSUE HOBBIES (6%)

LESS TIME FOR EXERCISE (7%)

LESS TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS (10%)

FEEL TIRED, AGITATED (31%)

LESS TIME FOR SLEEP (16%)

UNABLE TO SWITCH OFF (14%)

Many factors lead to a stressful office environment. The biggest drivers of stress among survey respondents include:

Having too much work to do (26%)

—

Lack of support from colleagues and management (16%)

—

Unclear tasks or priorities (15%)

—

Unrealistic deadlines (15%)

2.

The hidden volume of work about work

Work about work is entrenched in the ways that we've been working for decades. Fueled by an over-reliance on emails, spreadsheets, and meetings to communicate about and manage initiatives, we're spending nearly twice as much time on it than we realize.

But organizations can make changes to mitigate its impact.

Teams need a living system to help orchestrate their efforts, where everyone can see, discuss, and execute their shared priorities. For individual employees, it's about taking the guesswork out of work—they know what they need to do and when, without digging through email or chat threads. For team leaders, tools and processes can help them feel more organized and connected to the day-to-day output, without the need to over-communicate or micromanage.

> "I spend about a third of my day coordinating work. I think there is an opportunity for optimization there, especially some automated processing."
>
> – IT Vice President, U.S.

The time knowledge workers believe they spend on work about work across the world

GLOBAL AVERAGE (35%)

41%	32%	28%	36%	39%
AUS/NZ	GERMANY	JAPAN	U.K.	U.S.
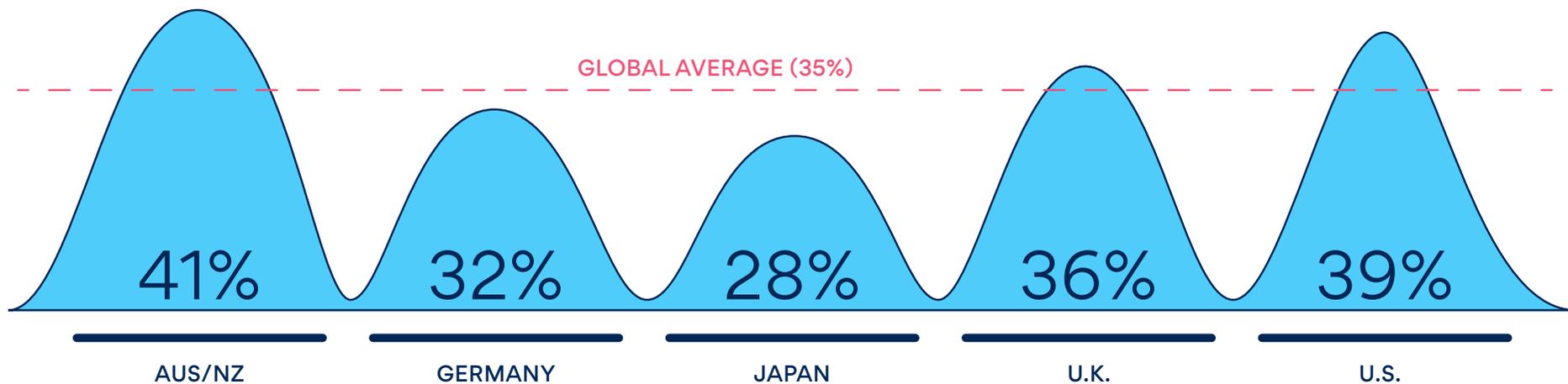
Work about work prevents teams from being agile and efficient

Coordinating across fragile technology and processes like spreadsheets and email may be the norm, but it fails to deliver the real-time alignment and clarity companies need today.

According to survey respondents, nearly two-thirds of the meetings they participate in are deemed unnecessary. Annually, that means we are losing countless hours in pointless meetings.

Across an organization, the time loss is staggering. In 2019, "bad" meetings are predicted to cost the U.S. economy almost $400 billion in lost productivity.[3]

But meetings are just a fraction of the work about work epidemic.

Siloed email chains create bottlenecks, impacting agility, visibility, and cross-functional alignment. Yet, 320 billion emails are expected to be sent and received every day by 2021.[4]

While the growth of messaging apps and platforms have helped alleviate our reliance on email and empowered organizations to stay connected, too many conversations in too many channels can have an adverse effect on productivity, deepen data silos, and add to distractions.

On average, global workers report spending 70% of their day feeling productive

"Our workflow is just managed through meetings. The things that are the most pressing are the ones I will do first. There is no system or structure."
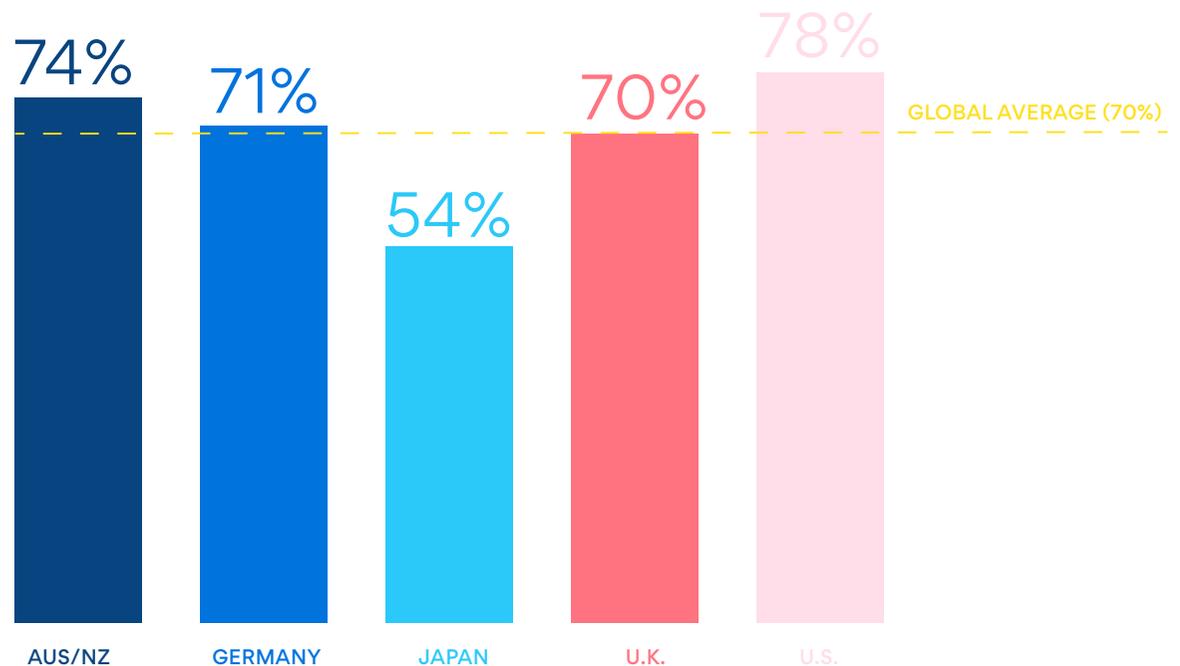
- Business and Marketing officer, U.S.

74% AUS/NZ
71% GERMANY
54% JAPAN
70% U.K.
78% U.S.

GLOBAL AVERAGE (70%)

Today, the average employee uses 10 different apps to complete their tasks every day. And the more apps they use, the longer they spend feeling distracted or procrastinating.

Work management platforms can provide an antidote by serving as the single source of truth connected to the underlying activities and mission-critical tools for an organization—keeping teams connected without fueling distraction.

"At the moment we tend to drown in emails when we are busy. Often people miss something or ask things again because they can't find them in their inbox."

– Lead investigator, Australia

As jobs become increasingly fluid and fast-paced, employees need to focus on mission-critical tasks. Work management platforms, such as Asana, provide clarity for teams to plan, organize, and execute their work so they can move faster with less effort.

Time spent feeling distracted and/or procrastinating on a daily basis

1 hr 4 mins	1 hr 5 mins	1 hr 10 mins	0 hr 52 mins	1 hr 7 mins	1 hr 4 mins
GLOBAL	**AUS/NZ**	**GERMANY**	**JAPAN**	**U.K.**	**U.S.**

3.
How lack of clarity
harms productivity

Lack of clarity, lack of alignment

Company-wide goals are often communicated once and then quickly fade into the background due to evolving priorities. Ensuring that people are clear on these goals and how their individual work contributes, is key to organizational alignment. It's also essential for assuring that employees are engaged, motivated, and focused on the right efforts.

Findings from other research reinforce this: 75% of aligned workers agree that they feel empowered to make strategic decisions or pursue new business opportunities, compared to 22% of unaligned workers.[5]

To be effective, organizations must provide clarity and visibility into how an individual's job contributes to company-wide priorities, objectives, and ultimately, its overall mission. This ensures employees feel empowered, engaged, and connected.

Moving from chaos to clarity

Coordinating across teams can be chaotic. Work management software can help by providing a central destination where all team members can see the tasks that need to be completed, who is responsible, and the status of the output. The level of clarity and transparency provided means teams are empowered to focus on the work that matters most.

Just

43%

are clear on their organization's objectives for the year

Only

46%

are clear on how their work adds value to their company

And

48%

are clear on their organization's mission

Employees who believe their organization is set up to work effectively are more likely to:

Be proud to work where they do (48% vs 14%)

—

Be inspired to meet their goals (45% vs 15%)

—

Say their organization does a good job at engaging team members (37% vs 8%)

"Productivity is impacted most by an unconnected workforce."

– Managing Director, Germany

4.
Reducing work about work: The role of automation

Less manual work, more automation

Each week, employees waste more than 10% of their time duplicating efforts—four hours 38 minutes on average. Annually, that's more than 200 hours lost to manual, low-value tasks that they or someone else has already done.

When teams operate in silos, repeated efforts and missteps in important processes are more likely to occur. Business leaders need a solution that bridges cross-functional initiatives, drives collaboration, and reduces human error.

"Duplication of effort usually happens when the team doesn't know what others are doing."

– CTO, Australia

Work management solutions with automation capabilities enable teams to spend less time on duplication. From automatically assigning tasks to relevant teammates and syncing calendars with deadlines, simple automation can make everyone's day easier and more productive.

The average time spent each week on duplication of tasks

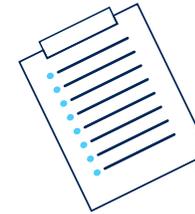| 4 hr 38 mins	5 hr 7 mins	5 hr 9 mins	2 hr 56 mins	5 hr 5 mins	4 hr 55 mins
GLOBAL	**AUS/NZ**	**GERMANY**	**JAPAN**	**U.K.**	**U.S.**

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5.
Removing barriers
to productivity

What are the barriers to being more productive?

RESPONDING TO EMAILS AND MESSAGES

In Germany, the U.K. and U.S., responding to email messages and notifications is the leading barrier to productivity.

TOO MUCH WORK TO DO

In Japan, too much work is cited as the main barrier to being productive.

APPROVALS AND FEEDBACK

Japan was the only country to identify chasing colleagues for approvals as a top 3 barrier.

CHASING TEAMMATES TO COMPLETE WORK

35% of knowledge workers in Australia and New Zealand say chasing colleagues to complete work or for input has the biggest impact.

How can knowledge workers focus on what matters most?

For most of us, no two work days are the same. Understanding how all the work we do fits into the bigger picture can mean the difference between feeling empowered and engaged or overworked and overwhelmed.

Joshua Zerkel, Certified Productivity expert and Head of Global Community at Asana, shares his productivity tips.

ASSESS THE BIGGER PICTURE

At Asana, we leverage the "Pyramid of Clarity" to align everyone on the high-level goals of the day and the results they should produce. These goals can be broken down into a subset of shorter-term goals, giving managers a clear vision of what needs to happen and when.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO PLAN FOR BUSY PERIODS

Many organizations rely on employees flagging when they've got too much on their plate but they don't always speak up. There are tools which allow businesses to map out projects and help managers and their teams understand how much work everyone has on.

TRAIN EVERYONE ON TOOLS

Not everyone will know how to use the tools they have at their disposal. Training is critical, especially if the team is expected to use tools for work management, coordination and communication. Structure the rollout of new tools, explaining how they are going to help, to get teams on board.

ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

Never-ending email notifications and pings make it easy to fall into the trap of adopting an always-on mindset. But by establishing guidelines within your team, you'll be able to reduce some of the pressure on individuals to respond at all hours of the day and night.

ClassPass teams move 30 - 40% faster with Asana

ClassPass makes it easy to find and book fitness classes. Established in New York in 2013, the company has quickly become global with a 25-person marketing team tasked with running over 200 campaigns per year aimed at increasing brand awareness and growing the ClassPass user base.

But delivering those campaigns at scale and at the rate the company needed has not always been straightforward, according to Kerry Hoffman, Senior Project Manager of Marketing Operations.

The marketing team used an unwieldy combination of email, chat, and spreadsheets to collaborate on campaigns, resulting in:

- No source of truth or accountability on due dates

- A constant need to ask for status updates

- Information silos and documents lost in email threads

- Duplicate work requests that could have been consolidated

Thanks to Asana, ClassPass improved team efficiency by 20%, cut down on meetings by 25%, and was able to produce campaigns 30-40% faster. Read more on their story.

classpass

"We run around 40 growth campaigns and 20 content campaigns per quarter, and 8 to 10 large campaigns each year. Although we were supporting the business globally, we had no way to view all incoming requests and work in progress at once across our creative, growth, and content teams. The lack of oversight made it very challenging to balance the workload and resources across the three teams, and ultimately led to delays and duplicate work."

- Kerry Hoffman, Senior Project Manager of Marketing Operations

20%
Improved team efficiency

25%
Reduction in meetings

30-40%
Faster campaign production

6.
Focus on what matters most with work management tools

Give people the tools to work smarter

Forward-thinking organizations around the world are leveraging time-saving technology and work management software to reimagine the workplace.

These tools empower employees to collaborate more efficiently, take control of their workloads, and make faster decisions.

This makes work more rewarding, productive, and impactful, for everyone.

"By using tools to manage work, we don't have the overlap of meetings or business negotiations. Productivity has been increased because of this."

- Retailer, Japan

x2

When knowledge workers feel clear on their workload motivation doubles compared to those without clarity.

Empower workers to spend more time doing what machines can't

Those who spend more time on busywork are more likely to spend time on duplication of efforts

+

Empower people to work how they want and on tasks that matter

62% of employees are regularly asked to do something that doesn't feel valuable to the business

+

Empower employees by implementing the right tools

64% of organizations who use work management software say their company is set up for efficiency versus 27% of firms that do not manage how assignments are distributed

Methodology

In August and September 2019, quantitative and qualitative research was conducted by Sapio Research on behalf of Asana, to understand how people spend time at work. Asana and Sapio Research co-designed the questionnaire and surveyed the behaviors and attitudes of 10,223 knowledge workers across Australia/New Zealand; Germany; Japan; U.K. and US.

The study defined a knowledge worker as a professional who spends the majority of their time in an office or 50% or more of their time at a computer or device to complete tasks.

The sample spanned an age range of 18 to 55+, over 20 industries, all company sizes, and all career levels (from individual contributors to business leaders).

Respondents completed 40 multiple choice questions that explored the percentage of time they spend on specific tasks, to the barriers they believe make them less productive. This study was supplemented with 30, 25-30 minute telephone interviews with knowledge workers across Australia/New Zealand; Germany; Japan; U.K. and U.S., to explore in more depth, the reasons why people spend time at work as they do.

Sources

[1] IDC: Worldwide Collaborative Applications Forecast, 2019–2023: Accelerating Enterprise Collaboration

[2] https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/

[3] https://meeting-report.com/

[4] https://www.statista.com/statistics/456500/daily-number-of-e-mails-worldwide/

[5] https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/state-of-work

About Asana

Asana is a work management platform that helps teams orchestrate their work, from daily tasks to strategic initiatives. With Asana, teams take the chaos out of planning, organizing, and executing work so they can get more done, faster. Learn more.