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## Save a Day a Week by Cutting out Unnecessary Work

The average employee's productivity within the workplace is little more than a few hours a day. So why are people stuck in the office from early morning until evening, complaining of a poor work-life balance? International CEO and management guru Kevan Hall talks to Nicola O'Connell about the epidemic of unnecessary work that plagues today's offices.

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People in the UK may work the longest hours in Europe, but a recent survey commissioned by Cadillac found that the average employee does just four hours of productive work a day.

It comes as no surprise to learn that office employees don't spend every minute of every working day slavishly working their fingers to the bone, but the fact that as many as four hours, every day, is spent doing unnecessary work or generally wasting time is a concern for all employers. It is certainly costing the economy too - to the tune of £140bn a year through lost productivity, the survey says.

**"People in the UK may work the longest hours in Europe."**

From an employee's point of view it does not make sense either. Unnecessary work wastes time and reduces job satisfaction; yet still, we do it.

So how exactly are employees filling their days, particularly when they appear to be busily bashing out things on their computers and complaining of too much work and stress?

They are indeed busy, says Kevan Hall, management guru, CEO of Global Integration and author of *Speed Lead: Faster, Simpler Ways to Manage People, Projects and Teams In Complex*

*Companies.* But, he says, people are spending more and more time doing things that, quite simply, do not need doing.

Global Integration has consulted with over 300 major multinationals and delivered over 100,000 participant days of training, and during that time, Hall has witnessed what he considers to be an enormous amount of time wasted on meetings, conference calls, misused technology and personal matters.

"It can be quite challenging to spot what is actually unnecessary," says Hall. "There is a whole system around us which is perpetuating stuff that does not need doing. The hardest thing is put your hand up and simply state, 'this does not need doing'.

"In modern offices it's easy to be busy all day responding to emails and attending meetings, yet actually achieving very little. We are like the old-fashioned mill operators - paced by our machines all day. With a little thought, it soon becomes evident that much of this work is irrelevant to moving our jobs and our businesses forward."

### Save a day a week

To help organisations weed out those unnecessary tasks, Global Integration has introduced its 'save a day a week' programme, whereby companies learn how to eliminate unnecessary work, increase productivity and improve job satisfaction.

**"In modern offices it's easy to be busy all day responding to emails and attending meetings."**

"The first thing we have learned to do is to challenge unnecessary teamwork and cooperation. People tell us they spend an average of two days per week in meetings and conference calls, but feel that over half of this is unnecessary and irrelevant.

"In many cases, people carry out work individually, yet they are forced to spend huge amounts of time on conference calls, listening to what everyone else is doing, when in fact this has no relevance to them and is usually very boring.

"Where we just take out those topics - activity reviews, status updates, and project reviews - it makes no difference to productivity and can easily save many people at least an hour a week.

"Recently I presented a session on this subject during a conference for a high-street bank, and one of the HR teams instantly decided to scrap their hour-long weekly meeting. They could see straightaway that their time would be better spent on other work."

Hall nevertheless realises that an element of teamwork is still important in any number of activities - but he urges organisations to focus only on instances where all members really need to be involved, and even then he encourages smaller groups to avoid everyone becoming involved in too much.

### Technology deluge

Despite the fact that technology is intended to make our working lives easier and improve efficiency, it also accounts for a large proportion of unnecessary work. And with new technology

always coming along, the situation is only likely to worsen, Hall warns.

"Each new technology tends to be addictive, so it's very rare for one technology to replace another. It just goes into the mix and we get an increase in connection and communication," he says. "And connected is not the same as effective. I advise companies to think about how a new piece of technology fits into their communication strategies. Choose the right technology for the right task."

Email is generally regarded as the automatic answer for most external and internal communication. But the sheer volume of emails filling people's inboxes on any given day means that it is now very easy to fritter away hours simply responding to them - yet how many are actually essential to people's jobs? Global Integration's own online survey found that people receive an average of 56 emails a day, but only 45% are relevant. A typical team of 11 people writes, sends, stores and deletes over 76,000 unnecessary emails a year.

"One telecommunications company we work with decided to cancel all cc email. It prompted a lot of discussion about how email should really be used within the company. Banning cc emails and turning off the ability to 'reply to all' can make a dramatic difference. It forces people to think about who they really need to communicate with," says Hall.

If we consider that question in the broader context, it forces people to really think about how they are filling their days during working hours. People need to be able to stop spending time on whatever they don't need to know, Hall stresses, and to stop constantly reacting to low-priority interruptions.

"I am quite tough on some of the distractions and alternatives to actually working," says Hall. "If you spend an hour a day surfing the web on personal tasks or interests I don't think you can complain about having to spend an hour in the evening catching up the time you wasted - fair is fair. Maybe it would be better to focus on your work and get home on time."

The question is: how much of the information and cooperation we are involved in is necessary? If it doesn't have direct relevance, then it's unnecessary work, says Hall. And as such, it must be minimised in people's agendas.

"One of the challenges when implementing the 'save a day a week' process is potentially offending people," says Hall. "Sometimes people consider it a mark of respect to attend meetings, even if they are useless. But people must be confident and motivated to take a stand on this. Cutting out unnecessary work not only improves individuals' productivity and satisfaction levels, it can also have a significant impact on businesses profitability."

**"How much of the information and cooperation we are involved in is necessary?"**

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