DISTRACTION IS THE NEMESIS OF PRODUCTIVITY
*Why more training will not solve the root cause*

Key Insights Include:
- How distraction and overload is costing your business time & money
- Simple ways to promote better productivity and sustained performance
- Why your business needs "Self-Regulators" and how to identify them
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Distraction is the nemesis of productivity – more training will not solve the root cause. A paradigm shift is called for and our research has found evidence of such a shift beginning to take effect.

The Ernst & Young Australian Productivity Pulse™ began checking Australian Workers’ sentiments about individual and organisational productivity 18 months ago. The latest findings report that 85% of workers could be more productive, and 21% said that just a few things would need to change. These things were poor staff management, lack of motivation and reward and recognition.

We wanted to extend on this study further and explore the impact distraction and overload had on productivity as a result of the massive increase in information we are exposed to on a daily basis.

*Between the birth of the world and 2003, there were approximately five exabytes of information created. We now create five exabytes every two days. If we measured information as a medium-sized book, this would be approximately 180kg of books for every person on the planet created every two days.*

We created a productivity measurement instrument that was simple, quick to complete and encouraged honest and accurate responses. We collected a sample of 435 respondents via self-selection – there was no incentive, coercion or payment to participate. Our interpretations are accurate to within 95% confidence due to the sample size.

Our results indicated that distraction not only had a significant impact on workplace productivity, but it appears to have created a ‘false perception’ of being productive when in actual fact, people were not ‘doing what they were paid to do’ – yet reported being productive.

The results from this study clearly indicate that distraction due to the deluge of ‘stuff’ we are all incessantly bombarded with has created a ‘silent or invisible’ pandemic of poor productivity.

The cost of this silent pandemic was explored in detail and is likely to represent only ‘the tip of the iceberg’ in terms of the true impact on both individuals and organisations. With each employee completely unproductive on average 4 hours per week (due to stress, overload & overwhelm), the opportunity cost in terms of salary (estimated as 11% of annual salary costs) and time are significant.

The most interesting thing we found following our rigorous analysis of the data and the 1100+ verbatim responses was the identification of two clear and distinctive behavioural and attitudinal groups. We coined these groups as the Early Adapters - representing 20% of the sample - and the Constrained Defeatists - the remaining 80%.

The Constrained Defeatists displayed behaviours that indicated limited control, where they perceived they had no power or ability to change the status quo.

The Early Adapters, on the other hand, clearly indicated that they were in control. They were self-regulators who felt they were able to take responsibility and deal with distractions – by changing their environment or by working at another time when they were not futilely battling distractions.

More importantly this group provide evidence that a paradigm shift is occurring in recognition and response to the 24/7 lifestyle resulting from advances in technology and the speed of information transfer that is our ‘life’ in 2013. The only problem is that business structures and “hours of operation” have not caught up to a 24/7 global marketplace.
SUMMARY of KEY FINDINGS

1. **PEOPLE ARE WORKING HARD AND ARE COMMITTED**

The research indicated that almost three quarters of respondents worked more hours per week than they were paid to do; they took work home and also responded to emails at home.

- 73% people work more hours than paid.
- 80% people respond to emails at home.
- 72% people take work home with them by choice or because it is expected.

When asked to qualify why they worked more hours than paid per week, free text responses revealed:

- 29% stated core hours were not enough time to complete work.

  “Never enough hours to get through my workload”

- 71% reported that they had flexible roles, were happy to spend the extra time on ‘their career’, and worked to complete a job rather than specific hours.

  “I am paid to deliver a role, and I work whatever it takes to do this” & “I believe it is necessary to work longer than the minimum to reach your career goals. The minimum is never enough”

Reasons for working more hours than paid include:

- Workload
- Flexible hours
- Available 24/7 via technology
Why are we working from home?

- 31% reported that they took work home because there were less distracted at home.
- 60% reported working to deadlines or requirement of the job meant having to work at home.

What does this mean?

*Attitudes to ‘working hours’ are shifting and life and work are becoming ONE...*

**Work Industrial Age**

**Work Knowledge Age**

*The knowledge age, speed of information transfer and 24/7 connectedness is driving a change in perception that work / career is a part of life rather than being isolated as something separate to life.*

Less than 15 years ago few employees had work email addresses or mobile phones;

- In 2000 some 430,000 adults had an ongoing agreement with their employers to work from home some or all of the time. Around 35% of these employees accessed their employer’s computer system using a modem.
- In 1999 the OECD put the figure at almost 40 mobile phones per hundred Australians.
- In the 12 months to November 2000, 50% of persons over 15 in Australia accessed the Internet at home or elsewhere. Almost a third of all adults accessed the Internet at home, while a quarter used it at work.
Today;

- Almost a quarter (24% or 2.4 million) of people employed in November 2008 worked some hours at home in either their main or second job.

' Catching up on work' was the main reason given and this was reported by over one-third (34%) of people who worked at home in their main or second job, followed by 'wanting an office at home/no overheads/no rent' (22% of people).

- In 2012 the figure for mobile phones was 88 per hundred Australians.

- In 2011 over 80% of persons over 15 in Australia accessed the Internet at home or elsewhere. All of these adults accessed the Internet at home, while two thirds used it at work.

A 9-5 / 5 days no longer fits as our lifestyle is such that we are contactable and connected 24/7.

This in and of itself creates both opportunity and temptation depending on how people perceive ‘responding to emails and doing work beyond the designated 8 hour window of 'business hours'.

These boundaries are no longer clear-cut as people can and do work anywhere at any time.

Who is this working for?

The majority of those who expressed positive sentiments about working more hours and at whatever times were demanded, convenient or appropriate were self-employed professionals.

These respondents clearly fall into a segment we have coined the Early Adapter segment as they are much more likely to:

- Have adapted and are living/working to a new norm.
- Work and non-work activities are much more likely to be able to be conducted without constraints of an out-dated, standard 9-5 business system.
2. BUSY OR DISTRACTED

“It's a constant battle to be productive consistently throughout the day; it requires heaps of discipline”.

Our research indicates that people are losing the ‘fight against distraction’ and that as much as people try to ignore a ‘distraction’ their attention will be captured and work forgotten.

- Almost 7 in 10 report they spend 8 or fewer hours doing what they are paid to do.
- Half of these respondents reported they spend less than 6 hours per day doing what they are paid to do and 57% of those people consider themselves to be productive most of the day.
- Meaning 34% of employees spend one quarter or more of their day doing things other than what they are paid to do.

What are employees doing if not the job they are paid to do?

When asked to qualify their response;

- 40% of respondents reported they spent the time doing non-core work, were too stretched, too much admin due to poor process and time wasted in useless meetings.
“Lots of time is wasted in useless meetings and calls”

- The other 60% commented that they had flexible working options or that they were efficient and organised.

“I have work access from home, so can manage my workload by additional time in early hours of day, late hours of the day and/or weekends”

If I am not doing what I am paid to do, does this still mean I am productive?

In the graph above there is seemingly a conflict with respondents’ perceptions of productivity and hours they actually spend doing what they are paid to do.

For example, of the 25% of people that said they spent ‘5-6’ hours a day doing the job they were paid, 16 of the 25 agreed they were productive most of the day.
Distracted & Overwhelm is the New Productive ‘Norm’

We explore this further in the graph below, which adds an additional element to the apparent conflict.

55% of people are frequently distracted at work. Of those frequently distracted;

- Only 33% can effectively disregard distractions and get on with work but
- 56% believe they are productive most of the work-day.

These conflicting reports may be indicative of a newly established ‘norm’ where workers are so used to distraction and overwhelm that they perceive they are ‘being productive’ when in fact they are not.

The evidence from the verbatim comments confirms this possibility.

- 43% of respondents rationalise and justify their productivity based on ‘distractions’. In other words, “we are productive provided we are not distracted”
- Further support for this ‘new norm’ comes from the verbatim responses to being frequently distracted where one third of respondents reported that distraction were part of the job.

I am frequently distracted, I can’t disregard distractions and get on with work BUT I am productive most of the workday. Really?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am productive throughout most of the work day</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am frequently distracted at work</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can effectively get on with my work and disregard distractions</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have enough time to complete my work in the hours I am paid.</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
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% of Respondents
The evidence suggests that we have a situation of chronic productivity losses throughout the working day that are effectively ‘invisible’ and therefore most likely underreported and ‘off the radar’.

Can we disregard distractions if motivated to do so?

Consider the following scenario: it’s Friday and James is heading away for the weekend so will be leaving the office early (at 1pm). Will James be motivated more to disregard any distractions that come up during the morning so that nothing will prevent him departing on time?

YES! 44% of people could get their work done in 10% or less time of paid work hours if they could manage all distractions, stay focused on getting the job done, and take the rest of the week off when they completed their work.

BUT - 22% of people would still need to work more hours than paid to get the job done even if they were motivated to disregard distractions and get on with the job.
3. **WORKPLACE TRANSITION**

Workplaces are beginning to show signs of catching up with the marketplace and the massive shift in lifestyle that has occurred in the past decade due to the rapid advances in technology and the shift to the knowledge age where information transfer occurs at lightning speed.

When asked ‘What is the ONE thing that could help you become more productive in the workplace on a daily basis?’, no one mentioned ‘more training’.

The system, the way business is conducted, the out-dated concept of business ‘practice and structure’ fitting into a specific, non-negotiable ‘third’ of the number of hours in a day is the issue – not people and their perceived lack of performance and engagement.

The New Global Workplace

Our 21st Century world is 24/7 and we enjoy that. We have adapted to being able to watch a TV show or sport at 2am – or liaise with others in real time with the US or Europe in the middle of our night or do the shopping if that is what we choose.

Successful organisations are asking a new type of question: ‘how can I help you *(my employees)* be successful at work and in life in a way that works for you professional and personally?’

The Global Workplace is:

- Virtual teams across multiple time zones require real time communication and information.
- Families juggling full time work and parenthood making 9-5 work-days impossible.
- Global roles and responsibilities extend the Australian work-day.
- Unrealistic deadlines push excessive workloads on individuals.
- Tight economic conditions mean lean and dynamic employees with multiple responsibilities.

In the workplace this 24/7 economy has translated to 24/7 organisations. Work/life balance and the need to manage boundaries between the two have given way to work/life integration.
Our research has clearly provided evidence that some employees and businesses have adapted to this new global workplace – blending previous boundaries of work and life and in most cases quite happily. Challenges have occurred where organisations have not been able to bend or provide flexibility in terms of adapting ‘work’ boundaries to allow ‘life’ elements in.

“The culture of the organisation and the 9-5 mentality of the workforce”

The Tension – Square Peg, Round Hole

It may be concluded that overload or a lack of ability to spend the whole 8 hours of the standard business day focused on task, is only one of the problems. The fact that work is failing to ‘fit’ into the 21st century lifestyle of 24/7 is the other main tension.

The stress and overwhelm that people are reporting is also driven by an inability to fit all that needs to be done into a set time-frame, i.e. the ‘standard business hours’. It is uncomfortable, constraining and causes individuals to become anxious, despite working hard and trying their best.

The key obstacle appears to be lack of TRUST. How do I (as an employer) know that they are doing what I pay them to do?

“The ‘standard’ 9-5 allocated hours is no longer being adhered to and it is seemingly accepted that work will be done regardless of hours spent at work. This is evidence of a strong case for flexibility and options for completing work being a compelling motivator for productivity.

It’s time for Australian organisations to return the flexibility that most employees from our research appear to willingly offer.

The most significant take-out from this research project is that it is time for service and knowledge businesses to move forward. To become truly aligned to the “Knowledge Age” and allow their workforces to be connected and integrated into the environment and marketplace that we operate in.

This comment from a respondent could not made this point clearer:

“Being able to set the hours to suit me - stagger my day around personal needs such as my young family”

The data showed clearly that a segment of the workforce have commenced transitioning toward this more flexible workplace. The ability to be more responsible for outcomes, rather than hours and have control over ‘when’ work is completed was rewarded with fewer overloads and enhanced productivity.
4. ADAPTATION – EARLY ADAPTORS VS CONSTRAINED DEFEATISTS

Perhaps one of the most interesting outcomes of the research is a post hoc segmentation analysis we conducted after identifying two clear behavioural and attitudinal trends. These trends emerged from the seemingly conflicting results with respect to respondents acknowledging the significant impact of distraction and the erosion of ‘work-time’ due to distractions on the one hand – to the perception that people believed they were productive for most of the day on the other.

Self-Regulation Vs External Regulation

These trends emerged from clear distinctions between one group who appeared to be self-regulators and the other group who continuously reported that external factors control distractions, their workloads and, by default, their capacity to control their output and behaviours. Self-regulators versus external-regulators were the two attitudes that lead us to the segmentation. The former group we have called the Early Adapters and the latter group the Constrained Defeatists.

When examining the two distinct groups of respondents further by conducting a thorough analysis of the 1100+ verbatim comments we identified clear behavioural parameters and attitudes within these groups.

The first and smaller group, ‘Early Adapters’, displayed a well developed ability to self-regulate, are autonomous, solution focused, high achievers and indicated an internal locus of control i.e. they ‘believed’ and enacted this belief that they were in control. They are:

- Able to disregard distractions
- Are productive throughout most of the day
- Take work home as well as respond to emails
- In control of their workload personally, and
- Work more than the hours they are paid.

“I prefer to be flexible with my time and if working 9pm-10pm means I can spend time with my family I prefer that”
They are happy with these work arrangements. The key differentiator with this group is that they have ‘control’ over their own work schedule whether self-employed or working with a progressive organisation.

From our findings it’s clear that these organisations appear to fully understand, and more importantly have adopted, flexible practices as well as encouraged resourcefulness and creativity with their employees. They also reportedly have an understanding of the disconnect between the current marketplace and the structure of business operating hours being limited to a set window of time.

The Early Adapters were more likely to be progressive in their thinking and interpretation of work. There was clear evidence from the open-ended responses that work was a career and a significant and important part of life – not something that was a means to an end. This is increasingly being evidenced with the importance of Brand Me in the younger workforce in particular. Rather than being perceived as a negative, this attitude is positive and these people are highly motivated and productive. Their career is synonymous with doing the best job possible and their WIIFM (What’s In It For Me) is being leveraged by the progressive businesses.

“Because I want to deliver more, and the paid hours will only deliver expected results, for most part, unpaid hours deliver future promotions due to knowledge, networks, understanding, better insights, more thoughtful strategies and tactics”

The ‘Constrained Defeatists’ perceived they had little or no capacity to self-regulate, and believed their overload, distractions & inability to be productive was caused by the business environment (being outdated processes, existence of a culture that lacked focus, an abundance of senseless meetings and ultimately ‘managers’).

This group displayed a lack of ability to take initiative, an external locus of control and a seemingly inability or unwillingness to find solutions. They appeared to be ‘resigned to their fate’ - and were more likely to report;

- Being frequently distracted
- Unable to get on with work and disregard distractions
- Do not have enough time to complete their work
- Unproductive throughout most of the day, and
- Taking work home and responding to emails at home.

“If I don’t, (take work home) I quickly get inundated”

The ‘Constrained Defeatists’ segment are indicating clear signs of overload, overwhelm and are finding the going tough.
“Although I would like to have control I am held hostage by others' inefficiencies and delays in responding and simply not actually doing their job”

When asked ‘What do you think contributes to the statement ‘Australian workers are disengaged and unproductive’?"

- 19% did not agree with the statement
- 74% perceived that this situation was ‘created by something’ external to themselves.

Only 7% believed that the individual was responsible for the engagement and productivity experience.

“Poor leadership; inadequate focus on productivity and unproductive time; poor process management; lack of vision or direction for the organisation; disengaged and controlling middle managers”

Leading the Way Forward

**Early Adapters** are in effect paving the way for business structures and the way in which transactions are conducted in line with the 24/7 marketplace and environment of the 21st century Knowledge Age.
COST – TO INDIVIDUALS

The cost to individuals of the findings in this survey can be summarised at three levels;

A. Professional - in terms of the impact sustained overload and distraction have on engagement and performance.
B. Personal - in terms of the additional work hours and ‘boundaryless’ work environment has on family relationships & other associated elements of life.
C. Physical - the impact of overload on mental, emotional and physical body

This is what life looks like for the average respondents:

I work 41-50 hours a week, which is more than I am paid to do but if I didn’t work the extra hours I wouldn’t get the job done (although if I could disregard distraction and get on with the job I could get my work done within paid hours).

On average I spend 7-8 hours doing the job I am paid to do which means the other 2-3 hours a day are spent dealing with distractions which I frequently experience. Sometime I am able to deal with the distractions and get on with the job, other times I am not so successful. During an average week I am completely unproductive for about 4 hours because I am overloaded, overwhelmed and completely brain dead.

Overall I feel that I am productive most of the day but I take work home (by choice) & frequently respond to emails at home.

Professional Costs of Survey Findings - Engagement and Performance

People feel like they are working hard and more than they are compensated to do so:

- 61% people work 40+ hours a week.
- 73% people work more hours than paid.
- Only 39% people agree that they have enough time to complete their work in the hours paid.
“We are at the tipping point of asking too much of people. We actually need some "good years" to rebuild the banks of emotional commitment from our people. People don't mind contributing extra when they can see positive outcomes.”

People are giving up personal & family time to work more BUT the additional hours are largely to cope with distractions – not to do a better job.
We know that money is not the primary driver of motivation and performance for many people BUT

When people are giving more than is perceived to be required and not receiving something in return for the effort (i.e. a better performance, appreciation, feeling like they are in control) it becomes frustrating and difficult to sustain.

“...only so that I don't let the organisation down, but now I am finding that there is no appreciation of me doing so”

SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE = ENGAGEMENT + PRODUCTIVITY

Engagement and Productivity are the two ‘invisible’ elements as to why a high performing individual today, can be average the next. ‘Invisible’ because:

- Rarely will an employee openly report the reason for a decrease in performance is because they are not liking the job; &
- It is unlikely that an individual consciously knows the ‘real’ impact productivity issues are having on performance (nor believe anything can be done about it).

How are engagement & productivity linked?

Even the most highly engaged employee would lose motivation and satisfaction if their ability to be productive and deliver is compromised regularly. In organisations this may look like burn out followed by a reset for the roller coaster to begin again.

“Long hours & unrealistic workloads cause stress, which in turn leads to unproductivity. The frustration felt leads to disengagement.”
Likewise it is highly unlikely that you will achieve sustainable high performance from someone who is productive but non-engaged.

“I am not unproductive but poor leadership actions have meant that I am extremely disengaged”

Personal & Physical Costs of Survey Findings

Whilst the survey did not explore the impact on individuals in terms of hours worked and burden of overload, you only have to look around any workplace or talk to people to know that the costs of this sort of sustained overload are personally and physically high.

➢ 25% people are completely unproductive 7+ hours a week
➢ 47% people are completely unproductive 5+ hours a week

Survey Question: How many hours a week are you completely unproductive due to distractions, information overload, stress, brain dead, had enough and/or complaining to colleagues? Please, be honest!

What does this sort of sustained overload cost the people in your organisation?
COSTS TO ORGANISATIONS

"It is an epidemic," says Lacy Roberson, a director of learning and organisational development at eBay Inc. At most companies, it's a struggle "to get work done on a daily basis, with all these things coming at you," she says.

The findings and insights from this survey have significant implications for organisations at 3 levels:

1. Financially – opportunity cost of salary invested, stress claims etc.
2. Strategically – opportunity cost of time wasted in overload and thinking that is compromised consistently driven by distractions and overload.

What does this cost Australian Organisations Financially?

To demonstrate the impact these survey findings may have on your business we have applied the results to an organisation or division with an annual salary cost of $12 million and 150 employees.

Summary of key results are below:

- $1.3 million a year or 2.3 days a month (per employee) is completely unproductive due to stress, overwhelm and overload. This is 11% of your annual salary cost.
- 3.5 out of 10 of your employees are focused on doing something other than what they are paid 1.3 days a week, which represents salary costs of $1 million in your organisation.
- 3 out of 10 of your employees are consciously aware that they are not productive most of the day. This represents $3.7 million of salary costs that are operating at less than capacity.
- 5 in 10 of your people are impacted by distractions regularly taking up to 23 minutes to recover every time.
- 4 in 10 of your employees could get their job done in less time (10% or more) if they could manage distractions and go home when the work was completed. This represents up to $1.0 million salary costs or 1.7 days per employee per month.

Whilst we recognise that there may be overlap of the impact of each element of productivity discussed above, what is evident is that productivity issues are costing this company $1 million + annually..

What is the opportunity cost of $1.3 million or 2.3 days per employee per month of time wasted in your organisation?
To demonstrate the impact this can have financially on organisations, we have applied key findings to an example case study for a division or business with $12 million salary and 150 FTE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Key Findings</th>
<th>Impact on Your Organisation</th>
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| ➢ 47.3% of your employees are completely unproductive 5 or more hours a week due to stress, overwhelm, overload. | ➢ $1.3 million salary costs per year (11%)  
➢ 2.3 days per employee per month  
➢ 5.6 working weeks per employee per year  
**OF ZERO PRODUCTIVITY**  
We estimate that this may just be the tip of the iceberg. The real cost of this could be at least double, as responses reflect that with which respondents are consciously aware of. |
| ➢ 34% of your employees spend less than 6 hours a day (75% of their time) doing the job they are paid to do | ➢ 3.4 out of 10 of your employees are focused on doing something other than what they are paid to do 1.3 days a week representing a salary cost of $1 million. |
| ➢ 31% of people are not productive throughout most of the work day                      | ➢ 3 out of 10 of your employees are consciously aware that they are not performing to the level they are capable of.  
➢ This represents $3.7 million salary costs that are operating at less than capacity. |
| ➢ 55% of people are frequently distracted throughout the workday.                      | ➢ Nearly 6 out of 10 of your employees are frequently distracted throughout the workday. |
| ➢ Only 50% of people are not able to disregard distractions effectively and get on with their work. | ➢ 5 out of 10 of your people are impacted by distractions regularly taking up to a possible 23 minutes to recover every single time. |
| ➢ 44% of your employees could get their job done in less time (10% or more) if they could manage distractions and go home when the work was completed | ➢ $1.0 million salary costs per year (8%)  
➢ 1.7 days per employee per month  
➢ 4.1 working weeks per employee per year |

The findings of this survey are representative of the population, allowing extrapolation of these findings to your business. You can apply the findings to your organisation to calculate an estimate cost of lost productivity.
What does this cost Australian Organisations Strategically & Culturally?

Aside from the opportunity cost of money and time; distraction, overload and overwhelm in employees also impacts other key aspects of a business which are critical to sustainable success. These are summarised below.

**Strategic costs:**

- **Customers** – poorer satisfaction and experience as interactions with your company are more likely to be below expectations when your people are distracted and overloaded, therefore this impacts on what your customer say about your business – they will not speaking highly of you.

- **Quality and reliability** of product and service delivery – the chances of quality breaches and poor service delivery are much higher with overloaded and distracted people. Safety is also severely compromised.

- **Reputation/brand** – your people are effectively advocates for your business – if they are disenchanted because they perceive they are overworked due to distraction they are certainly not likely to speak highly or encouragingly about your business to others.

**Cultural costs:**

- **ROI** from investing in capability training is compromised by people's ability to learn and take in new information when they are constantly distracted. They are also much more likely to not sustain the learnings and changes as distraction will cause them to revert to old habits.

- Peoples ability to self-regulate is severely compromised when they are distracted – meaning they are less engaged and have poorer relationships with colleagues. Management, co-workers and the customers are likely to be seen as the cause of their distractions. They are more likely to be stressed and take sick leave.

- Distracted people have difficulty with creative and innovative thinking – and are therefore less likely to be able to come up with new ideas and more efficient ways to do things. They will also be more likely to be unrepresentative to others new ideas or creative thinking as they are stuck in problem mode.

- **Leaders and managers** are completely compromised, as by default their roles managing overloaded employee’s is a huge burden. Effectively business leaders and managers are doubly loaded with distraction.

Maybe it would be pertinent to take a fresh look at the CORE cause of the alleged poor leadership – distraction and overload.
THE SOLUTION

To determine the key driver or solution that would really make the biggest difference to productivity on a daily basis, we asked the following question:

‘What is the ONE thing that could help you become more productive in the workplace on a daily basis?’

- these responses add further support to the identified segments ‘Early Adapters’, those who have taken control of their workplace experience and ‘Constrained Defeatist’, those who look to items external to themselves as driving a lack of productivity.

➤ Only 22% of respondents identified a solution that could be implemented or controlled by the individual or self (being More Focus 12% and More Personal Responsibility 10%).

Almost all of the comments were focused on removing ‘the problem’.

“To not have to answer other people’s phones, to not have to answer emails straight away and to not work in an open plan office”

Unsurprisingly the most common response related to email.
Q. How can **Individuals** Improve their Productivity?

**A. Self-Regulation**

“When focussed I can limit external 'noise' and make sure that when critical attention is required I create the appropriate environment”

The **Top 3** self-regulating solutions that respondents identified that could enhance productivity on a daily basis include;

1. **Turning off email / limited access to email throughout the workday i.e. checking emails once in the morning and once in the afternoon.**
   - “I turn my emails and telephone off during a morning session. I then turn them on before lunch and respond and then turn my email off but leave my telephone on during the afternoon. This has helped me tremendously.”

2. **Managing work environment to control distractions related to open plan offices.**
   - “I move to quieter areas or use earphones”
   - “Putting headphones on to block out the sounds of others”

3. **Focus – develop concentration skills and minimise multi-tasking.**
   - “Developing concentration skills for a longer period of time to give 100% focus on specific tasks.”
   - “Being present to each piece of work”
   - “Book time out without distractions”

*We cannot change the world we live in nor control in ‘absolute’ the work environment we are surrounded by.*
Q. How can Organisations Improve the Productivity of their Employees?

A. Empowering Processes that Guide and Promote Self-Regulation

Whilst the most powerful and effective way to enhance productivity is to facilitate self-regulation skills, organisations do also have a role to play when it comes to supporting productivity improvements. The Top 3 solutions that have been identified by respondents include:

1. Decrease emails e.g. email free afternoons,
   "Less use of emails" & "less incoming emails"

2. Fewer meetings and less unproductive meetings e.g. meeting free days or hours
   "Being clear about requiring meetings - what is the purpose; be on time and use the time wisely.”

3. Leadership / management support to be clear on priorities and encourage focused attention.
   "Support to filter out the noise that takes me away from achieving my KPI’s”
   "Better organisation of workloads at management level”

47% of survey respondents represented Senior & Mid Management.

When analysed, the results for this group were largely consistent with that discussed throughout this paper. This group are:

1. Just as overloaded, distracted and unproductive.
2. Held up by many as the solution to problem.

It is this leadership level who can benefit substantially from support organisationally in terms of empowering processes that support, guide and develop leaders’ self-regulation skills and capability.

Rather than giving these leaders another problem to fix, help them model the behaviours that will drive enhanced productivity in the organisation. The benefits will be felt by these leaders, their teams who will be encouraged to take ownership and accountability of their own workplace experience and ultimately the organisation.
What are organisations doing in this space?

*Instituted a no-device policy during some team meetings, to make meetings more efficient.*

*Has implemented ‘no email Friday’ to encourage staff to pick up the phone and solve issues immediately both with clients and colleagues.*

*Google*

*A global IT Services Company, implemented a ‘zero email’ initiative to remove internal email and get people picking up the phone after a study found employees spent 2hrs a day managing their inbox.*

*AmeriBank*

*‘Search Inside Yourself’ is a well-known training for employees that has been held at Google since 2007. The program focuses on among other things, attention training and creating useful mental habits.*

*Intel*

*Worried that their people were not having enough time to think deeply about problems – Intel Corp instituted 4 weekly hours of ‘think time’ where workers are not expected to respond to emails or attend meetings unless it’s urgent.*

**The solution is to twofold:**

Help **Individuals** build self-regulating behaviours so they can build habits that support distraction management.

As **Organisations**, implement cultural change around communication, work environments and workplace flexibility. This may include changes in policy’s to support such change.
SO WHAT? MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR ORGANISATION

The challenge with research can sometimes be: how do we make it relevant and how can it help us in our organisation? So let’s make this simple!

REALITY

➢ Most of your employees are working hard and want to succeed doing the best job they can.
➢ Some of that hard work is ‘wasted’ because they are unable to be productive due to distractions, overload and stress.
➢ The survey results detected respondents conscious awareness of the impact of distract – this is just the ‘tip of iceberg’ – the actually situation is likely to be bigger.

IMPACT

➢ Employee performance is compromised and individuals are frustrated and stressed.
➢ Organisations are paying salaries and burning staff out for seemingly no reason.
➢ This costs Australian Businesses real hard-earned money.

SOLUTION

➢ For businesses to successfully transition to a global workplace managing distractions and work life integration, through a focus on promoting self-regulation by trusting people to drive their own time agenda.
➢ Organisations can set their people up for success and provide a supporting environment to empower self-regulation.
➢ Some companies are already leading the way and experiencing real returns.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE THIS MATTER

1. Share this report (or the short 3 page summary) with everyone you know, and together identify 1 change that will make a difference to your productivity. Self-awareness is the first step to behavioural change.
2. As an organisation – present the results at a lunch and learn to educate your employees on the impact of overload and how they can control this. We can help you with this!

HOW WE HELP ORGANISATIONS MAKE THIS MATTER

1. Calculate the Cost in Your Organisation – You can run our Productivity Impact Tool (PIT) internally to calculate the impact on your organisation.
2. The tool has backend capability to identify solutions and provide direction where you can make a change immediately toward enhancing productivity.
3. We are workplace performance specialists as well as researchers and insights specialists and can assist you in implementing a timely and appropriate development program to achieve the immediate change that the PIT will inform.
4. Most importantly we ensure that any ‘people performance improvement’ process is measured. We measure the impact and ROI after the changes are made, keeping your CFO happy!
SURVEY INSIGHTS – 1 PAGE SUMMARY

PEOPLE ARE WORKING HARD

- 73% people work more hours than paid
- 80% people respond to emails at home
- 61% of people are working 40+ hours a week
- 72% people take work home with them by choice or because it is expected
- Only 39% of people have enough time to complete their work in hours paid

BUSY OR DISTRACTED?

- 55% of people are frequently distracted at work
- Of those frequently distracted only 33% can effectively disregard distractions and get on with work but 56% believe they are productive most of the workday
- Overall only 50% of people can disregard distractions and get on with their work
- Almost 7 in 10 report they spend 8 or fewer hours doing what they are paid to do
- 34% of employees spend one quarter or more of their day doing things other than what they are paid to do
- 44% of people could get their work done in 10% or less time of paid work hours if they could manage all distractions, stay focused on getting the job done, and take the rest of the week off when they completed their work

THE COST TO INDIVIDUALS & ORGANISATIONS

- $1.3 million a year or 2.3 days a month (per employee) is completely unproductive due to stress, overwhelm and overload.
- 25% people are completely unproductive 7+ hours a week
- 47% people are completely unproductive 5+ hours a week

THE TOP 3 THINGS THAT WOULD IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY DAILY ARE:

- 20% people said less distractions
- 17% people said improved resources and systems
- 13% of people identified improved leadership
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY RESPONDENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Respondents</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• 435</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What country do you live in?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• 95% Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1% New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 4% Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 55% Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 45% Male</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2% 18-25</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 29% 26-35</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 35% 36-45</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 26% 46-55</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 8% 56+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Years Working (years)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2% 1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 11% 5-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 35% 11-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 33% 21-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 20% 30+</td>
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This research is the first collaborative project of two unique global thought leaders of human behaviour in the workplace. Their passion to drive real change in Australian businesses, combined with their diverse skills and experience ensure that this dynamic collaboration will bring a new way of thinking to both individuals and leaders of organisations.

**DR LUCIA KELEHER, QPMR, BEHAVIOURAL NEUROSCIENTIST**

Lucia is a leading edge thinker and an expert in human behaviour and in particular helps businesses navigate the new territories of the current day - by ultimately understanding how peoples thinking processes have changed.

Lucia made a revolutionary discovery during her PhD studies about how the human brains survival mechanisms have reacted to the overload of information and ’stuff’ people have to deal with on a daily basis. The most insidious thing is – people ’are unaware of this brain change and ’blame themselves for not being able to stayed focused and succumbing to the tyranny of constant distraction.

Lucia developed the Conquer Brain Overload CBO® program to help people ‘control overload and distraction.

Over the past decade she has trained 100’s of people in the process resulting in a radical change in the way they view themselves. ’It is not something wrong with me that causes me to be constantly distracted – it is the way my brain responds to my environment’.

The key to changing these behaviours permanently is through measuring and reinforcing efforts to master the strategies taught to reverse this brain change default to succumb to distraction. Lucia’s motto is ’If you do not intend to measure it don't do it’. Behaviour change is only successful if measured. To facilitate this she has developed a measurement platform MeasurePeople™

**KATE BOORER, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT & PERFORMANCE SPECIALIST & CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT**

As a little girl, she dreamt of growing up and becoming a high profile dealmaker…. something along the lines of a Trump/Buffet combo only with hair and heels. It is funny where life takes you and how dreams change but seriously, few people dream of growing up to become a slave to the 40-hour workweek, miserable, doing a job they hate. It is the common existence of such misery in Australian workplaces, and the impact it has on the profitability of businesses, that is the driving force behind both Kate’s purpose and passion.

Founder of Employerbility, Kate specialises in both the strategic and practical elements of creating sustainable performance for her clients. Her strong corporate leadership experience and financial acumen together with years of working as a consultant, facilitator and coach integrate to provide a powerful partner who is committed to building the capability of your organisation.

Whether you are looking to gain insights from survey data, build a performance scorecard to measure the people element of your business or, work with your people to facilitate a new level of thinking and performance, Kate will ensure that any investment by your organisation will deliver both the outcomes and ROI you need. Not only that, she will help you measure it!
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND

The Principal Consultants of Integrated Research Advisory Services and Employerbility joined forces to conduct a research project to test a theory about productivity and engagement in Australia.

Our theory based on our decades of consulting experience and observations, academic research and our own observations and desk research lead us to want to test the hypothesis that:

“Australian workers are not so much dis-engaged and unproductive, they are distracted and overloaded which in turn leads to overwhelm and feelings of never having enough time to do all that is required – both at work and outside of work”

The lead principal of Integrated Research Advisory Services is a QPMR (Qualified Practicing Market Researcher) and thus the project was to be run professionally and ethically according to the requirements of the profession.

THE STUDY

Our study of 435 workers self-selected to respond to the survey, thus removing any potential bias with paid respondents as with purchased panels for conducting research. More than 95% of respondents were from ‘corporate’ workplaces and responded to a very brief 12-question survey. We specifically asked participants to answer as honestly as possible on workplace performance and distractions, and we believe the complete randomness and non-biased situation with the way this research was conducted has successfully elicited honest responses.

Additionally we added options for verbatim comments to all the questions in the absence of having conducted qualitative informative research up front. This process paid off with over 1100 comments throughout the questionnaire that has given considerable richness of insights from the results. Hence we are able to go beyond the ‘so what’ with our report.

SAMPLE SIZE

The total sample comprised 435 respondents.

SURVEY ACCURACY

The standard error for the overall sample of 400 would be ±4.91%, at the 95% confidence interval. Put in general terms, this means that if 50% of respondents indicated that they had a particular attitude to an issue, we could expect that between 45.09% and 54.91% of the population would have the same attitude to this issue.

It is important to remember when considering the results, that the standard error for each of the sub-groups is much larger than for the overall results. When considering a sub-group size of 100 for example, the standard error increases to 10%. As a guide, the standard errors for various sub-group sizes within this study are:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBGROUP SIZE</th>
<th>STANDARD ERROR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>± 5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>± 7.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>± 10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>±14.14%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**QUANTATIVE METHODOLOGY**

The total sample comprised 435 respondents, who responded to an online survey and was conducted from throughout March 2013. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent out via the principal researchers networks and beyond. Participation in the survey was via a probability method of self-selection and thus eradicates the possible confounding factor of participants being paid to participate, thus rendering the sample as a more accurate depiction of the population of workers in Australia.

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Survey questions were developed based on the desk research conducted as well as observing ‘parameters’ of productivity measures i.e. hours worked, and required or paid hours worked. The survey was deliberately kept short, 12 questions, and we sequential in terms of building on each other for the purpose of greater clarity with the results.

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*http://www.ey.com/AU/en/Services/Advisory/Pulse_May2013_Reaching-our-305-billion-productivity-potential*
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Or visit www.integratedresearch.com.au

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For more information phone 02 8012 3668
Or visit www.employerbility.com.au