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A Pink Slip for Nine to Five?

In a recent interview with Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin in Mashable, Mr. Page opined that much of civilized society is now at a point where many people don't need to work full time in order to meet basic needs. **"Most people like working, but they'd also like to have more time with their family or to pursue their own interests. So... if you had a coordinated way to just reduce the workweek...then, if you add slightly less employment, you can adjust and people will still have jobs."** ⁽¹⁾ The business world might not be quite ready for the significant cultural, organizational and political shifts required to evolve the workforce in the manner suggested by the Google CEO. Yet, politics aside, from a workplace strategy perspective, this kind of thinking around organizational and cultural change is exactly what companies need to start doing to better prepare for the future.

The Google interview was a welcome affirmation of the research we're doing at Mancini Duffy on the future of the traditional work week. Preliminary results from our year-long, 4-part study align with Mr. Page's conjecture, suggesting that the future of the Knowledge Economy - which, with technology's help has quickly advanced to the Idea Economy - is indeed eroding the traditional model of a 9-5, Monday through Friday work week. In a departure from our 2013 focus on physical workplace characteristics (published in May's column⁽²⁾) our current study is looking at intangibles like time (when and where certain activities are performed) and inspiration, and at elements like place and resources, which, while tangible, can also be virtual and not part of the built office environment. We're asking **what do people really need to do their best work and what does that mean for the workplace?**

The average work day looks like this:

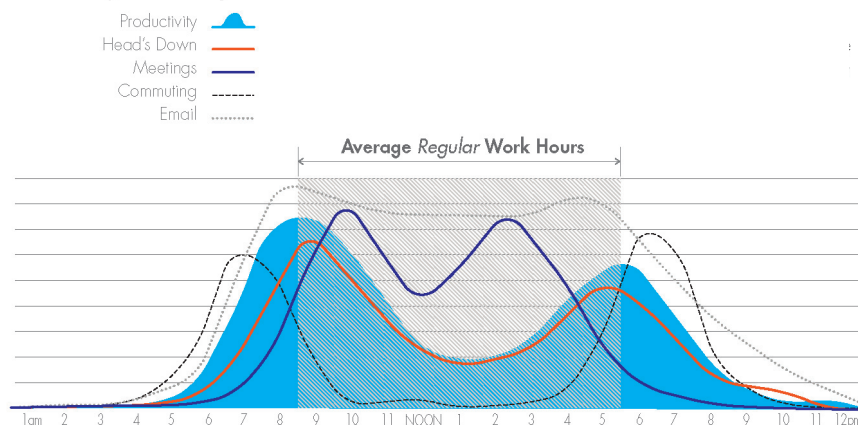


FIGURE 1

Initial findings indicate that employee **productivity peaks at the beginning and end of the day.** Most of the work done at these peak times is head's down, concentrated work (quiet work) such as reading, thinking and corresponding. (Figure 1.) Furthermore, the study shows that meetings, both internal and external, tend to be not only mid-morning and mid-afternoon, but mid-week. In other words, **Mondays are for planning, Fridays are for clean-up, and mid-week is for meetings.**

What this immediately brings to mind is how well these patterns lend themselves to flexible work hours and even flexible work days. How much more productive would we be if we could work from home during these peak periods and apply the time saved by avoiding rush hour commutes to our workday? This wouldn't necessarily mean a shorter work day, but a day (or days of the week) spent in places other than the office. If this is what's really happening, it's no wonder that industry reports of observational studies conducted for clients continue to show that workers, on average, spend no more than 35-40% of their work day at their assigned work location. It would seem then, that for companies struggling with occupancy planning and increasing densification, **the answer lays somewhere among these data points that imply the need for flexibility, whether it's flexible hours, flexible places, or both.**

Priorities differ by generation:

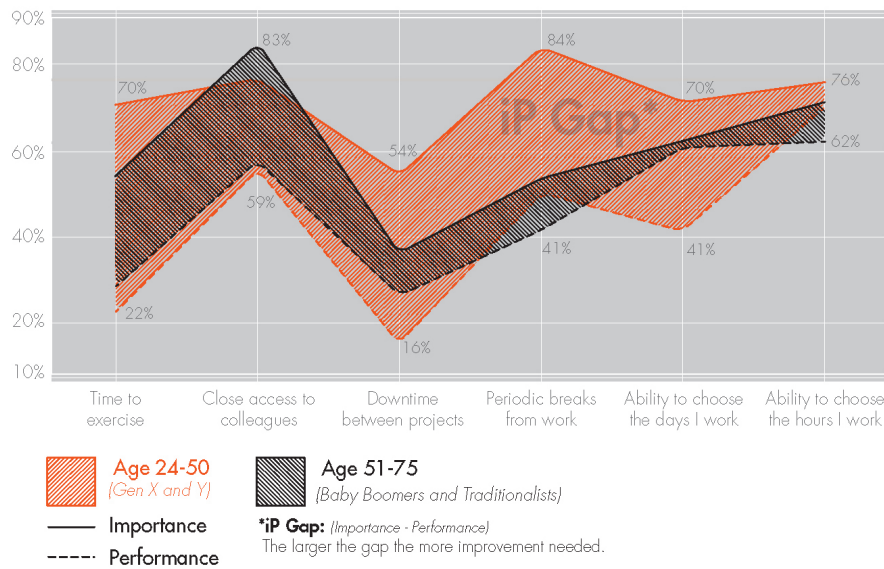


FIGURE 2

Further supporting the concept of flexibility are the differences we found when we split the generations. Not surprisingly, Traditionalists and Boomers towed the line on the traditional work week; in contrast, whether a function of real cultural differences between generations or the general under-employment experienced over the past six years, **Generations X and Y** showed a marked preference for downtime, including taking time for exercise, breaks between projects, and having the ability to choose which days of the week they worked.

Pleasing everyone is tough stuff. Still, because the Idea Economy is all about innovation, companies must find a way to offer the flexibility that will attract, acknowledge and reward the innovators who get a great idea after midnight or in their morning shower, and at the same time provide spaces that support the ideas that emerge when people come together. What makes this more challenging are the seemingly disparate goals of saving real estate, accommodating growth and creating dynamic places where everyone wants to be. As our study unfolds, we'll be working towards some conclusions (and hopefully, solutions) but for now, there's enough data out there - ours and other's - demonstrating how important adaptability will be to future business success. Real, long term solutions will not come from traditional models, but from a willingness to throw away the standards book and start afresh. The business case and the technology are already there to support new models, but driving these solutions home will largely depend upon real organizational change. This presents a challenge, and at the same time, offers an opportunity, for management to manage in new ways; it will be up to them to determine which policies get the pink slip.

(1) Mashable is a British-American news website focusing on technology and social media. View the Google interview here: http://mashable.com/2014/07/07/google-founders-interview-khosla/?utm_cid=mash-com-fb-main-link

(2) "Give the People What They Want," NREI, May 6, 2014



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People are a company's most valuable asset and in today's business environment it is people who make the difference. Our mission is to combine real estate, technology and business processes to create exceptional spaces that empower people to do their best work. We align design solutions with actual business drivers and create performance metrics to establish a feedback loop that continues to inform. This builds agility into the workplace to support the way people work today while enabling its evolution to support the way they will work in the future.



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