

# Workplace Factors That Drive Business Value

Key elements in employee productivity.

In a business environment that is relentlessly competitive, cost-constrained, and demanding ever-faster processes for sensing and responding to threats and opportunities, an employee's time is money. People increasingly demand tools, services, and support infrastructure that collapse process time—time to seek and synthesize information, time to communicate with colleagues and customers, time to procure critical resources, and time to deliver against goals and objectives.



Professional service organizations are particularly adept at equating employee time with value delivered, because time is the fundamental unit of value. Consulting companies, law firms, and other service firms calibrate the value of client engagements in terms of billable hours.

The extent to which a client project meets time budgets will determine its realization of value. An unprofitable engagement is typically the result of deliverables that exceed project schedule and time commitments. A high-performance organization enables employees to maximize productive time, time that is directly related to creating revenue-producing products and services. But how does the workplace contribute to maximizing productive employee time?

## Flexibility



Workplace flexibility empowers employees with choices that minimize unproductive time. For example, to the extent that an employee can choose different work settings for different tasks, flexibility supports more efficient work activity by matching the work location and setting with the task at hand. "Heads-down" research and report writing is best done at home or in a quiet setting that enhances concentration. Collaborative work is best done in-group work settings or in the context of a collaborative application. Large professional services firms use office hoteling in conjunction with telework to enhance workplace flexibility. Portable devices such as laptops, cellular phones, and personal digital assistants, in combination with remote access connectivity, are essential enabling tools of this type of workplace flexibility.

## Navigation



Efficiently navigating the enterprise saves employee time when locating colleagues and managers, identifying skills and expertise, and pinpointing staff groups and their locations in support of employee projects. Web-based tools that combine facilities maps with employee data, including skills and competencies, greatly facilitate navigating the enterprise, which can minimize search time.

## Employee self-service

Employee self-service is a rapidly growing capability in the business-to-employee domain. The extent that self-service conserves, rather than adds to, the employee's productive time can translate into greater employee efficiency, but only if an application clearly accelerates and simplifies employee support (such as expense reporting, travel planning, and supplies ordering). Pushing tedious administrative tasks to the employee impairs, rather than enhances, productive time, so care must be taken to select services that truly simplify and speed up employee support.

## Knowledge management

The professional services industry has perfected the use of knowledge repositories to enhance and speed up the research and client-delivery process. Best practices, engagement histories, templates, proposal documents, and other knowledge capital can be sorted and retrieved via a knowledge management system that combines the enterprise's explicit knowledge repository with a skills database (tacit knowledge). Used effectively, employees can quickly find and aggregate information on customers, engagements, and best practices. This capability leverages employee time and the knowledge capital of the enterprise.



## Help desk

An around-the-clock (24x7) help desk can enhance employee efficiency by solving technical problems in real time. A consolidated help desk that addresses hardware, software, and services problems can provide one-stop shopping for employee support issues regardless of where or when the employee encounters a technical or service problem.

## Workflow tools

Many enterprise applications are now including workflow tools that support and automate work activities and processes. These tools allow the design of specific work processes and support these processes with collaborative functionality, including document management, instant messaging, chat, e-mail, white boarding, and other tools that facilitate employee coordination and collaboration. Web-hosted meeting applications, such as WebX and Placeware, greatly enhance virtual collaboration as well as reduce employee travel time—another source of unproductive time.