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Unlocking Productivity: Working in the UK

Shining a light on the way we work

The future is exciting.

Ready?

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Contents

Length **13** pages

Read time **2** cups of tea

People **3019** surveyed

Foreword

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Today the UK boasts an advanced digital economy, with thriving industries up and down the country and in a range of sectors.

However, despite promising figures around employment and wage growth, there is still more to be done to boost the country's productivity levels.

There are a number of ways we can do this. Developing skills is one, particularly in areas like digital, where we know there are growing gaps in supply and demand.

Enabling smarter working practices through technology is another.

The makeup of every workforce is different, as is what makes individual employees feel more productive. It's important businesses find the right working practices for their business, and balancing people's roles and responsibilities with customer needs is critical to that.

Technology can help strike this balance while playing a critical role in fostering collaboration and teamwork, supporting mobility and unlocking people's productivity potential.

However, despite all of the technology available today, research shows that people don't feel as productive as they could be at work. Less than a third of UK employees rate themselves as 'very productive', and almost a quarter rate themselves as 'unproductive'. A situation that is neither ideal nor sustainable if we are to boost economic performance and industry efficiency.

There is an opportunity for both the private and public sectors to take decisive action and turn things around. To do that, we must embrace technological innovation in a way that will unlock potential, not just at an industry-level but at a human one too.

It's time to rethink the way we work

The purpose of this report is to uncover some of the main drivers of productivity — by seeking out the views and insights of employees across different parts of the country, and across different industries.

While our previous report, 'The Power of Productivity' [1] — which was developed by the London School of Economics (LSE) and commissioned by Vodafone — articulated a top-down view of the productivity problem, here we explore the trends that are working at the grassroots level.

We surveyed the people who understand the productivity struggle on a day-to-day basis: the workers operating on the ground.

In doing so we sought to reveal some specific areas in which businesses can empower employees to be more productive.

Read on to find out what we discovered.

How employees view productivity
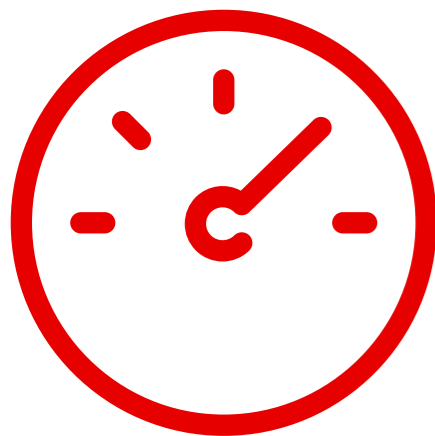
We know there's a productivity puzzle that the UK must solve. But where and how do we start?

We believe the first stage comes from understanding UK productivity trends across the nation, and the Vodafone-commissioned 'Power of Productivity'[2] report by the LSE did just that.

Next, we need an understanding of what's happening on the ground — and in particular, we need to know what employees think about their own productivity, and how that varies in different parts of the country and across industries.

We asked 3,019 employees to rate their productivity out of ten, and 23% admitted to feeling 'unproductive' at work. Using the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures, when we look at how this is reflected across the working population the number of people feeling 'unproductive' at work equates to seven million workers nationwide[3]. The percentage rose to 28% amongst Gen Z employees who gave themselves an 'unproductive' score of 0-6 out of ten.

Looking from an industry perspective, when we asked employees to rate themselves we found the most productive people by industry are construction workers and those in human health and social work roles, with 36% of each group giving themselves 9-10 for productivity.

It turns out that there is a bit of a mismatch between people's perceptions of their own productivity, and what the statistics show.

For instance, the region where people consider themselves the most productive is north of the border in Scotland, where a third of Scottish workers gave themselves a productivity score of 9-10.

But the LSE report showed that London is the most productive region, with productivity at 30% above the UK average[4].

The question is, what actually makes people feel productive?

The LSE report revealed three key levers that can influence productivity; these were management practices, technology and a flexible workforce[5]. And these have been echoed in our study of employees.

51% believe processes at work stop them being productive.

47% blame too many meetings.

42% went as far to reveal that the stress they are under is holding them back.

Evaluate and improve management practices

UK employees are looking for support from management to help them be their best at work. Our employee study found that over half of workers (51%) believe processes at work stop them being productive. Meanwhile, almost the same number (47%) blame too many meetings, and four in ten (42%) went as far to reveal that the stress they are under is holding them back.

Management teams should consider new approaches to the structure of the working day, ensuring it is actually helping employees be as productive as possible. There's also an opportunity to examine the business processes that employees use on a day to day basis. Removing, simplifying or digitising those processes could have a big impact on an individual's ability to be productive.

Embrace Technology

All this is underpinned by technology, as it enables teams to work effectively together and stay connected — in and out of the office environment

Access to technology has a significant impact on employees' opinion of how productive they are, with **80% of those who rated their productivity highly saying they have the right technology for the job.**

And a lack of the right technology can have the reverse effect: actually harming productivity.

Create an agile, flexible workforce

A more engaged, productive and responsive workforce can be achieved through supporting different employees' working patterns and preferences.

Digital has transformed every industry. Getting people together is important for fostering collaboration and teamwork in a competitive environment where being able to work in a fast, agile fashion is highly valued for business success.

Where it's not possible or practical to get people together physically to complete tasks, there needs to be the right technology in place to enable employees to virtually work together and collaborate.

Flexible working came out top in our survey as a factor that can make people feel more productive, with 71% saying it's important.

Regardless, creating a sense of team and belonging is key, wherever people work. In fact, 64% of employees say the team around them matters to their productivity.

Every business will have a different idea of what flexible working means for them. For business leaders and HR teams, it's important to think about the needs of the customer and the business as a whole, and balancing that with people's desire to not always be required to work from one fixed location.

For example, for some – such as field engineers and sales executives – mobility is essential. Indeed, although more than half (58%) of all UK employees say their employer's office or building is their primary place of work, 43% say they sometimes work from a customer or project site.

Having the right technology to be able to work from different locations when required by personal circumstances or the role a person holds remains a vital component of how productive employees are able to be.

Every business is different, and it's important to have all the tools in place to allow people to plug into the central team from wherever or whenever they need to.

Businesses need to establish smarter ways of working that best suit how their business functions within its particular industry, and in a way that will empower employees to best serve the needs of customers.

Confessions of a multi-generational workforce
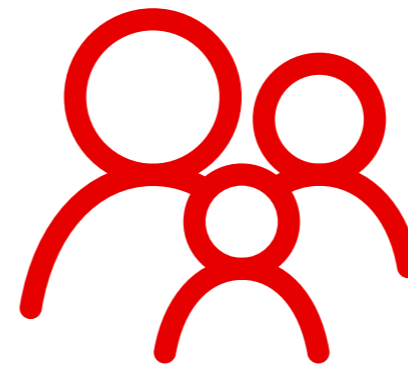
Most businesses today have up to four different generations in the workplace at the same time.

For the purpose of this report, we've grouped them into the following age ranges:

- **Gen Z** (born after 1995)
- **Gen Y** (born 1981-1995)
- **Gen X** (born 1961-1980)
- **Baby boomers** (born 1945-1960)

These different age groups will naturally have varying working preferences and technology skills, requiring management to consider a variety of learning and developmental needs, work styles and skills to ensure that everyone can work together as effectively as possible.

A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to achieve this, and there are some key differences between each generation to bear in mind when it comes to productivity.

Teams

The people we work with matter. After all, we spend more time with them than you do our own friends and family, and if a group of people click in the right way, they can inspire and motivate each other to do brilliant things.

When it comes to productivity, young people are particularly affected by their colleagues.

74% of Gen Z employees said their team matters and is the most important factor in making them more productive, compared to 60% of baby boomers.

63% of Gen Z employees feel they benefit most from learning and development.

In our survey **61%** of Gen Z employees said the quality of the technology they use makes them more productive on a daily basis.

Training

63% of Gen Z employees feel they benefit most from learning and development, too.

But don't let this detract from the importance of training people across every age group. As skill requirements evolve, it's important for employees who have been in the same role for long periods of time to be able to retrain in new areas.

And with new digital technologies coming into the workplace all the time, it's vital that all employees, regardless of generation, have the skills and the training that will enable them to use, and get the most out of, technology at work.

Equally, there is a huge amount that different age groups can learn from each other. Mentorship can work across generations.

Technology and devices

Again, younger workers link technology and productivity more strongly, arguably because they've grown up with technology, and are so called 'digital natives'. In our survey 61% of Gen Z employees said the quality of the technology they use makes them more productive on a daily basis.

With it ingrained in their personal lives, they've entered the working world with certain expectations around the way technology should serve them to fit with their own preferred ways of working with colleagues and help them produce their best work — expectations that simply didn't exist when their older colleagues began their careers.

Workplace culture

One point on which 54% of employees across all age groups agree is the importance of workplace culture when it comes to a productive workforce.

We also know that the way we apply technology and the way we work can have a positive impact on engagement and culture. Having the right technology for the job makes employees more likely to be satisfied at work, having implications for attracting and retaining employees with valuable skills.

The roaming office

We need to make it easier for employees to connect and collaborate whether they're in the office, at home or on the move. Enabling flexible working increases employee satisfaction, and helps attract, nurture and manage talent; indeed **45% of employees said their ideal employer would have a flexible working policy.**

Mobility is so integral to the way we work now that we need technology to keep us connected to systems, people and information. Giving employees access to information, applications, and people across one platform makes productivity-enhancing working behaviours possible.

Every business is different, but establishing an 'anywhere office' means businesses can allow for the movement of people as it fits with their roles, the objectives of the business and the needs of customers. As the business grows, evolves, and transforms, by using technology to facilitate an agile workforce, employees can keep up their productivity even in the face of great change.

Transforming the commute

Flexible working means so much more than just working from home, and for some of the 82% of us that commute as part of our day-to-day that means working on the move. Employers need to ensure they're equipping employees with the tools they need to make the most of that time should they wish to.

While 50% of employees spend thirty minutes or more travelling from their home to their place of work and back each day, nearly a Fifth (22%) say their journey allows them to fit more work into the day.

When we compare private and public sector workers, those in the private sector (24%) are more likely to work during their commute than those in the public sector (15%). While 32% of private sector employees are relying on technology to help them work during the commute, as we saw earlier in this report less than half (46%) of public sector workers are satisfied with the technology they have available to them, suggesting that investing in devices could enable public sector employees to get more out of their day.

A massive 29% said access to technology – is what helps them to work on their journey.

Despite advances in technology that make working on the move easy, which could in turn bolster productivity, the previous report from the LSE suggests a reduction in commuting time could also have a positive impact.

For some employers, this could mean enabling people to work from another location other than a central office – perhaps by creating local 'hubs' to stop people having to commute all the way in to a central location, or even enabling people to work from shared working spaces, or a customer's premises.

Essentially, the key is to find a balance between where people need to be to do their job best, and how their journey to that location impacts upon their productivity.

The tech that defines our working life

Everything we've discussed in this report so far – from making sure the working environment and culture fosters collaboration to making the commute more productive – relies on having the right technology in place to make it happen.

The workplace needs technology to thrive. It needs digital tools that remove barriers and empower people to do their very best work every day.

And those who do have the right technology to do their job effectively are more satisfied with their job than those who don't. More than half put this down to the technology helping them be more productive, while many cite working flexibility as a benefit.

But as previously mentioned, this isn't just about the positive impact of particular technologies and processes – it's about what could happen if businesses and organisations don't keep up.

More than two fifths (42%) of employees already say poor technology is stopping them being as productive as they would like to be, and this figure increases when you look at larger or London-based organisations.

This is particularly critical in an age where responsiveness has become a key differentiator in business. Customers expect immediate answers, and employees need to be equipped to deliver that level of responsiveness. It's vital, therefore, that both the technology and connectivity enables a swift response to customers and colleagues.

> **More than two fifths (42%) of employees already say poor technology is stopping them being as productive as they would like to be, and this figure increases when you look at larger or London-based organisations.**

Final thoughts

Digital transformation: the time is now

The figures above leave no uncertainty as to the importance of technology in the workplace. Without it, employees simply won't perform at their best, and therefore neither will a business.

The simple truth is this:

75%
of business managers are not aware of the technologies that could improve productivity[6], so it's clear that many organisations want to transform but not as many know how to do it.

Those that can truly get to grips with digital technology and invest in it now will surely stand out in their markets in the coming years.

Ann Sheehan,
UK Enterprise Director,
Vodafone UK

It's clear there's more to do to rethink the way we work.

The workforce is changing and has been for some time. The UK is an incredible destination for businesses to thrive, and looking at how we can encourage employees to be more productive at a grass roots level could be what gives us a competitive edge on the world stage. We are constantly connected in every aspect of our lives, and work is no different. The powerful technology we have access to means we have the opportunity to adapt working practices, flex management styles and equip workers in a way that fits with both the priorities of the business and needs of the customer.

At the same time, the UK workforce is more diverse in age than ever before, and from what we've seen in this report there is an exciting opportunity to reap the benefits of upskilling and retraining employees throughout their careers. It's also important to think about the teams people are operating in, the culture in the workplace, and where people feel they need to be to do their best work. Businesses should be proactive in balancing the needs of a multigenerational workforce, providing targeted training where relevant, and ensuring technology is serving their people in the most productive way.

Tackling these challenges requires more than technology, of course. On a broader scale it's about transforming processes and organisational culture to accommodate a new approach to the way we do business, and indeed the way we live in general. Combining a rethink around technology, working practices and management practices can increase productivity by as much as 20% according to the LSE report[7]. With competition in the marketplace for customers and talent higher than ever, we need to take action. A change in the way we work is already happening. There is no doubt about that.

Now it's over to you.

If you'd like you to ensure that your business is making the most of digital technologies to unlock your employees' full potential, Vodafone is here to help. Together, we'll work toward an exciting and more productive future for a digital UK.

Methodology

About Bryter

Bryter work for the world's top telecommunications, technology, gaming and healthcare organisations.

It utilises innovative qualitative and quantitative techniques, together with advanced analytics to deliver insights that enable clients to navigate and understand the global landscape.

Bryter's clients are spread across five continents, delivering research studies that have covered over 50 countries. Bryter's work allows companies to make the most of growth opportunities, through research based insight and consultancy.

About Vodafone UK

Vodafone UK partners with businesses of all sizes – from start-ups and small businesses to the largest companies and the public sector.

The company has worked with UK businesses for over 30 years, starting out as a mobile provider and becoming one of the UK's leading total communications partners.

It provides a range of voice and data services, secure communications infrastructure, fixed and call centre capability, unified communications and Internet of Things technologies and was the first mobile phone operator to offer a truly converged service for fixed and mobile.

For more information, please visit: www.vodafone.co.uk

This report is based on the findings from 3,019 online surveys completed during May 2017. Quotas were used to ensure robust and representative sample sizes of employees across genders, regions, industries, ages and business size.

The final data was weighted to be nationally representative of the UK workforce.

The sample includes both full and part-time workers.

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