

No more nine to five? Technology liberates workers to think creatively about tomorrow's work

Submitted by: AUGUST ONE COMMUNICATIONS

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London, UK - Friday 17th October 2003 - New research conducted by MORI and released by Microsoft today shows that workers have faith that the technology available to organisations in the next five years will help them do their jobs better and use their time more flexibly.

47% of workers agreed that in the future, technology would free up their time to do more enjoyable things, against 12% who strongly disagreed.

52% of workers also wanted in future to be able to control the hours they spend working, by only working when appropriate (such as later in the business day if much of the work is driven by contact with people in different time zones around the world), as opposed to working the traditional five days a week. Moreover, 75% wanted a four-day working week.

In September, whilst the quantitative MORI research was being conducted, Microsoft brought together three working groups, made up of representatives from industry bodies, Government, small business, human resources and information technology departments, to look at current research and knowledge gaps around the use of technology in work and the social and business issues that exist. The groups concluded that employers of all sizes would face significant challenges in responding to these changing working practices, especially in the management of and communication within more disparate workforces.

This quantitative and qualitative research forms the first phase of Microsoft's tomorrow's work, a long-term programme of academic study into how work is going to change in the next five years and how organisations in both the public and private sectors will need to respond to the challenges that new working practices will create.

TUC Deputy General Secretary Frances O'Grady, who took part in one of the Microsoft working groups, said: "We're all working longer than ever before. But it doesn't have to be this way. The idea that longer hours lead to greater productivity is simply a myth. You only have to look to Europe to see that workers there put in significantly less hours yet their economies are by and large more productive than ours. Achieving a better balance between work and home isn't some lofty ideal we should maybe try to achieve one day, but something we must make a priority. Workers whose employers are forward thinking enough to allow them to work flexibly will be more content in their jobs, more productive and have happier families."

Commenting on these studies, Dr Carsten Sorensen of the London School of Economics, said: "Information workers are generally more and more involved in creating their own horizontal networks by means of a myriad of meetings, emails, mobile phone conversations, and circulated documents. Applying information technology to allow flexible choice of work setting makes up more flexible organisations. But flexibility works both ways, and people are now demanding that the increased flexibility of work also can be designed by themselves and not only by the organisation. "

Neil Laver, Group Marketing Manager at Microsoft Limited explains: "UK companies need to change the way in which they manage, motivate and support their Information Workers , otherwise they're in danger of squandering productivity with a consequent impact on business performance. We feel that there is some important work to do here to plug knowledge gaps about the way in which UK plc operates and this is why we have launched tomorrow's work."

As part of the tomorrow's work study, Microsoft announced that it would be commissioning a number of individual academic research projects to explore specific areas that were identified as a priority by the working groups. The results of these studies will be made available throughout 2004.

Continues Neil Laver: "Nearly 50% of workers believe that company policy will be a barrier to realising this vision of a more flexible workforce, and a similar proportion believes that Government support for flexible working initiatives will be critical in promoting a better work-life balance. Through further academic study, we aim to bring clear guidance and support for organisations and individuals to strike a better work-life balance in future. Technology is obviously a key part in this transformation, but there are also some other significant variables which need to be addressed at the same time."

Organisations involved in the tomorrow's work working groups, which defined the focus areas, included the Department of Trade and Industry, Trades Union Congress, the London School of Economics, the Work Foundation, Accenture, BP, Avis, Halfords and John Lewis. Organisations interested in participating in future should contact.

tomorrow's work is one part of a wider Microsoft commitment to promote new research into work and productivity. The Work Foundation's iSociety project – supported by Microsoft – will publish a report at the end of November on the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in transforming the workplace.

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Notes to Editors

MORI interviewed a nationally representative quota sample of 1,001 adults including 611 workers, aged 16+ in Great Britain. Interviews were carried out using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing), between 19 - 21 September 2003. Data have been weighted to reflect the known national population profile.

For further information on the MORI Survey please contact Alnoor Samji (alnoor.samji@mori.com) or Nathan Burrough (nathan.burrough@mori.com) on 0207 347 300.

About the TUC

The TUC is the voice of Britain at work. With 70 affiliated unions representing nearly seven million working people from all walks of life, we campaign for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad. For more information about the TUC, please visit www.tuc.org.uk. The TUC Press office number is: 0207 467 1248 or email media@tuc.org.uk

About the LSE

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is the world's leading social science institution for teaching and research. A 'laboratory of the social sciences', the School's academic

profile spans a wide range of disciplines, from Economics, International Relations, Government and Law, to Sociology, Information Systems, and Accounting and Finance. Teaching and research are conducted through 18 departments and more than 30 Research Centres and Institutes. LSE has nearly 7,000 full-time students and around 750 part-time students. Of these, 38 per cent come from the UK, 18 per cent from other European Union countries and 44 per cent from more than 120 countries worldwide. Around 48 per cent are women and 52 per cent are postgraduates. For more information about the LSE, please visit www.lse.ac.uk, or contact the press office at pressoffice@lse.ac.uk or 0207 955 7060

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and Internet technologies for personal and business computing. The company offers a wide range of products and services designed to empower people through great software -- any time, any place and on any device.

Microsoft is a founding member of the Information Work Productivity Council (IWPC), a global project to explore how organisations can improve productivity through technology enhancements and other business tools and practices.

Microsoft is also a supporter of iSociety, a Work Foundation project that identifies 'deep impact' changes brought about by the widespread diffusion of ICT into our lives. More information can be found at <http://theworkfoundation.com/research/isociety/index.jsp> or by calling 07932 690 746.

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