

Offices: An archaic concept?

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Picture this: you're sitting at your work station, with a dozen e-mails, a report and a deadline to attend to... but first coffee. Now you're at the coffee station waiting on the water to boil and a thought invades your mind: "A smoke break would great." You eventually get back to your desk with every intention to tackle the day's work, but you're distracted by your colleagues having a heated discussion about nothing and everything... and then the phone rings: your manager wants the latest status report. *Damn!* An email comes through, a meeting invite. Suddenly it's 11am, an hour till lunch and you haven't *reaaaaally* started with your work day. Where has the time gone?



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I recently watched a TED Talk entitled "[Managers and Meetings](#)" and the basic premise here is that the biggest time wasters and hurdles to productivity are managers and meetings. Jason Fried describes how people recount their most productive spaces to be anywhere **but** the office, and productive periods often fall outside of the normalised 9-5. Examples include a coffee shop, home, library, even the subway aka Gautrain.

Often time's people have been sitting at their desk all day, but haven't been productive and this leads to either working late or taking work home. Fried explains that the reason people prefer these spaces is because they actually *get work done uninterrupted*.

On face value, either of these spaces looks like the hub of distraction, but Fried argues that these are welcomed distractions: at your own peril. You *choose* to take a break, or to reach for your phone or to check your social media, as opposed to the office where interruptions are both inevitable and out of your control.

My personal preference is coffee shops; the noise is just far enough in the distance for me to be able to concentrate on the task at hand. No one knows me personally therefore I can count on a conversation (read small talk) free work flow. Furthermore, there are no looming meetings on the horizon. Fried notes that organisations don't realise the productivity time-stealers meetings are.

The general thought is that an hour-long meeting steals an hour of productivity. Contextualised: an organisation with 10 employees in an hour long meeting loses 10 hours of productivity. What an apt observation, particularly because the usual topics discussed in a meeting could easily be communicated in a memorandum.

Ye olde office

So it's clear that I believe offices are an archaic concept. I feel they are counter-productive spaces and I believe the systematic approach to productivity is something which needs reviewing.

What I have gathered is that managers have an irrational fear that not seeing their people equated to the conclusion that their people are not working. Poor managers tend to micro-manage, clock watch and measure productivity by the amount of **time** the employee has put into a task.

The traditional model of measuring productivity is flawed. Managers should be utilising the exercise of control over **deliverables**, not **time**. In other words, it shouldn't matter where and how the work happens, just that it happens to the expected standards and within the required time frames. In many corporations, long hours are often encouraged and rewarded with little consideration to the measure of the productivity.

The move from the industrial age necessitates an evolution in the concept of work from the rigid model. In a world where the workforce is fast being dominated by Millennials, these traditional work practises are defunct.

The PwC study "[Millennials at Work](#)" describes that although Millennials expect to work hard, they don't necessarily wish to do so whilst sitting all day in a bland cubicle. The technological pandemic allows work to be performed anywhere and anytime. Millennials find that the office environment and rigid working hours are increasingly suffocating and constraining to both creativity and productivity.

What they want

What do Millennials seek? What is the new face of the concept of workplace landscape? Flexi-time. Millennials seek an environment where it's not the time that is measured, but the deliverables. Organisations need to move towards models where they provide clear targets and deadlines and use these as measures of productivity rather than the rigid 9-5 work day which breeds complacency.

“Set them free: Millennials want flexibility. They work well with clear instructions and concrete targets. If you know what you want done by when, why does it matter where and how they complete the task? Give them the freedom to have a flexible work schedule. Does it matter if they work from home or a coffee shop if that's where they are most productive? Set deadlines and if they meet them, don't worry so much about their tactics and the time they clock in and out.” Vineet Nayar
Vice Chairman and CEO, HCL Technologies, India ”

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