



# Personal Productivity and Organizational Efficiency Whitepaper

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## Executive Summary

Millions of people use office productivity tools. In spite of automated systems, lot of work still involves manual handling of spreadsheets, presentations and documents. Although most work is happening without any problem, each one of us has learnt these skills largely by trial and error. Due to this, the methods used for getting day-to-day work are far from efficient. There is a huge scope for improvement.

The problem is that nobody has noticed this great opportunity.

A whopping [5 million person-days of time and effort are wasted](#) by employees in organizations worldwide every single day.

This whitepaper discusses the personal productivity challenge, the opportunity and the methodology to enhance it.

## Personal Productivity v/s Business Automation

Organizational efficiency is a sum total of individual employee productivity and business automation. Most companies have already invested a large amount of time and money on business process re-engineering and automation.

In spite of business automation, certain activities still require manual work. These include activities like handling mail, generating reports, creating presentations, analyzing information



and so on. Expertise of individual employee determines how such work is completed. Most employees spend a substantial part of their time (40 to 80%) on this type of manual work.

Although we call it “Manual Work”, it does involve using common products like Microsoft Office, MS Project, Mobile devices and so on.

As most of the work is happening without any problems, we feel that all employees must be doing it the right way. Unfortunately, most of the employees have never undergone a comprehensive job specific training on using the Office products most effectively.

Most of us have learnt MS Office and similar products on our own, by trial and error. What we do not realize that even though are able to deliver work, the method that we are using may not be the most efficient one.

## **Total Quality and Personal Productivity**

All organizations are always striving to increase profitability by enhancing quality in all areas of business management. Many management techniques are available to improve quality and efficiency on an ongoing basis.

The underlying process is a simple one.

1. Understand how a particular set of activities are performed (for example, the manufacturing process or the claims reimbursement process or supply chain).
2. Find out areas of improvement or bottlenecks
3. Find ways of minimizing effort / automating activities / improving processes
4. Implement the improved method across the organization
5. Repeat this methodology on an ongoing basis

Unfortunately, this well-known and proven method of improving quality and business is NEVER applied to the most common activity performed by all white-collar employees. The work these employees do using Office productivity tools!

Why is this area never audited, why has nobody tried to find better ways of managing day to day work which thousands of employees do ?

The answer is very simple. Everyone thinks that he or she is working using the most efficient methods! Unfortunately, reality is much more disturbing.

In reality, the chances of finding the most efficient method by using by trial and error is almost zero in the long term.

In short, everyone is working ... work is happening ... so nobody thinks there is any cause for alarm.



The negative impact of working in a non-optimal manner is completely overlooked in corporate circles worldwide.

## **Pitfalls of typical productivity enhancement initiatives**

Many organizations do have some initiatives to enhance productivity. However, most of these initiatives lead to short term and minimal improvement. The reason is that the focus, methodology and quality of skill enhancement initiative itself ignore the base problem.

Typical hands-on training programs are ineffective because the content is not customized to the needs of participants. Further, training is usually conducted for a mixed group of participants, coming from differing departments and roles. Therefore, the features shown during the training program may not be equally relevant / appealing to the participants.

Elearning programs are technically appealing, but most users do not want to read lengthy on-screen manuals / presentations.

The most important hindrance is that participants are expected to grasp generic technology / feature knowledge during the training programs and apply this to their jobs on their own. Most participants do not have the time, creativity or patience to do so. Thus, they end up grasping and using a very small portion of the overall feature set covered.

All this leads to a depressingly low feature utilization percentage (4-10% of available feature set).

## **The myth of Basic and Advanced**

Many users and educators often tend to divide features and training programs as basic and advanced. However, they do not realize that each feature has a relevant purpose for which it was designed.

Classifying users as basic ensures that they will never know about features that are thought of as advanced, even though they may need these to complete their work efficiently.

In reality, a feature is neither basic nor advanced. It is either useful or irrelevant to a given person's job profile. The problem is that most training approaches never even attempt to map the job profile and feature set.

## **Inefficient work is an accepted practice**

Unfortunately, the Office tools are so feature rich that you can get the same work done using many different methods. Most users find one of these methods by trial and error or by asking colleagues. We then conveniently assume that the method is the ONLY and the BEST method.



All this happens subconsciously, without any active thinking! This way, further exploration for increasing efficiency is never even thought of as a necessary step.

If you try to give the same work to different persons in the same organization or team, you will be surprised to note that everyone used a different method. With little extra effort, it is potentially possible to conduct such audits for the most critical and common activities and find the most efficient / fastest method used. This method can then be propagated to all users. This is feasible.

However, it has a fundamental problem. The problem is that the fastest observed method may still NOT be the most efficient way of getting the work done. This may sound incredible / unbelievable. Unfortunately (or fortunately), it is true.

Because everyone has found his or her own method by trial and error, the real question is “Who will find the best possible method?”

To find the best possible method you need persons with high level of expertise. In the context of productivity tools, this expertise means understanding and mastery over ALL features and their business application in a customized manner.

Unfortunately, such persons with such expertise are very few. Gaining such an expertise is not technically difficult. With a booming IT work force base, it is certainly not difficult to create a large number of such experts. However, gaining this level of expertise does require substantial effort and career focus. Sadly, most IT Professionals do not consider a career based upon Office products as an acceptable option!

Therefore, due to shortage of expertise in the market, this area of personal productivity enhancement is at best an unwillingly kept secret.

### **Unnoticed inefficiency**

As most of the employees, decision makers and business owners are at the same level of skill set (trial and error based); nobody really knows that there are much faster and effective ways of working possible. Therefore, as long as the work is done, nobody cares which method was used.

However, once the most appropriate method is demonstrated, the same people wonder how they could live with such an inefficient way of working for so many years!

Let us try to quantify this problem.

1. Assume that most employees who work on PC or laptop use it for 8 hours every day



2. Also assume that, during this time, they work with Office products only for 3 hours
3. Now, based upon our experience in coaching thousands of people, we can safely say that out of these 3 hours, at least 30-45 minutes of time can be easily saved by imparting the right skill set (showing them more efficient ways of getting their regular work done)
4. Now multiply 30 minutes a day with number of working days and number of all employees in the world... the number is astounding!
5. How do you know how many people work on Office every day worldwide?  
For want of a better method, here is a simple estimation:
  - a. Microsoft has sold Office to 400 million users
  - b. Let us assume that only 20% - that is 100 million use Office every day.
  - c. Therefore, we are talking about a **daily wastage of 5 million person-days** of time and effort every day! (See Table 1)
  - d. Of course, all these person-days are wasted in terms of productive output. Nevertheless, all companies are still paying their employees for this time. Imagine the monetary wastage associated with that.

### Estimate of Time Wasted Worldwide

| Parameter                                   | Value         | Unit         |
|---|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Official users of Office worldwide</b>   | 400,000,000   | users        |
| <b>% Effective users per day</b>            | 20            | %            |
| <b>Effective users per day</b>              | 80,000,000    | users        |
| <b>Time wasted per person per day</b>       | 30            | minutes      |
| <b>Time wasted worldwide per day</b>        | 2,400,000,000 | minutes      |
| <b>Hours wasted worldwide per day</b>       | 40,000,000    | hours        |
| <b>Person-Days wasted worldwide per day</b> | 5,000,000     | person days  |
| <b>Average working days per year</b>        | 200           | Days         |
| <b>Person-days wasted per year</b>          | 1,000,000,000 | person days  |
| <b>Person-years wasted per year</b>         | 2,777,778     | person years |

### Suggested approaches

This is a very big problem and therefore, the solution, although technically easy and apparent, is operationally complex.

The steps involved here:

1. Global level
  - a. Creating awareness



- b. Global skill development
- 2. Organizational level
  - a. Creating awareness at highest stakeholder level
  - b. Creating and delivering role based training content
  - c. Providing ongoing access to
- 3. Individual level
  - a. Changing the mindset
  - b. Imparting skills of proactive, ongoing learning
  - c. Using productivity enhancement as a competitive tool for career growth