



Overhauling a culture of 'presenteeism' at work





Executive summary

Today's young professionals have grown up as digital natives. They know how to harness the latest technology and use it to improve their performance at work. Those young professionals are tomorrow's business leaders and their skill-sets will help to propel Ireland on its journey to becoming a true technological leader and innovator.

However, there is a stumbling block that's obstructing the path of our young digital leaders. Our research shows that Irish professionals feel restricted by outdated working cultures and policies that stifle growth and development.

This trend can best be summarised as a mounting culture of 'presenteeism' amongst organisations in Ireland.

Traditionally, 'presenteeism' refers to those who choose to work while sick or unwell. But the definition now encompasses a generation of young people who feel they must fake the extent of their workloads in order to win favour with their superiors.

Our extensive research of Irish office workers – disclosed in this report – reveals that 'presenteeism' now accounts for those who feel that working long hours at their desk is the key to career progression and praise from management at work.

The drivers of this negative trend are rooted in the most recent global downturn, which triggered economic uncertainty, pressure for profit and high levels of youth unemployment. But we cannot continue to allow these external trends to damage morale and working standards in Irish organisations.

As a company that is passionate about how technology can transform the workplace, we hope that this research will help companies maximise the potential in their leaders of the future.

Marking the launch of Ricoh's Growth Through Workstyle Innovation campaign, we have used this research to develop industry recommendations that will help employers ensure their employees reach their true potential. From embracing technology to working closer with the government, only by committing to positive change can Ireland unearth its full economic and digital potential.

Phil Keoghan, Chief Executive Officer, Ricoh UK and Ireland

Freeing professionals from a culture of 'presenteeism'

Ricoh is committed to using technology to bring the modern workplace into the future and enable individual workstyles to flourish. We wanted to learn how outdated office cultures are preventing workers from reaching their full potential.

The reluctant adoption of flexible working initiatives has the largest impact on young professionals, most of whom are well-versed in digital technologies and devices such as smart-phones and tablets. As digital natives, this age group has grown accustomed to consuming content and completing tasks through digital channels – whether at home or on-the-go.

A UK report from the Centre for Economics and Business Research concluded that greater flexible

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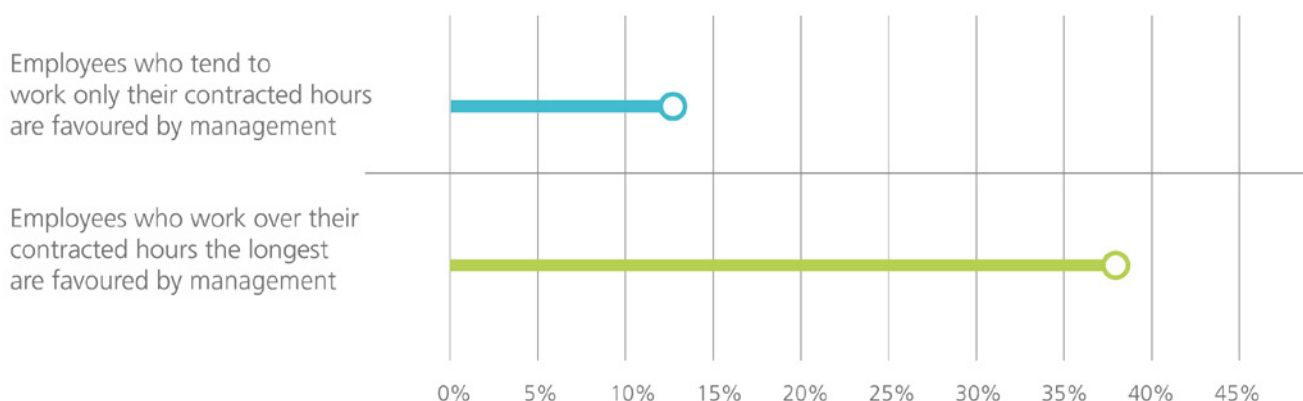
working could add £11.5 billion annually to the UK economy and save workers £7.1 billion through reduced commuting costs and over half-a-billion hours of travel time. While this research was carried out in the UK, it is safe to assume that many millions of euro would be saved in Ireland, too.

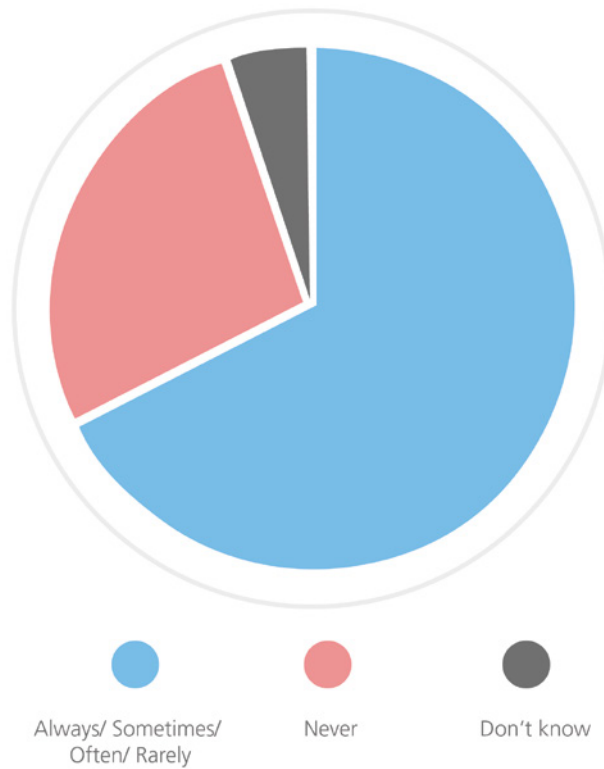
The report went on to claim that flexible working cultures have the potential to encourage the economically inactive or unemployed to return to work and thus, boost GDP significantly.

Yet, many companies are still out of sync. Our research - carried out by YouGov - has revealed that 37 per cent of Irish workers believe their bosses favour staff that work beyond their contracted hours, regardless of the results they produce.

This is a startling statistic that reveals just how impeded employees still feel by today's outdated working culture. Individuals are rewarded by old-fashioned metrics such as how long they've been 'clocked in', as opposed to the output and quality of their work.

Generally speaking which ONE of the following best describes your current workplace?





How often, if at all, do you stay in the office for longer than your contracted hours in order to appear to be working harder?

Young people already face a significant challenge to secure meaningful employment in Ireland, with youth unemployment currently standing at approximately 15 per cent . Getting those young people into meaningful employment is only the first step. We must then ensure that our working environments are optimised in order to support them to perform to the best of their ability.

However, our research has revealed that 80 per cent of Irish professionals have admitted to 'faking' the extent of their workloads by staying late at the office beyond their contracted hours – solely to secure positive feedback from senior staff members.

This type of culture is at odds with the way most young professionals are geared up to work. Our workplaces are failing to reflect modern environments and are out of touch with emerging technology trends.

Young professionals are eager to impress and move up the career ladder at speed and will therefore naturally seek the most productive and innovative method to complete tasks.

Having grown up in the digital era, this culture of embracing technology to enhance productivity appears to be locking horns with more traditional work-styles. Only by educating employers can we unlock

our next generation of leaders from the shackles of a 'presenteeist' culture at work and truly foster innovation and positive change.

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Analogue workspaces in the digital age

Getting onto the career ladder is one of the toughest challenges for the next generation. To tackle this significant problem, both businesses and relevant government bodies must collaborate closely.

But as we have already outlined in this report, getting into work is only the beginning. Fostering future economic growth and individual prosperity requires organisations to invest in the development and skills of their workforces. Employers must provide adequate training, support and review processes to guide employees throughout their careers.

Ireland is on the cusp of a digital revolution, enhanced by the promise of super-fast broadband reaching 500,000 Irish homes and businesses by 2020 under the National Broadband Plan³. Competition in the technology sector is likely to dominate the agenda, both in terms of providing services and attracting talent.

Despite the vital role that technology will play in Ireland's economic future, Irish enterprises are slow to embrace technology within the workplace. Our survey found that 30% of Irish professionals believe regularly working away from

the office could damage their career progression – despite advances in collaborative technology and unified communications systems.

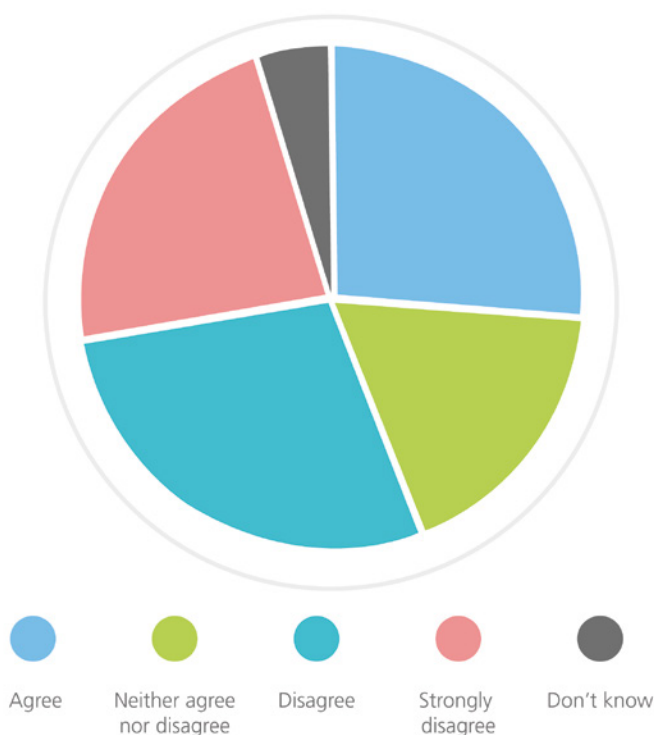
At Ricoh, we believe that using the right technology, flexible working should be encouraged and this perception should be reversed. If our employees can perform their role optimally without wasting time and natural resources on unnecessary travel, then why should we deny them of that opportunity?

It is this outdated culture that stifles innovation, rather than harnessing it. The old saying that 'good ideas breed in the coffee

shop and die in the boardroom' has never seemed more apt.

A recent global study from Vodafone found that some 75 per cent of worldwide enterprises now have a form of tech-enabled working policy⁴ in place, with eight out of 10 of those reporting significant improvements in productivity.

With senior staff members claiming to acknowledge the benefits of building a flexible work environment, there seems to be a disparity between the sentiments of business leaders and that of the workers on the 'front line'.



To what extent, do you agree with the below statements: 'Regularly working away from the office could damage my career progression.'

Today, young people enter the workplace with significant experience of communicating and working across different channels.

They can use multiple digital devices and are keen to use technology to improve productivity and enable them to deliver high quality

work. Employers must be proactive by building future-proofed tech-enabled working policies that

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harness their young workforce's digital skills and expertise. By embracing a 'working anywhere' culture, business leaders can create more enjoyable and productive workplaces.

Bridging the gap between employers and the government

Many countries, such as Australia, the US and UK, have legislation to facilitate flexible working. However, the Irish government has yet to put any framework in place. Our research shows that Irish professionals want legislation that will allow them to define their own workstyles, rather than have it dictated to them. Some 56 per cent of Irish professionals want to see the government do more to enable flexible working and 63% want the government to educate employers on the business benefits it can bring.

Indeed, increased flexibility doesn't just benefit employees; it can help drive profits. Our survey

found that 45 per cent of respondents believe that working away from the office would allow them to meet clients more easily, leading to increased sales generation.

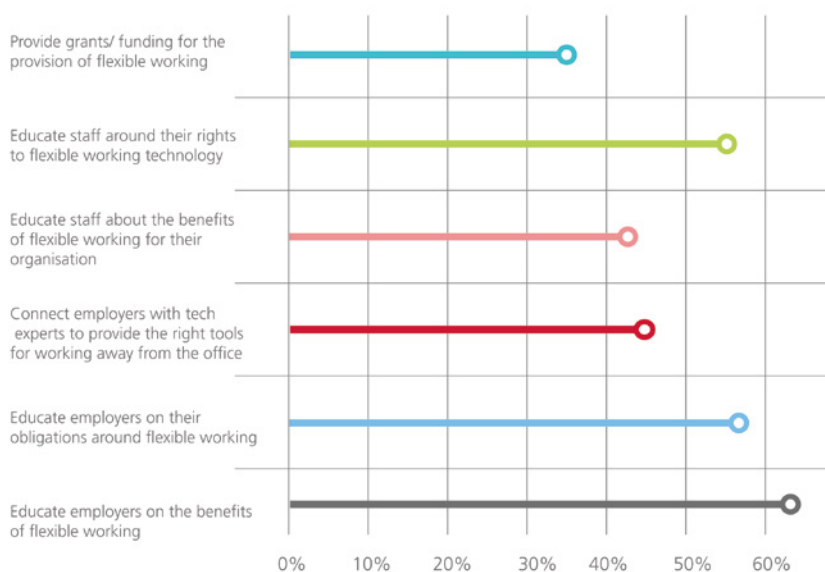
So, while new legislation is needed, employers must also play their part. They need to be willing to implement tech-enabled working, giving employees the opportunity to work from any place, at any time, via any device.

Many companies have adopted aggressive digital transformation strategies in response to customer demands. Today, people want instant access to content and services from

anywhere, using the device of their choice. If businesses don't participate in the digital revolution, they know they will lose out to more adaptive, innovative competitors.

35 per cent of Irish professionals believe the government should provide grants or funding for the provision of flexible working technology

Which, if any, of the following do you think the government should do in order to help employers create a flexible working culture?



Dealing with young workers is no different and without the right technology in place, organisations will lose their best talent to the competition. Our research shows that young professionals understand the link between digital skills and success, with nearly half (45 per cent) calling on the government to connect employers with technology experts. Furthermore, more than one-third (35 per cent) called on the government to provide grants and funding for the provision of the technology required to enable a more flexible workforce.

At Ricoh, we don't just help external organisations improve their mechanisms and workstyles: we practice exactly what we preach and have invested significantly in a tech-enabled workstyle that allows employees to hot-desk, reduce travel and maximise their time. We therefore know first-hand how technology can harness innovation and improve productivity.

It is not just technology that will help businesses embrace increased flexibility. A cultural change of mind-set is key to

ensuring the new approach reaches all echelons of a company. From a CEO that understands the role of social media, to a CIO that appreciates the value of equipping staff to work anywhere, digital change can only truly work when driven by leaders.

By combining strong leadership with government support, employers can empower staff to deliver high quality work in their own style, allowing them to grow in their roles as they progress through their careers.

As the next generation of young professionals comes up through the ranks, now is the time for businesses to address the digital divide, placing the emphasis on staff output and productivity, as opposed to their physical presence at work. Digital skills are a key enabler of workforce productivity. A culture in which these skills can develop and flourish is vital to company growth and success.

Conclusion

Today's young professionals are digital natives and they represent the future of the workforce. We must pledge to harness their skills, leveraging their expertise to support economic and cultural prosperity.

We all have our own individual workstyles and many of us like our work, home and social lives to be completely separate. However, with the introduction of new technologies, these distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred. Typically, it is young workers that are most comfortable with these convergences. By embracing a culture in which the emphasis is on productivity and individual success, as opposed to physical presence, young professionals will be happier and more motivated thanks to a new and improved work-life balance.

Two years after the UK government announced that it would grant every employee the statutory right to request flexible working, Ireland lags behind and has no legal framework to outline such rights.

The astonishing figure that 80 per cent of Irish professionals have felt the need to fake their workload to get ahead in their careers demonstrates how widespread the culture of presenteeism is in Ireland. We are therefore calling on the government and business community to act now and work together to encourage and embrace flexible working practices for the good of Irish workers and the economy.

However, without the right technology to underpin this movement, staff working remotely could be left without access to important information, or worse, put the organisation at risk of critical data theft.

With that in mind, enterprises must work with technology experts to deliver digital transformation - enabling secure innovation and positive change that will deliver significant benefits to all elements of the company.

Gary Hopwood - General Manager Ricoh Ireland



About Ricoh

Ricoh is a global technology company that has been transforming the way people work for more than 80 years. Under its corporate tagline – imagine. change. – Ricoh continues to empower companies and individuals with services and technologies that inspire innovation, enhance sustainability and boost business growth. These include document management systems, IT services, production print solutions, visual communications systems, digital cameras, and industrial systems.

Headquartered in Tokyo, Ricoh Group operates in approximately 200 countries and regions. In the financial year ending March 2016, Ricoh Group had worldwide sales of 2,209 billion yen (approx. 19.6 billion USD).

For further information, please visit ricoh.ie.