



Lost Focus: The Cost Of Distractions On Productivity In The Modern Workplace

About This Report

What is happening to our attention spans?

Those in leadership roles are acutely aware of the link between employee focus and productivity. However, there's an overwhelming sense that focus in the workplace is diminishing, yet there is little real understanding as to why it's happening.

Some employers attribute this erosion to the new generation of workers entering the workforce; however, the matter is far more complex.

The Lost Focus: The Cost Of Distractions On Productivity In The Modern Workplace report examines the varied factors that contribute to this widespread loss of focus. The results reveal a “perfect storm” of digital and real-life distractions, as well as changes in employee demands, technologies, work environments, and workplace dynamics.

Our aim is to get to the heart of our generation's focus issues. We surveyed 1200 people to find out exactly what's disrupting today's employees and workflows – and most importantly, what can be done about it.

This report delves deeper into how both employers and employees tackle the issue of staying focused, offering strategies for creating more productive work environments.

Key Findings:

- Our findings show both employers and employees identified lack of focus as either the biggest challenge or a significant issue, affecting productivity in the workplace.
- The data strongly suggests traditional workspaces are no longer conducive to deep, focused work. A significant number of employees state that more flexible work arrangements contribute positively to their productivity, concentration, and overall well-being.
- Technology has a profound impact on employee focus and productivity. Constant digital distractions are detrimental to deep work, however—emerging technologies, like Artificial Intelligence (AI), can be applied to enhance employee focus.
- To achieve sustained productivity, companies need to facilitate deep work environments, whether through technology, work flexibility, location, or otherwise. Even minor improvements in focus across the entire workforce can significantly boost output and results.

About Insightful

Insightful software is trusted by **5,100+** global brands and used by **180,000+** people daily. Insightful workforce analytics software helps manage and boost productivity, improve workflows, and support employee wellbeing. Features include an employee tracker, automatic time tracking, remote working tools, and so much more.



Methodology

We teamed up with Pollfish to conduct a comprehensive survey involving 1200 respondents across the U.S. The group was split evenly between 600 company employees and 600 company leaders, ensuring insights from both sides of the workplace.

The survey featured 14 multiple-choice questions, digging into what affects employee focus and productivity.

We designed the survey to explore key areas such as:

- **Frequency & sources of distractions:** How often employees get distracted and what's causing it.
- **Impact of digital tools & notifications:** The role of technology in either aiding or hindering focus.
- **Effects of remote work on focus & productivity:** How working from home stacks up against the traditional office in keeping employees on task.
- **Link between burnout & lost focus:** Exploring how stress and overworking are linked to the ability to concentrate.
- **Strategies for creating distraction-free work environments:** What companies can do to help their employees stay focused.

Our goal is to provide a well-rounded view of the current challenges and potential solutions for maintaining employee focus in contemporary workspaces. Furthermore, we want to translate our proprietary findings into key actions leaders can take to enhance focus in the workplace and support employee wellbeing.

The Current State of Employee Focus Is Sounding Alarm Bells

While lost focus is a widespread issue – it seems to hit the workplace the hardest. Both employees and employers acknowledge its impact on individual performance and overall company efficiency.

According to our research, as many as 92% of employers state that lost focus is an alarming problem in their organizations.

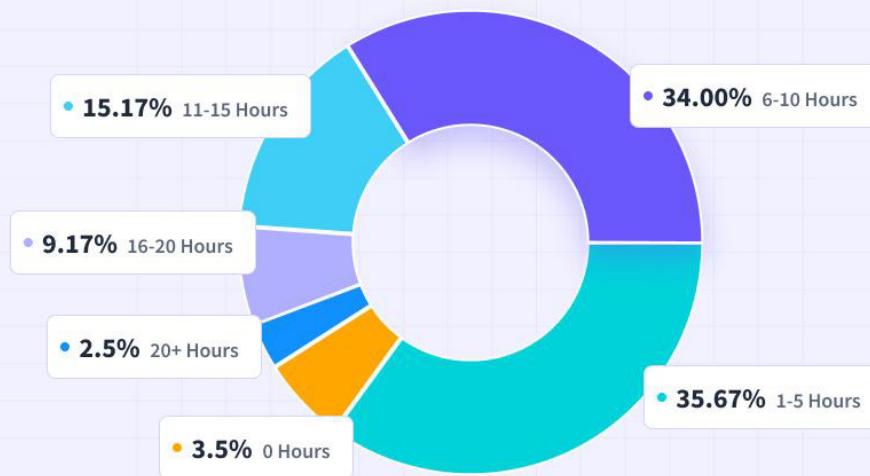


Why has employee focus been slipping so drastically in recent years? Our research points to several factors, the main culprits being: noisy and crowded work environments, digital distractions, inflexible work arrangements, and burnout.

The sections ahead dive into the causes of these distractions and explore practical solutions for more focused and productive work environments.

Employers Believe They Are Losing a Lot of Time

How much time do managers estimate employees lose to lost focus weekly?



Employers estimate a shockingly high number of hours are lost each week. Almost 36% say one to five hours are lost each week per employee, while 34% say six to ten hours are lost per employee. In other words, up to a quarter of the typical 40-hour work week.

Even more alarming for company productivity is the fact that 15% of leaders say 11-15 hours are lost each week, and 9% say 16-20 hours are lost. Meaning, a quarter of leaders surveyed believe between 25-50% of the average work week is lost on a consistent basis.

The Surprising Number One Offender

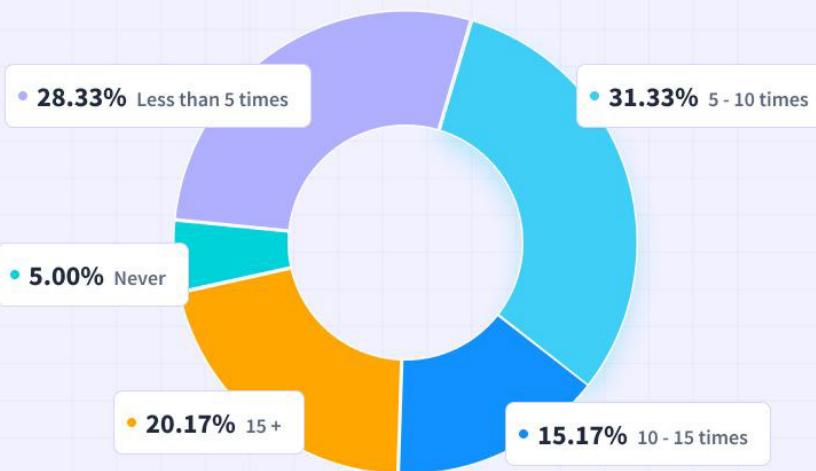
Our research revealed that almost 80% of employees said they can't go a full hour without being distracted. At least 11% get distracted every 5 minutes, while over 59% face distractions every 30 minutes or less.



This data clearly shows consistent productivity is an ongoing challenge in the workplace. Employees struggle to get work done due to constant distractions and find it difficult to regain focus after being disrupted repeatedly.

Digital distractions, such as apps, websites, and phone notifications, are major issues in the modern workplace.

How often do employees check work emails or messages (Slack, Teams) during work hours?

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However, the number one cause of distractions for most employees is, in fact – other employees. Approximately 71% of respondents listed their coworkers as the main reason they lose track of thought and can't focus on work.

What are the biggest distractions for employees?

People interrupting **71%**

Phone notifications **62%**

Email **32%**

 **Insightful**

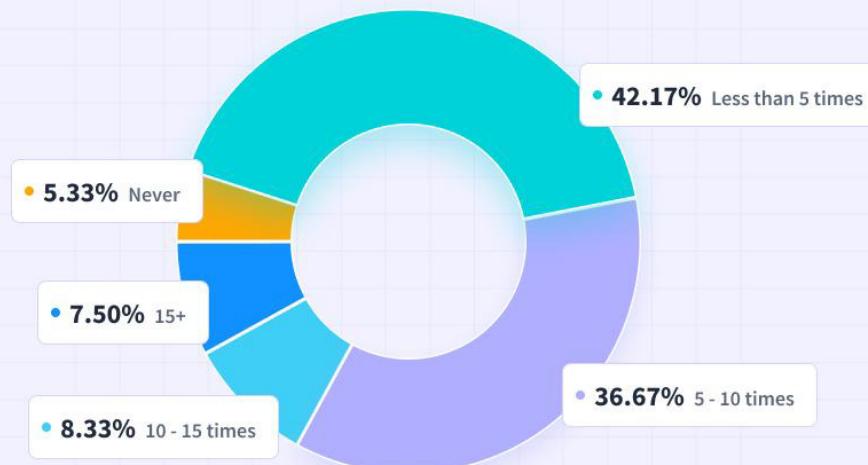
Other notable sources of distraction include:

- **Phone notifications:** 62% of employees reported notifications as major disruptions.
- **Chat apps (e.g., Teams, Slack):** 27% of employees found chat applications distracting.
- **Email notifications:** 32% of employees listed frequent email notifications as distractions.

Several employees (17%) also mentioned meetings – both in-person and video – as a source of distraction. Additionally, 22% felt that frequent manager check-ins disrupt their focus.

Personal use of devices and apps also consistently causes distraction. More than 42% of employees say they check their devices for personal reasons up to five times a day. While almost 37% of respondents said they reach for their phones five to ten times a day.

How often do employees check personal emails or their phone during work hours?



Is Lost Focus a Generational Issue?

When discussing the noteworthy decline in employee focus and productivity, younger generations – particularly Gen Z – often bear the brunt of the criticism.

According to our research, 64% of managers identify lack of focus as the top issue with new-gen workers, with 49% of respondents also claiming Gen Z workers “lack the motivation to work.”



What brought on this sentiment toward the younger generation requires further study. One hypothesis could be that Gen Z workers have a different attitude towards work that clashes with traditional career expectations. At any rate, this is a topic for further research that we will be doing in the future.

While there is reason to believe younger employees struggle more to focus, it shouldn't be interpreted as a generational issue alone. Instead, [our research points to a broader need for new workplace practices that better suit the evolving nature of work and changing attention spans.](#)

Lost Focus & Burnout: A Vicious Cycle

The issue of lost focus ties directly into the larger problem of burnout. **Our research reveals that as many as 68% of employees have felt burnt out in the past year.**

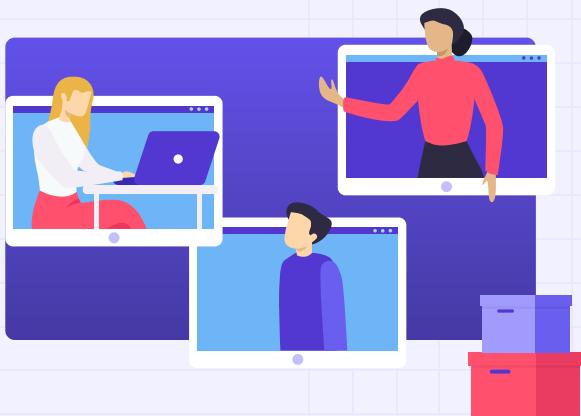


Burnout doesn't just come from working long hours; it's also about how the hours are spent.

When employees work in disruptive conditions where they're constantly interrupted and unable to focus, their stress levels rise, and their productivity drops. This cycle leads to burnout, which further affects their ability to concentrate.

Our research shows managers are also aware of this connection, with 93% claiming work-life balance is a top priority in their organization. When asked what measures they take to prevent burnout, 75% stated they regularly check in with team members to assess job satisfaction.

Employers are taking meaningful action to combat burnout:

**75%**

say they check in regularly

57%

use internal systems (spreadsheets, project management tools)

53%

use workload management software

34%

rely on HR to identify burnout

Additionally, 53% of employers reported using productivity or workforce management software to keep track of workloads, while 56% have internal systems (e.g. spreadsheets, project management tools, etc.) for assigning responsibilities.

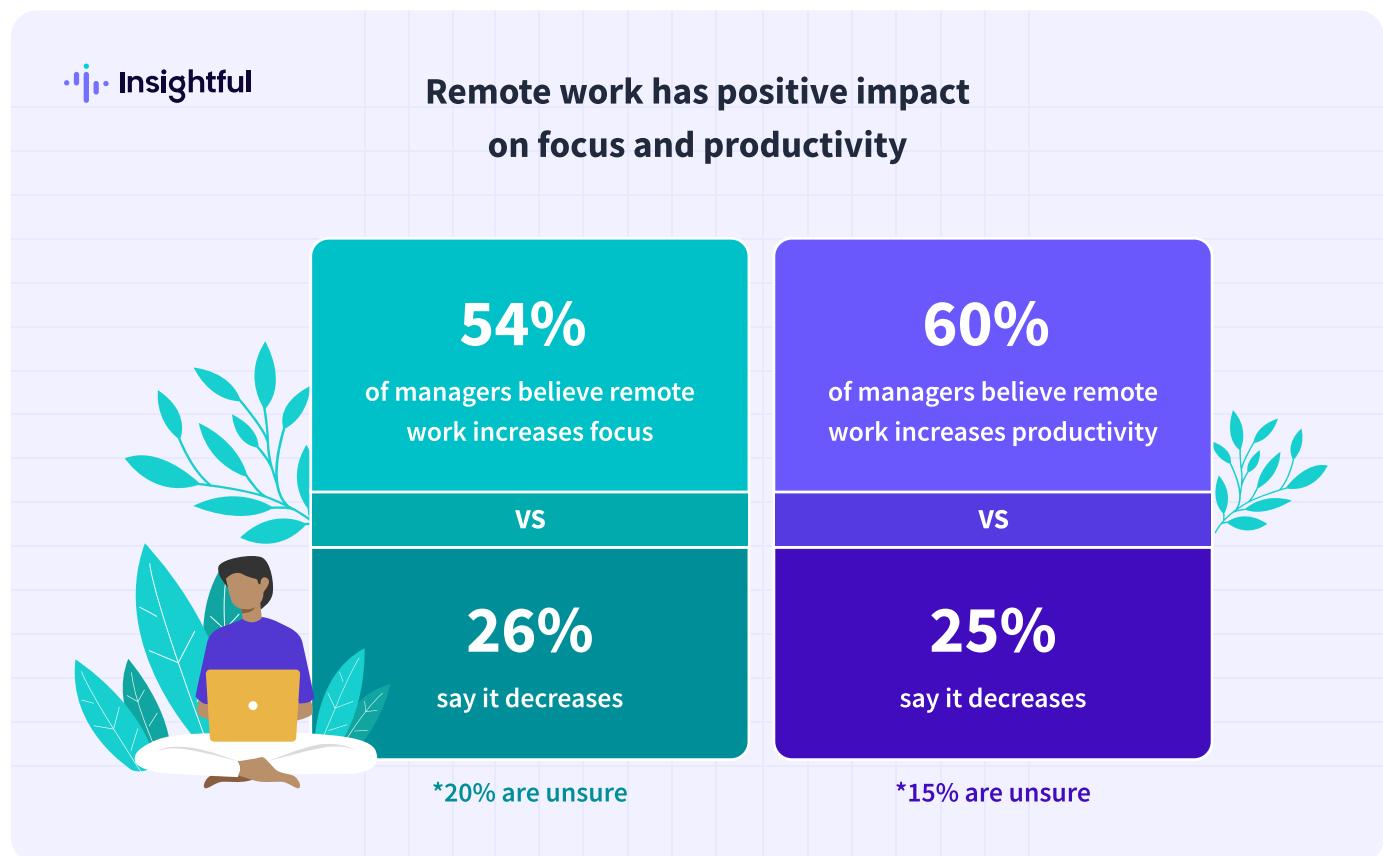
However, it's clear workplaces must evolve even further to meet the needs of a digitally native workforce and minimize burnout. This means rethinking how we manage work hours, handle digital distractions, and provide mental health support.

Ultimately, when leadership is proactive about employee well-being, employees maintain better focus and productivity.

The Unexpected Impact of Remote Work on Focus

Remote work has been pointed out time and again as the key contributor to a decline in focus and productivity. However, contrary to some beliefs, our data shows that remote work actually enhances employees' ability to concentrate.

According to our research, 54% of employers stated remote work increased employee productivity. While only 26% said it decreases focus.

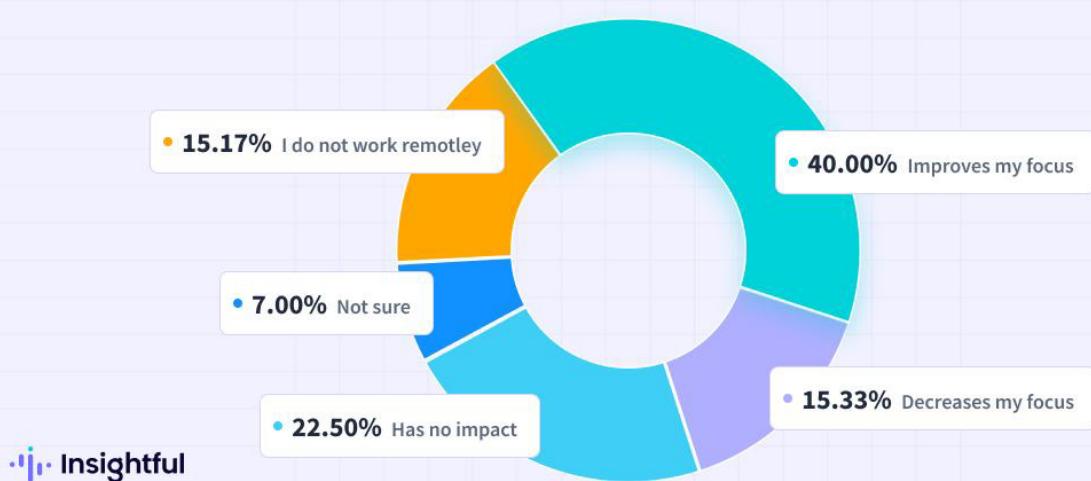


This is largely due to workers experiencing fewer distractions at home compared to a traditional office setting. Employees can also manage their time and environment better when working remotely, leading to improved focus and higher productivity.

Our survey data supports this, demonstrating remote or hybrid work results in:

- **Improved focus:** 40% of employees reported that remote work enhances their ability to concentrate, while 22.50% stated it has no impact. At least 7% of respondents claimed they weren't sure, and only 15% found remote work decreases their focus.
- **Decreased distractions:** 81% of employees felt they are regularly distracted when working in the office.
- **Better work-life balance:** The flexibility of remote work helps employees balance their personal and professional lives more effectively.

Employees are 2.5x more likely to say they are more productive when working remotely.



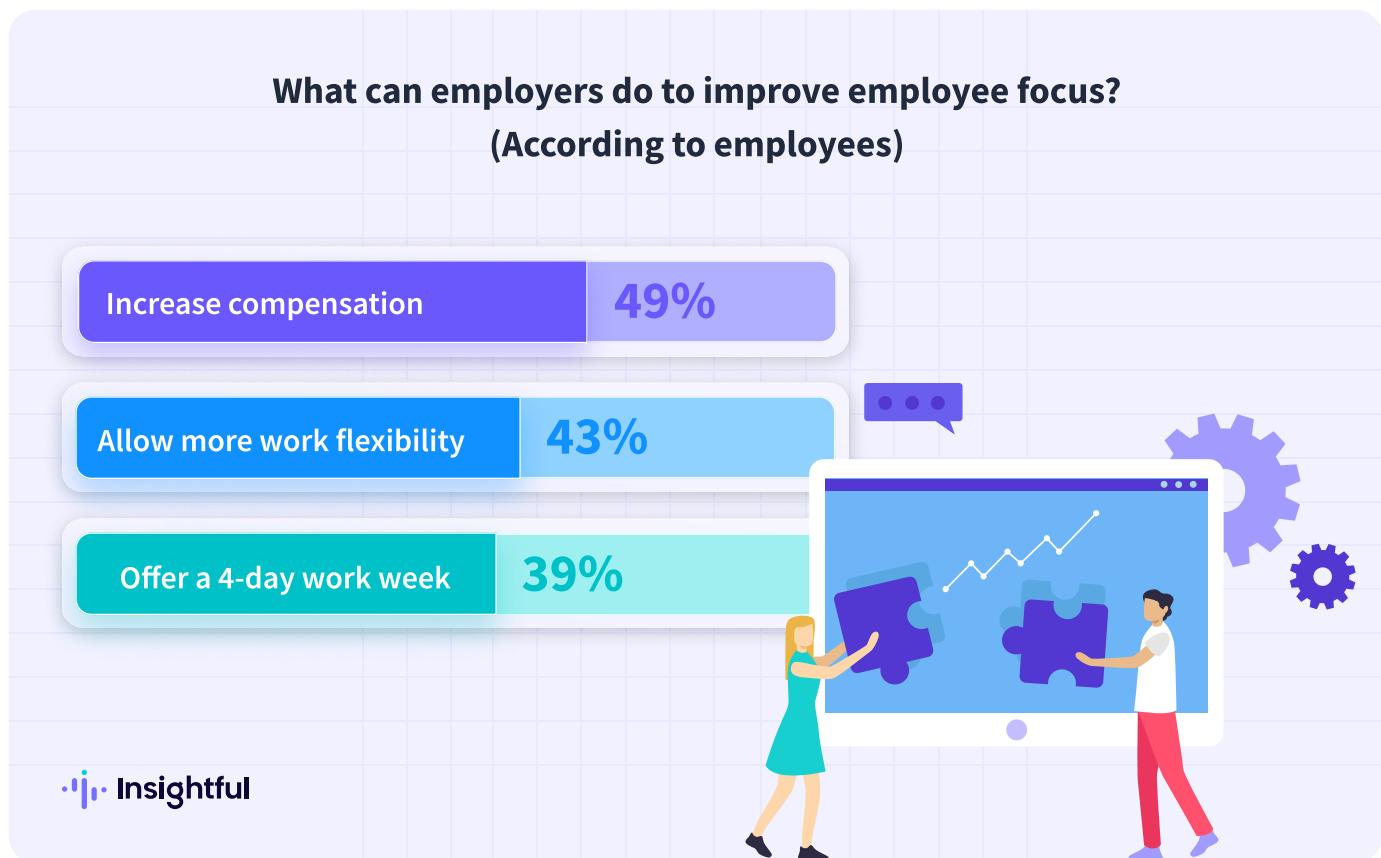
Moving out of the traditional cubicle is a strategic move toward improved performance and job satisfaction. Overall, fluid work arrangements where workers have control over their schedules seem to create a more focused and efficient workforce.

Flexibility: A Path to Improved Focus & Productivity

A significant number of productive hours are lost due to low focus. It's clear that employers are exploring all potential avenues for improving focus in the workplace, having identified the issue as a top priority.

One solution to this issue is offering more flexibility. **When asked what employers could do to improve their focus, 43% of employees suggested flexible work hours.**

Additionally, 49% believe increased compensation would enhance their focus.



Leadership also seems to have recognized the importance of a more flexible approach. Our research shows that 62% of employers have introduced more work flexibility to counteract lost focus.

Employers are going to great lengths to improve focus...

**62%**

of employers offer more work flexibility

53%

offer more team building opportunities

49%

offer more perks

45%

offer more financial incentives

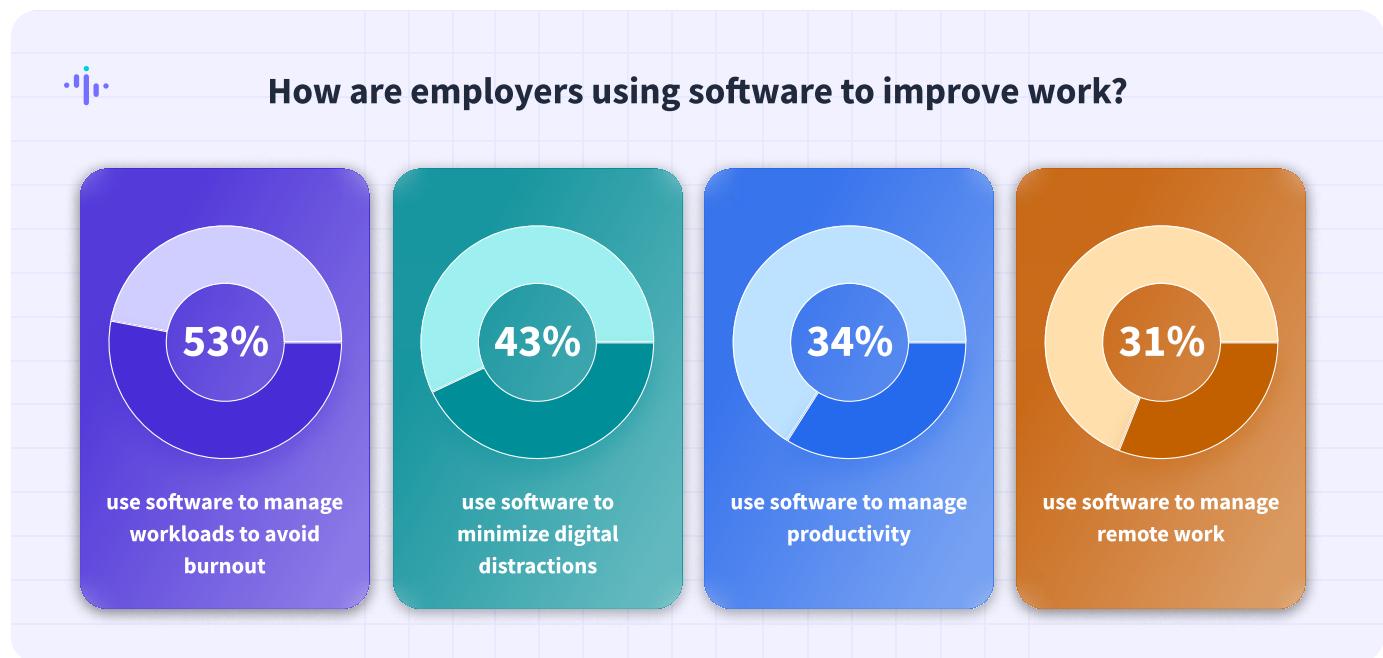
Allowing employees to work during their most productive times, rather than enforcing a rigid schedule, helps maintain higher levels of focus. Now especially, with advanced workforce analytics and productivity management software, companies can identify these important patterns and structure the workflow according to peak productive hours.

The Role of Technology in Creating Focused Environments

So far, digital tools have been labeled as a disruptive force in the contemporary workplace. Our research shows that 50% of employers enforce strict measures to minimize digital distractions, with 47% of them banning employees from using their phones during shifts altogether.

While it's true that non-stop notifications affect one's ability to focus on the task at hand, digital tools can also facilitate deep work, when applied strategically.

According to our research, 43% of employers use software to manage technology usage and cut down on digital distractions.

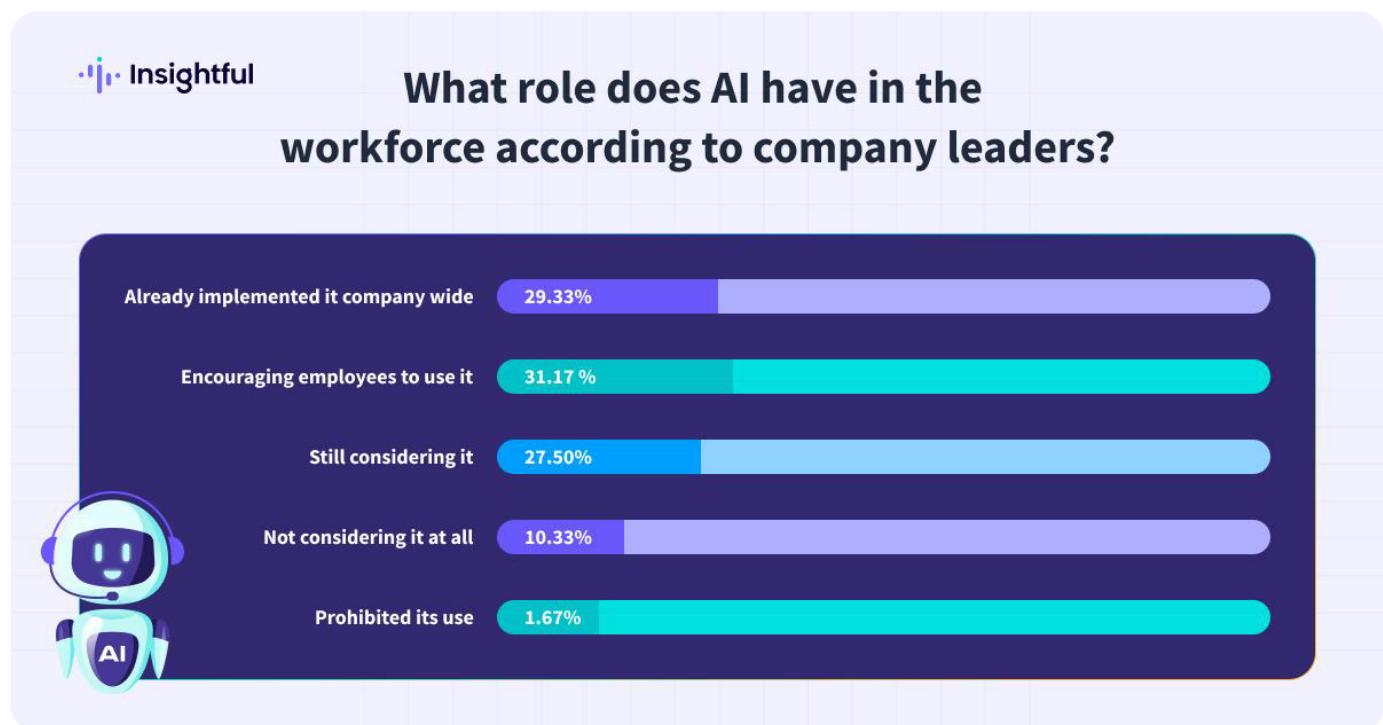


Modern workforce analytics tools and productivity software are designed to help managers balance workloads, analyze employee performance, and facilitate remote work. Right now, our research indicates at least 32% of employers use some type of software to measure productivity.

Some platforms like Insightful can even identify early signs of burnout among employees based on factors such as extended work hours, task-switching, and prolonged periods of low productivity.

What Role Does AI Have to Play?

With the rise of AI, there is also significant interest in how it can help improve employee focus. **Currently, 60% of managers report already using AI in their workplace, while 28% are considering implementing some AI-powered technologies.**



At present, Artificial Intelligence is mostly used as an automation tool, saving employees from having to deal with repetitive tasks. However, there's much more to explore when it comes to AI and its role in workforce management.

For example, **AI-powered workforce management software** enables company leaders and managers to ask any question about their workforce – and get instant answers – so that they can make more informed decisions. This type of AI-guided management is what some are predicting will be the norm in the workplace of the future.

Conclusion

The Lost Focus: The Cost Of Distractions On Productivity In The Modern Workplace report highlights the urgent need for employers to rethink their approach to work environments.

Our findings reveal that distractions – both digital and interpersonal – are widespread, significantly affecting employee performance and efficiency. The research shows that traditional offices with rigid schedules and frequent interruptions are no longer conducive to deep, focused work. Instead, flexible work arrangements, fair compensation, and support from leadership are shown to improve the employees' ability to focus.

Remote and hybrid work models that were previously viewed as the biggest contributors to lost focus were proven to do the opposite. More than half of company leaders stated their employees are more productive and have better focus when working from home as opposed to the office.

Moreover, our research accentuates the critical impact of technology on employee focus. While digital distractions are pervasive, a more strategic use of digital tools and AI can help minimize these interruptions and encourage deeper, more productive work. Employers that capitalize on workforce analytics and productivity software can better understand and respond to their employees' needs, preventing burnout and achieving sustained productivity.

As we move forward, it's clear that traditional work models must evolve. Embracing flexibility, leveraging new technologies, and prioritizing employee well-being will be key to overcoming the challenges of modern workplace distractions. Ultimately, companies that adapt to these changes will be better positioned to create a focused, efficient, and motivated workforce, driving greater success and innovation in the long run.



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