Business improvement

The productivity leaks hiding in your business



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When you're looking at productivity in your business, the bigger problems usually grab your attention first.

If a cyber attack shuts systems down for a day, the impact is obvious.

If the internet fails or a critical application stops working, everybody knows about it almost immediately.

Work slows down, priorities change, and fixing the problem becomes the focus.

But small frustrations get less attention and become part of everyday working life.

A process that takes slightly longer than it should...

Information that isn't particularly easy to find...

A task that requires more steps than anyone would choose if they were designing it from scratch...

These things develop slowly.

A workaround is created to solve a problem, a new system is added without fully replacing an old one, or a process changes because it suits the needs of the business at that moment.

The immediate problem is solved, which is what everyone wanted.

But months later, the workaround is still there. And a year later, nobody remembers why it exists.

Then it becomes part of how things are done.

That's where productivity leaks begin.

People are remarkably good at adapting to inconvenience.

Faced with a delay, an awkward process, or technology that doesn't behave as expected, they'll usually find a way to keep working.

But that can hide inefficiencies for a long time.

By the time somebody notices there's a problem, the process may have been operating that way for years.



Death by **a thousand interruptions**

A reason productivity leaks survive for so long is that they become part of the routine.

You can probably think of a task you completed yesterday that took longer than expected because you couldn't focus on it for long enough to make progress.

An interruption doesn't need to be dramatic to have an impact.

The interruption itself might only last a minute or two, but it breaks concentration.

Anybody who's spent time working on a proposal, preparing a report, or dealing with a complicated customer issue will recognise this.

There comes a point where you're fully engaged with what you're doing, then something pulls your attention elsewhere.

Perhaps it's a password prompt or a system that isn't responding as expected. Maybe the information you need isn't immediately available.

The task stops.

A few minutes later, the problem is resolved and work resumes.

At least that's how it appears.

What actually happens is slightly different.

You spend a little time reminding yourself where you were, what you were thinking about, and what you planned to do next.

The interruption creates a ripple effect that lasts longer than the interruption itself.

It can make technology frustrations expensive.

The issue isn't always the time spent fixing the problem, but the disruption to everything surrounding it.

When these interruptions occur throughout the day, employees lose the ability to work for sustained periods without distraction.

People feel busy, yet progress can feel slow.

Everyone appears occupied, the effort is there and the hours are being worked.

Yet somehow less gets finished than expected.

The cost of **slow technology**

Technology doesn't have to stop working completely to affect productivity.

In fact, many of the systems that create the most frustration are still technically doing their job.

At first glance, there doesn't appear to be a problem.

Employees can still access the systems they need and work continues to get done.

The question is whether everything is working as efficiently as it could be.

This can be difficult to judge because people adapt quickly to change.

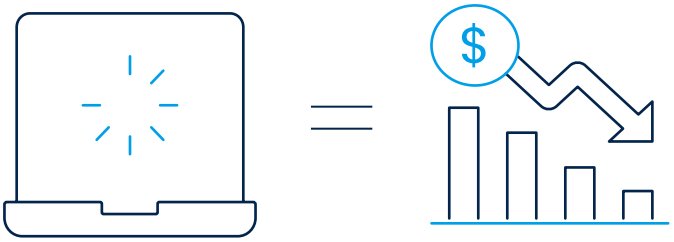
If a computer takes ten minutes to start tomorrow when it took one minute today, everyone would notice immediately.

When that same decline happens little by little over several months, it barely attracts attention.

Employees adjust their routines around it.

They arrive in the morning and turn their computer on before making a coffee.
They open applications before doing something else.

They stop expecting systems to respond instantly because that's how the technology behaves.



That acceptance can hide a lot of lost time.

When people know something will take longer than it should, they avoid it where possible.

When you review productivity, you might look at a team and see people working hard, responding to customers, completing projects and dealing with day-to-day responsibilities.

What you can't see is the amount of time being lost while people wait for systems, information, or for technology to catch up with the pace of work.

Slow technology chips away at efficiency bit by bit.

And often, the frustrations that no longer generate complaints are the ones that have become embedded into everyday work.

When those issues are finally addressed, the improvement can feel huge because people have forgotten what 'good' looks like.

How hard is it to **find information?**

Businesses have more information than ever before.

Customer records, emails, proposals, contracts, reports, meeting notes, invoices and countless other documents are created every day.

Storing information isn't a problem… but finding it can be a different matter.

When somebody needs something quickly, it becomes obvious.

Something that should take a few seconds can turn into several minutes of searching, checking locations, and trying to remember where a document was saved.

When people can access what they need without thinking about it, work flows more smoothly.

Once information becomes harder to locate, workarounds appear.

That helps in the short term, but it can also create new complications later.

What started as a simple workaround can make it harder to know where information lives, which version is current, or whether everyone is working from the same set of details.

Eventually, more time is spent finding and checking information.

And that's a sign that information has become more difficult to manage than it needs to be.

Technology can certainly help, but the real goal is making sure people can access what they need without wasting time looking for it.



The work that's **being done twice**

One of the easiest ways for productive time to disappear is through repetition.

The kind that exists because information isn't flowing through the business as smoothly as it could.

Some processes contain extra steps that nobody would include if they were starting again today.

Few business processes are designed in a single sitting and then left untouched.

They develop as the business develops. Decisions are made, adjustments are introduced, and new ways of working emerge.

It's normal, but it can leave you with processes that are carrying a little more complexity than they need to.

It's noticeable when information must move between different systems.

Because these activities happen every day, they can become almost invisible.

People follow the process because that's how the process works.

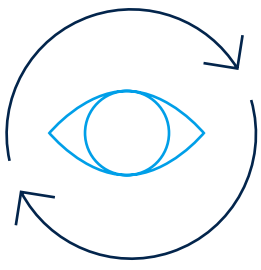
After a while, nobody stops to ask whether every step is still necessary.

The work gets done and the business keeps moving forward, but that doesn't always mean the process is as efficient as it could be.

A closer look will sometimes reveal that a lot of effort is being spent supporting the process rather than producing the outcome it was designed to achieve.

That's why process reviews can be valuable.

Looking closely at how work moves through a business reveals steps that were introduced for a good reason years ago but no longer serve purpose.



Removing unnecessary repetition also reduces the opportunity for mistakes, because information only needs to be entered, updated or checked once.

Meetings, emails, and digital noise

Communication has never been easier.

Businesses have access to email, instant messaging, video meetings, shared workspaces and collaboration tools that would have seemed remarkable not that long ago.

They help people stay connected, share information and make decisions quickly.

Yet there can be an unintended consequence.

It can feel relentless.

People spend large parts of the day responding, replying and reacting, which can leave less time for the work they originally sat down to do.

By lunchtime, they've been active all morning but haven't made as much progress as they expected.

Being busy and being productive are not always the same thing.

Communication is essential to running a business well. But is the information being shared in the right way?

Employees are interrupted throughout the day by information that isn't urgent.

That makes it harder to focus on meaningful work for long periods.

Good communication helps productivity.

Too much communication can slowly start working against it.



Security problems can become **productivity problems**

When you think about cyber security, you might think about protecting data.

But security has another role that receives far less attention: It helps people keep working.

Every business relies on technology to some degree.

The more important technology becomes, the more disruptive it is when something prevents employees from accessing it.

A serious cyber attack is an obvious example, but security-related disruption isn't always that dramatic.

A small issue can create delays elsewhere, pulling people away from the work they should be focusing on.

Before long, productive time is being spent fixing problems instead of getting things done.

Good security practices help reduce that risk.



Keeping systems updated, managing access properly and protecting accounts all help create a more stable working environment.

As well as preventing security incidents, the goal is to help employees get on with their work without disruption.

When security is treated purely as a compliance exercise, it's easy to overlook the operational benefits.



Why small technology improvements **create big results**

You might assume that productivity improvements require big changes and bigger investments.

Occasionally that may be true, but it isn't what usually creates the most difference.

By the time productivity comes under the spotlight, the business is usually doing just fine.

You don't need to rebuild everything from scratch.

Instead, look for the small things that make work harder than it needs to be and remove them.

This is where technology can make a real contribution to productivity.

It can remove obstacles that make work more difficult than it needs to be.

Businesses sometimes discover that they already have tools capable of solving certain problems.

Features within platforms like Microsoft 365 may already be available but underused.



Where is your business **losing time?**

One of the reasons productivity leaks are difficult to address is that they become part of the furniture.

After a while, nobody notices them anymore.

But the time is still being lost, while the effort is still being spent.

It's happening in small amounts across dozens of different activities.

Looking for productivity leaks means understanding how work flows through the business and identifying the points where progress slows unnecessarily.

The cause could be a system, a process, or a way of working that made sense years ago but doesn't serve the business well anymore.

Understanding the cause is the first step towards improving it.

If your team constantly seems busy but progress never feels as fast as it should, there may be hidden productivity leaks contributing to the problem.

A fresh perspective can sometimes uncover opportunities that are difficult to spot when you've been living with the same systems and processes for years.

If you'd like help identifying where time is being lost and looking at practical ways to remove inefficiencies from your business,

get in touch.

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