**Chapter 2: It’s Not Lazy, It’s Productivity Redefined**

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines laziness as “the quality of being unwilling to work or use energy.” Hardworking is defined as “tending to work with energy and commitment.” Notably, neither definition says anything about the goal of the work being done or the process used to complete the work. Both definitions position hard work and laziness as subjective qualities. There is clearly room for interpretation. So is our interpretation of the work ethic of millennials correct? Has the perceived definition of work always stayed the same?

**One Coin, Two Sides Model: Lazy or Redefining Productivity?**

The observable behavior is that millennials desire to work when and where they want, including struggling to commit to working for a set duration, within set hours, in a set location. From a traditional perspective, this can be perceived as lazy because their beliefs are based in a world where putting in structured time equals work coming out. From a modern, top talent perspective, this flexible work style is borne out of redefining what it takes to accomplish work today.

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| **One Coin: One Observable Behavior**Desire to work when and where one wants, including struggling to commit to working for a set duration, within set hours, in a set location. |
| **Side 1: Traditional Interpretation**Lazy; unwilling to put in the time | **Side 2: Top Talent, Millennial-Based Modern Interpretation**Seeking to redefine productivity |
| Supporting Beliefs:* Putting in the time gets the work done.
* If I physically see someone present, I feel more assured that they are working.
* If someone is not putting in the time at the schedule expected, their performance may be compromised.
* A worker should conform to productivity standards defined by the organization.
 | Supporting Beliefs:* Putting in the time and achieving work goals are separate actions and in today’s world often mutually exclusive. Those who put in the time may in fact be less productive than those who focus on doing what is needed to achieve the work goal.
* I should be able to decide what is most productive for me and work together with my organization to align to the business and team’s needs
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Table 2.1: One Coin, Two Sides model for lazy vs. productivity redefined interpretations of modern workplace behavior. Source: Invati Consulting.

***Exploring the Traditional Interpretation: Lazy***

Millennials are perceived as lazy when they:

* Request nonstandard work hours.
* Don’t want to come in to the office to complete their work.
* Are on their device, “distracted from doing real work.”
* Attempt to turn a hobby into a business instead of working a traditional 9 to 5 job where one is forced to “put in the time.”

From a traditional perspective, because millennials desire to work when, where, and how they want and feel okay asking to work outside the normal structure, they are perceived to be lazy. The long-standing perception of “hard work” has been based on an assumption that if you are putting in time, you are putting in effort, and that effort leads to productivity. While that conclusion made sense in yesteryear, it does not hold true in many cases today.

***Exploring the Modern Interpretation: Redefining Productivity***

With the emergence of digital technology in the last 30 years, most jobs for the well-educated are based on knowledge or nonroutine manual instead of routine manual labor. Even lower-level knowledge tasks are becoming automated due to technology. In this highly cognitive world of complex skills we are moving into, the traditional 9 to 5 schedule is not likely to be the most productive work structure.

Considering the higher cognitive load for even entry-level jobs, a new definition of productivity has evolved for millennials and modern talent. What some traditionally see as work during a standard 9 to 5 day—going from often meeting to meeting, walking to another person’s desk to ask a question, staying later than the boss, sacrificing personal health and relationships for work—millennials often see as a waste of time, because this traditional idea of work may not be linked to productivity.

Instead, digitally enabled millennials, who have succeeded through school and work experiences in this information-overloaded world, see taking breaks as a part of productivity. They see minimizing stress and distractions as a part of productivity. They see working out, getting enough sleep, and eating healthy as a part of productivity. From this vantage point, desiring flexibility is not a sign of laziness, it is a sign of understanding intuitively that the future of work lies in a digital, high-cognitive-load, more egalitarian world and that flexibility is what it takes to be successful in that world.

**Leveraging the New Definition of Productivity to Build Modern Organizations**

Today, employees are charged with being creative, innovative, and strategic—all while balancing a home life influenced by egalitarian needs and economic pressures. As a result, focusing on results—what the goal is—rather than how, when, and where it gets done, takes on greater importance.

The key to generating productivity in the new paradigm is to shift from “putting in the time” to “meeting goals” by enabling workplace flexibility in three areas: work hours, work environment, and access to resources. These three interventions work together to stop employees from burning out from digital work and instead maximize productivity. Specifically:

1. **Question the existing structure and its linkage to productivity.** If time put in equals productivity out, a more structured environment may make sense. However, if the work is strategic or nonroutine, results may be tied to other factors such as optimizing personal productivity styles. Shift the focus from strict 9 to 5 work hours to a flexible structure as needed.
2. **Provide a mix of open office or cubicle layouts**, collaborative spaces, “library”-style spaces, and outdoor areas as work environments.
3. Determine productivity by how well employees are able to sort and filter through vast amounts of data. Organizations aligned with technology that provides searchable, instantaneous connections to the right data, relationship, or training eliminate hours of wasted time.

In order for a workplace to become more flexible in terms of hours, environment, and resources, the underlying attitude companies and leaders must develop is *to have more trust in their employees*. That means believing that top talent genuinely wants to meet their goals and that one does not need to be micromanaged to do so.

**Tales from the Trenches**

***Work Hour Experimentation in the Public Sector***

Former governor of Utah Jon Huntsman pioneered a tremendous change in work-life balance in 2008 by instituting a statewide four-day workweek for all public-sector workers. The benefits—all from changing a single organizational lever, work hours—were astounding: increased productivity, higher morale, lower absenteeism, better access to services, even reduced congestion during rush hour.

***Diverse Work Environments to Fuel Productivity***

Microsoft committed resources to researching and developing diverse workspaces that would work for its community. Their focus was on creating designs that offer people choices for their mood, the kind of work they are doing, and their work style, allowing employees to leverage their own personal productivity habits.

***(Re)Designing the Work Structure to Enable Goals***

A professional in the consulting industry had the ingrained notion that millennials are lazy and don’t want to put in the time because of their desire for flexible working hours. The focus on billable hours over flexible work schedules resulted in increased turnover among millennial and generation X employees, restricted training opportunities because training time was not considered billable, and hiring gaps as the company sought only experienced workers from a smaller talent pool.

**Summary: From Lazy to Evolving Workspace Flexibility for Today’s Work**

Although millennials could be perceived as lazy while looking through the traditional lens, the more useful, modern perception is that millennials have responded intuitively to the changes that have occurred in the way we work, what we work on, and the goals of the work. For today’s highly cognitive, nonroutine jobs and egalitarian world, workplace flexibility, not rigidity, is the key to increasing productivity.

**How Modern Is Your Culture?**

Take the [“How Modern Is Your Culture?” diagnostic](https://goo.gl/forms/Me6MhSMeUv8tzBaI2) to determine if your organization is leaning toward a traditional perspective of productivity that is at risk of disengaging modern talent.

**10-Minute Champion**

[View and contribute](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t8JXUyYyyjSBjqOii3UkM6AKxGf_Fm7nR05TqhtKreY/edit?usp=sharing) ideas for actions you can take in 10 minutes or less.

**Chapter 2: Questions for Further Discussion**

1. Has the perceived definition of hard work stayed the same through the generations? Explain.
2. How do you interpret the work ethic of millennials?
3. When you see modern workspaces with innovative design features intended to foster creativity, communication, and comfort, what is your reaction? Compelling and exciting? Frivolous and self-indulgent? Why?
4. What elements do you feel most drive productivity for the type of work you do? How could you influence the work environment or your lifestyle to include these elements?

**Chapter 2 Resources and References**

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