

PROSPECTS

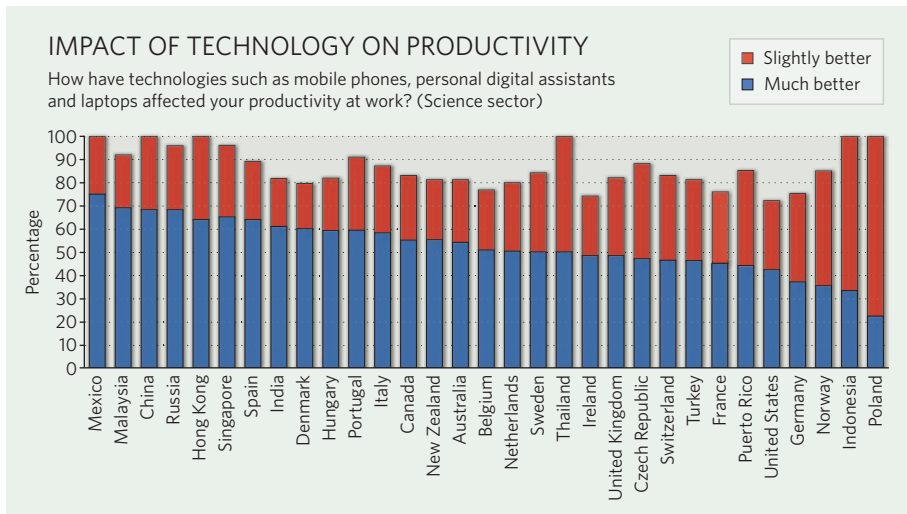
Going mobile

Survey results suggest that mobile technology offers scientists both increased productivity and unwelcome intrusion. Rich Pennock speculates on the consequences.

Mobile communications have transformed the average workplace, and the science workplace is no exception. The potential to work remotely has led to a higher level of job satisfaction and a sense of increased productivity, according to the Kelly Global Workforce Index, a survey conducted by workforce-management company Kelly Services. But this boost in connectivity and productivity has taken a serious toll on scientists' work-life balance.

Nearly 100,000 professionals, including more than 3,000 in the international science community, responded to the survey across North America, Europe and the Asia Pacific region. Questions focused on respondents' work-life balance and ways in which technology has affected their lives and careers.

The positive results: a big boost in perceived productivity. More than 70% of science professionals surveyed said that the ability to remain in constant communication with their work is a positive development. And 80% believe that they are more productive now than they were before the advent of mobile communications technology. Yet this sense of higher productivity comes at a price, the survey found. More than a third of science professionals polled worldwide are dissatisfied with their current work-life balance.



Telecommuting has hastened the disappearance of the line separating work and home. Eighty-three per cent of the 3,000 scientist respondents said that a workplace policy on telecommuting is an attractive component in deciding where to work. But with laptops and smartphones always within arm's reach, almost 30% of the scientists surveyed said that they are working more hours than they used to.

Employers must forge a balance. According to survey findings, employees who have

a good work-life balance tend to be more productive, more engaged and happier in their work. To maintain employee morale and productivity, managers should provide rewards to employees for good performance — for example, extra holiday time, or restaurant or entertainment coupons. Happy researchers are those who not only have access to the technology, but also the means and the incentives to completely disconnect. ■
Rich Pennock is vice-president of Kelly Services in Troy, Michigan.

Q&A

Stefan Söldner-Rembold, a particle physicist at the University of Manchester, UK, is the latest spokesperson elected to co-ordinate the DO experiment, an exploration of the subatomic universe that started in 1992 at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois.



As the second non-US scientist to hold the spokesperson post, what challenges do you face?

I've been at DO since 2001. Since then, non-US contribution to DO has increased significantly. Currently, about half the physicists on the experiment are from outside the United States. The challenge is navigating the different academic cultures and funding schemes to bring these groups together.

What has been your most exciting scientific endeavour?

At the former Large Electron-Positron collider at CERN [the particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland], and now at the

Tevatron accelerator at Fermilab, our research has focused on proving or disproving the existence of the Higgs boson, an elusive particle whose predicted existence may explain how elementary particles acquire mass. It is the most exciting and important thing I've been involved with during my career.

DO is set to end in 2010; will you be the last spokesperson appointed?

Not necessarily. We are approved until 2010 and expect to run through most of 2011. Currently, we have taken only half the data we expect to take by 2011. The machine has improved so

much over the years, resulting in many more proton-antiproton collisions and leading us to take ten times more data now than at first. So data analysis from DO will continue for many years.

So DO is still quite active?

Yes. In many areas of research at DO, we've published only 20% of what we expect to. There is a lot of physics out there — which is exciting for us and our students.

Has the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) usurped talent from DO?

The main challenge is balancing manpower between the Tevatron, currently the highest-energy running particle accelerator in

the world, and the start-up of the LHC experiments [at CERN], as many of us work on both LHC and Tevatron experiments. However, any competition is positive. Success of the LHC is extremely important for the field of particle physics. We are all in the same boat.

What is the main goal for DO before it ends?

As theoretical predictions point to a Higgs boson in a mass range accessible to the Tevatron, we may be able to exclude its existence in this mass range or see the first evidence for its existence. ■

Interview by Virginia Gewin