NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEWMIND RESEARCH · BENCHMARK REPORT 12

KNOWLEDGE-WORK EFFICIENCY BENCHMARK 2026

Where the knowledge worker's week goes, what meetings, tools and messages cost, what AI has been shown to save, the rules on measuring staff and using AI at work, what an hour is worth, and the playbooks and worksheets to win time back.

Edition 1
Desk-research edition

October 2026
Published

Licence
Single company use

CONTENTS

What's inside

01	About this edition	4
02	Executive summary	6
PART A · EVIDENCE		
03	Where the week goes	8
04	Interrupted every two minutes	10
05	The day that does not end	12
06	How much time meetings take	14
07	Are the meetings worth it?	16
08	The rise of the unscheduled call	18
09	Too many apps	19
10	Searching, re-keying and duplicate work	21
11	The inbox and the chat stream	23
12	Who is using AI at work	24
13	What controlled studies measured	26
14	From task savings to the bottom line	28
15	Seniority and role	30
16	Engagement, clarity and value	31
17	Which roles carry the cost	33
PART B · MONITORING AND AI RULES		
18	The rules at a glance	35
19	The EU AI Act at work	37
20	What the 2026 amendments changed	39
21	GDPR and platform work	41
22	US monitoring notice laws	42
23	US rules on automated decisions	43
24	Checklist for an efficiency programme	45
PART C · THE NEWMIND MODEL AND PLAYBOOKS		
25	How the model works	47
26	What an hour a week is worth	49
27	Scaling to a team	50
28	What a meeting costs	51
29	When the effort pays back	52
30	How to use the playbooks	54
31	Cut the meeting load	55

32	Protect focus time	57
33	Consolidate the tool stack	58
34	Remove searching and re-keying	59
35	Set channel and reply norms	60
36	Put AI on the right tasks	61
37	Measure without surveillance	63
38	Contain after-hours work	64
39	Report value the finance team accepts	65

PART D · SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

40	Self-assessment: KPI sheet	67
41	Self-assessment: work-about-work score	68
42	Worksheet: one week of time	70
43	Worksheet: recurring meeting audit	71
44	Worksheet: tool and copy-step map	72
45	Worksheet: AI task trial	73
46	Worksheet: measurement and notice check	74
47	Worksheet: value tracker	75
48	Worksheet: 90-day plan	76

REFERENCE

49	Sources by type	77
50	Method and limits	81
51	Glossary	83
52	Sources	84

Figures from third-party research carry a numbered source (full list in the Sources chapter). Everything else is labelled as NEWMIND analysis or model.

Page numbers refer to the full report.

CHAPTER 01

About this edition

This is Edition 1 of the NEWMIND Knowledge-Work Efficiency Benchmark. It is a desk-research edition: it contains no survey data of our own. It is built on official statistics, official legal texts, academic research and vendors' and consultancies' own published research, each fetched, saved and checked for this edition.

What this edition contains

- **Evidence**: where the week goes, interruptions, meetings, tool sprawl, searching and the message stream, AI use and what controlled studies measured, and how the load differs by role, from Asana[1], Microsoft[2], Slack[3], Gallup[4], Pew Research Center[5] and peer-reviewed and working-paper studies.
- **Monitoring and AI rules**: the EU AI Act as amended in 2026[6,7], GDPR and the Platform Work Directive, US state monitoring-notice laws and rules on automated decisions, with a checklist for any efficiency programme that measures staff.
- **A transparent model**: what an hour a week, a team and a meeting are worth, and when an efficiency programme pays back, from US wage and employer-cost statistics[8,9], labelled 'Market research model · based on published benchmarks'.
- **9 playbooks**: Cut the meeting load, Protect focus time, Consolidate the tool stack, Remove searching and re-keying, Set channel and reply norms, Put AI on the right tasks, Measure without surveillance, Contain after-hours work, Report value the finance team accepts.
- **Self-assessment toolkit**: a KPI sheet, a work-about-work score and 7 blank worksheets (one week of time, recurring meeting audit, tool and copy-step map, ai task trial, measurement and notice check, value tracker, 90-day plan).

What it does not contain yet

No original survey data. Edition 1 is desk research. A later edition is planned to add measured time splits from organisations, which firms do not publish.

Who it is for

Chief operating officers, heads of operations and transformation, CIOs, HR and people leads, and the finance and legal leads who sign off an efficiency programme.

You will recognise these signals

- People copy data between the same tools every day
- Status updates need meetings or chasing
- Each new tool adds work instead of removing it

What to measure

- Time split: skilled work, coordination and searching
- Tools used per role and how often work moves between them

- Duplicate data entry and status-chasing per week
- Hours lost per week, at loaded cost

How to read the numbers

- **Every figure** carries a numbered source and its population: who was asked, where and when. Surveys ask different questions, so figures from different surveys are shown side by side, never averaged.
- **Vendor and consultancy figures** are tagged 'vendor claim' or 'consultancy claim'. Most figures on time, meetings and tools come from firms that sell software for this work. They are not independently verified and are never used as model inputs.
- **Models** are transparent: every formula and input is printed so you can replace it with your own data.
- **Dates**: legal dates come only from the official texts and are stated against October 2026.
- **Currency**: US dollars throughout.

From benchmark to your numbers

A NEWMIND feasibility audit measures your own organisation in 2–3 weeks and delivers:

- Your time split against the Asana reference
- Hours and cost recoverable, per team
- The hand-offs and duplicate tools to remove
- The design for one platform where status lives

Licence: single company use. Please cite as: NEWMIND Research, Knowledge-Work Efficiency Benchmark 2026, Edition 1. NEWMIND PARTNERS has no affiliation with any vendor, consultancy or firm named in this report.

CHAPTER 02

Executive summary

The published evidence agrees on the shape of the problem: knowledge workers report spending much of their week coordinating rather than doing skilled work, in fragmented days spread across many tools and a heavy message stream. Most of that evidence comes from vendors that sell software for this work, so it is tagged and never used as a model input. AI saves time on well-chosen tasks, but the gains are not yet visible in wider data. The levers are ordinary: fewer and better meetings, protected focus time, fewer tools, clear channel norms, and measurement that respects the rules.

58%
Share of the day knowledge workers say goes on work about work [1]
VENDOR CLAIM

4.9 h
Hours a week they estimate better processes could save [1]
VENDOR CLAIM

2.8 h
Hours a week in unnecessary meetings; 3.6 h for senior leaders [1]
VENDOR CLAIM

Ten findings

01 Work about work takes most of the day

Knowledge workers in Asana's survey said 58% of their day goes on work about work: coordinating, chasing and updating [1] VENDOR CLAIM. The survey covered 9,615 knowledge workers in six countries [1].

02 Workers believe hours could be won back

The same respondents estimated that better processes could save them 4.9 hours a week [1] VENDOR CLAIM. It is a self-estimate, not a measurement; chapter 37 shows how to measure it.

03 Meetings cost senior people most

Asana's respondents put unnecessary meetings at 2.8 hours a week for knowledge workers and 3.6 hours for those in senior leadership roles [1] VENDOR CLAIM.

04 Tools multiply with seniority

Knowledge workers used 8.8 apps on average, and those at director level and above 10 [1] VENDOR CLAIM. Each extra place where work can arrive is a place to check.

05 The working day is fragmented

Microsoft's telemetry shows employees interrupted every 2 minutes by meetings, emails or pings during the 9–5 working day [2] VENDOR CLAIM; 68% of people in its 2023 survey said they lack enough uninterrupted focus time [10] VENDOR CLAIM.

06 The message stream is large

The average worker in Microsoft's data receives 117 emails a day [11] and 153 Teams messages per weekday [11] VENDOR CLAIM. Channel and reply norms are among the cheapest changes to make.

07 AI helps on the right tasks and harms on the wrong ones

In an experiment with 758 knowledge workers run with Boston Consulting Group, those using AI on tasks inside its ability completed 12.2% more tasks, 25.1% more quickly; on a task outside it they were 19% less likely to be correct [12]. Task choice decides the result.

08 Economy-wide gains are still small

US survey data put time savings from generative AI at 1.4% of all work hours [13]; Danish administrative records rule out effects on earnings or recorded hours larger than 2% [14]. 63% of US workers say they do not use AI much or at all in their job [5].

09 An hour a week is worth pricing

At the US mean wage for all occupations, loaded with employer costs, one hour a week removed is worth about $2,200 a year per person [8][9] (NEWMIND model). Global employee engagement fell to 20% in 2025, its lowest since 2020 [4]: freed time needs a use.

10 Measuring staff has legal limits

The EU AI Act bans AI that infers the emotions of people at work, except for medical or safety reasons; the ban has applied since 2 February 2025 [6]. As amended in 2026, duties for high-risk AI used in employment apply from 2 December 2027 [7]. Several US states require notice before electronic monitoring.

What to do on Monday

1. Fill in the KPI sheet for your teams (full report, chapter 40).
2. Score the eight work-about-work dimensions (full report, chapter 41).
3. Audit the recurring meetings (full report, chapter 43).
4. Price an hour a week with your own wages (full report, chapter 26).
5. Check the notice and monitoring rules before measuring anyone (full report, chapter 24).

CHAPTER 03

Where the week goes

Knowledge workers in Asana's 2023 survey said they spend the majority of their day, 58%, on work about work: coordinating, chasing and updating rather than doing the skilled job they were hired for [1] VENDOR CLAIM. The survey covered 9,615 knowledge workers in Australia, France, Germany, Japan, the UK and the US [1], with fieldwork in November 2022 [1].

58%
Share of the day knowledge workers say goes on work about work [1]

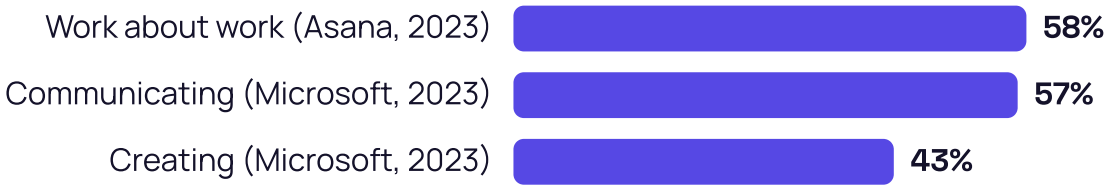
4.9 h
Hours a week knowledge workers estimate better processes could save them [1]

6.37
Working weeks a year that saving equals, on Asana's own arithmetic [1]

Two surveys, one pattern

Microsoft's 2023 Work Trend Index describes the same imbalance from a different angle. Its survey covered 31,000 people in 31 countries [10], and its Microsoft 365 usage data show that the average employee spends 57% of their time communicating, in meetings, email and chat, and 43% creating [10] VENDOR CLAIM.

Share of the working day, two vendor surveys, %



Sources: Asana, Anatomy of Work Global Index 2023 [1]; Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2023 [10]. The two measures are defined differently and are shown side by side, not added together.

How the saving was calculated

Asana turns the 4.9 hours into working weeks in a footnote: 4.9 hours a week multiplied by 52 weeks, divided by a 40-hour working week, gives 6.37 weeks [1]. That arithmetic treats a self-estimate as a measured saving and assumes every one of the 52 weeks is worked. NEWMIND does not use the 4.9 hours as a model input; chapter 25 explains why.

WHAT THE SURVEY ASKED ABOUT	FIGURE	POPULATION
Share of the day on work about work [1]	58%	Knowledge workers, six countries
Hours a week better processes could save [1]	4.9 hours	Knowledge workers, self-estimate
Time communicating vs creating [10]	57% vs 43%	Average Microsoft 365 user, usage data

Reading vendor research

Both publishers sell software that claims to reduce this overhead, which is why each figure carries a vendor-claim tag. The samples are large and the fieldwork is run by research firms, but the questions, the definitions and the choice of what to publish belong to the vendor. Edition 1 of this benchmark is desk research: NEWMIND ran no survey of its own, so these are the best published figures, not a measurement of your team. NEWMIND analysis.

What this means

- If the pattern holds in your team, more than half of a knowledge worker's day goes on coordination. That share is the pool any efficiency programme draws from.
- Self-estimates of time saved are a ceiling, not a forecast. Measure your own baseline before you plan on any number of hours.
- The rest of Part A breaks the overhead down: interruptions in chapter 4, meetings from chapter 6 and tools from chapter 9.

CHAPTER 04

Interrupted every two minutes

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index reports, from Microsoft 365 telemetry, that during the 9–5 employees are interrupted every 2 minutes by meetings, emails or pings [2], which adds up to 275 interruptions a day [2] VENDOR CLAIM.

2 min
Average gap between interruptions, Microsoft 365 users [2]

275
Interruptions a day, Microsoft telemetry [2]

68%
People who say they lack uninterrupted focus time [10]

What workers say about focus

In the 2023 survey of 31,000 people in 31 countries [10], 68% said they do not have enough uninterrupted focus time during the workday [10], and nearly 2 in 3 (64%) said they struggle with having the time and energy to do their job [10] VENDOR CLAIM.

Two years later the complaint had become a description of the work itself: 48% of employees and 52% of leaders said their work feels chaotic and fragmented [2] VENDOR CLAIM.

Microsoft surveys: what workers report, %



Sources: Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2023 [10] and 2025 [2]. The 2025 telemetry excludes education and EU tenants, so it describes Microsoft 365 users outside the EU.

Why interruptions cost more than their minutes

An interruption costs the time it takes plus the time to get back into the task. A message answered in thirty seconds can break a block of focused work that took ten minutes to build. None of the sources in this report measure that recovery time for knowledge workers, so this benchmark does not put a number on it. What the telemetry does show is the frequency: at one interruption every couple of minutes, an uninterrupted hour is rare unless someone protects it on purpose. NEWMIND analysis.

SOURCE OF INTERRUPTION	WHAT USUALLY DRIVES IT	FIRST LEVER
Chat and instant messages	Expectation of an instant reply	Agreed response times by channel
Email notifications	Inbox open all day	Batched email windows
Ad hoc calls	No shared view of who is free	Visible focus blocks in the calendar
Meeting reminders	Fragmented calendar	Meetings grouped into fixed parts of the day

Table: NEWMIND analysis. The playbook in chapter 32 turns it into steps.

What this means

- The interruption rate is a property of the team's habits and tools, not of one person's discipline. Fix it at team level.
- Measure focus time directly: blocks of 60 minutes or more with no meetings and notifications off. The worksheet in chapter 42 shows how.
- Treat the Microsoft figures as an order of magnitude from a large vendor data set, not as your number.

CHAPTER 05

The day that does not end

Microsoft's telemetry shows meetings after 8 pm up 16% year over year [11], and 40% of people who are online at 6 am reviewing email [11] VENDOR CLAIM. The report calls the result an infinite workday.

16%
Rise in meetings after 8 pm, year over year, Microsoft 365 [11]

37%
Desk workers logging on outside standard hours at least weekly [3]

50%
Desk workers who rarely or never take breaks [3]

After hours and without breaks

Slack's Workforce Lab surveyed more than 10,000 desk workers [3]. About two in five (37%) log on outside their company's standard hours at least weekly [3], and half (50%) say they rarely or never take breaks during the workday [3] VENDOR CLAIM.

In Microsoft's 2024 survey, 68% of people said they struggle with the pace and volume of work and 46% felt burned out [15] VENDOR CLAIM.

SIGNAL	FIGURE	SOURCE TYPE
Meetings after 8 pm, change year over year [11]	+16%	Vendor telemetry
People online at 6 am who are reviewing email [11]	40%	Vendor telemetry
Log on outside standard hours at least weekly [3]	37%	Vendor survey
Rarely or never take breaks [3]	50%	Vendor survey
Struggle with the pace and volume of work [15]	68%	Vendor survey
Feel burned out [15]	46%	Vendor survey

Long hours are not extra output

Hours logged after the end of the day are often the overflow of a day spent in meetings and messages. If the core hours went on coordination, the focused work moves to the evening. Adding hours hides the problem rather than solving it, and the cost shows up later in errors, turnover and absence. This report does not attach a figure to that cost, because none of the captured sources measure it for knowledge workers. NEWMIND analysis.

Monitoring is not the answer

A natural response is to track hours more closely. In the EU and in several US states, monitoring employees triggers legal duties of notice, and some uses of AI to assess workers are classed as high-risk. Part B sets out the rules, starting with chapter 18. Measure the work system, not the person. NEWMIND analysis.

What this means

- Read after-hours activity as a symptom of the core day. Fix meetings and interruptions first; the evenings often follow.
- Agree team norms on when messages are sent and answered. The playbook in chapter 38 sets them out.
- Track the trend in your own data, in aggregate, not individual log-in times.

Questions to ask in your organisation

- Which teams send most messages or hold most meetings outside agreed hours, in aggregate?
- Which recurring meetings or deadlines push work into the evening?
- Do senior staff model the reply norms they expect from others?
- Is there an agreed route for real emergencies, so everything else can wait?

Questions: NEWMIND analysis. Record the answers on the KPI sheet in chapter 40 and the worksheets that follow it.

CHAPTER 52

Sources

Each entry gives the date that applies to it: when a law was adopted or came into force, when a document was published, or, for live web pages and datasets, when it was accessed (9 October to 11 October 2026). Figures quoted are short, attributed and linked; no paywalled tables and no third-party charts are reproduced.

1. Asana, Anatomy of Work Global Index 2023 (press release, Business Wire), published 8 March 2023 https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20230308005268/en/Asana-Anatomy-of-Work-Global-Index-2023-Smart-Collaboration-and-Clear-Goals-integral-to-creating-positive-business-opportunities
2. Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2025: The year the Frontier Firm is born, published 23 April 2025 https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/2025-the-year-the-frontier-firm-is-born
3. Slack Workforce Lab, The surprising connection between after-hours work and decreased productivity, published 5 December 2023 https://slack.com/blog/news/the-surprising-connection-between-after-hours-work-and-decreased-productivity
4. Gallup, State of the Global Workplace (2026 edition), accessed 11 October 2026 https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx
5. Pew Research Center, U.S. Workers Are More Worried Than Hopeful About Future AI Use in the Workplace, published 25 February 2025 https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2025/02/25/u-s-workers-are-more-worried-than-hopeful-about-future-ai-use-in-the-workplace/
6. Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (Artificial Intelligence Act), Official Journal of the European Union, adopted 13 June 2024 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj/eng
7. Regulation (EU) 2026/1744 (Digital Omnibus on AI), amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, Official Journal of the European Union, adopted 8 July 2026 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2026/1744/oj/eng
8. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, national estimates (May 2025), accessed 11 October 2026 https://www.bls.gov/oes/
9. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employer Costs for Employee Compensation, private industry, accessed 11 October 2026 https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecec.nr0.htm
10. Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2023: Will AI Fix Work?, published 9 May 2023 https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/will-ai-fix-work
11. Microsoft, Breaking down the infinite workday (Work Trend Index special report), published 17 June 2025 https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/breaking-down-infinite-workday
12. Dell'Acqua et al., Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier, Harvard Business School Working Paper 24-013, published 1 September 2023 https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=64700
13. Bick, Blandin and Deming, The Rapid Adoption of Generative AI, NBER Working Paper 32966, accessed 9 October 2026 https://www.nber.org/papers/w32966
14. Humlum and Vestergaard, Large Language Models, Small Labor Market Effects (Still Waters, Rapid Currents), NBER Working Paper 33777, published 1 May 2025 https://www.nber.org/papers/w33777
15. Microsoft and LinkedIn, Work Trend Index 2024: AI at Work Is Here. Now Comes the Hard Part, published 8 May 2024 https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/ai-at-work-is-here-now-comes-the-hard-part

© 2026 NEWMIND PARTNERS. Licensed for use within one company. NEWMIND PARTNERS AG, Luzern, Switzerland · NEWMIND PARTNERS Inc., Sheridan, Wyoming, USA · hi@newmindpartners.com

END OF SAMPLE

Get the full report

This sample includes the cover, contents, about page, executive summary, where the week goes, interruptions and the working day, and the sources cited in them. The full report continues with meetings, tool sprawl, searching and the message stream, AI use and what controlled studies measured, roles and engagement, the EU AI Act as amended in 2026, GDPR, US monitoring and automated-decision rules, the NEWMIND model, nine playbooks and the self-assessment toolkit.

Full report

newmindpartners.com/benchmark-knowledge-work.html#report

NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEXT STEP

TURN THIS BENCHMARK INTO HOURS WON BACK.

You now know what is published on where knowledge work goes. NEWMIND PARTNERS measures where your teams' time goes, then designs, builds and tests the changes that remove the hand-offs, within the rules on measuring staff.

01

Feasibility audit

In 2–3 weeks we map where the week goes in your teams on your data (read-only and in aggregate): the tools, the hand-offs, the copy steps and the meetings, priced at loaded cost. Then we compare every option on the market, off-the-shelf or custom.

02

Design

We rank the hand-offs and duplicate tools to remove by hours at stake, and design one place where status lives, with the notice and monitoring rules built in.

03

Build and run

Our senior engineers build the integrations and automations, connect them to the tools you already use, and can run them in production with monitoring.

04

Prove it

Baseline on day one, then the measured change in hours and cost against a control, reported every month.

Start with a feasibility audit

Find out which hand-offs cost most, what removing them is worth, and the business case to back it. No commitment.

Start a feasibility audit →

newmindpartners.com/pre-audit.html · hi@newmindpartners.com · Luzern, Switzerland · Sheridan, Wyoming, USA