

Lend me your ears... in a digitally distracting world

A global research study titled #ListenLearnLead, conducted by Accenture, finds listening is more difficult in today's digital workplace.



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The new research conducted for International Women's Day revealed that while nearly all (96%) global professionals consider themselves to be good listeners, the vast majority (98%) spend part of their workday multitasking. In fact, almost two-thirds (64%) say that listening has become significantly more difficult in today's digital workplace.

While 66% of respondents agree that multitasking enables them to accomplish more at work, more than a third (36%) say the many distractions prevent them from doing their best, resulting in a loss of focus, lower-quality work and diminished team relationships. When asked what interrupts their workday the most, respondents cited telephone calls and unscheduled meetings/visitors more than twice as often as they cited instant messaging and texting (79% and 72%, respectively, versus 30% and 28%, respectively).

The research, which surveyed 3,600 professionals from 30 countries, found that eight in 10 (80%) respondents say they multitask on conference calls with work emails, instant messaging, personal emails, social media and reading news and entertainment (cited by 66%, 35%, 34%, 22% and 21%, respectively). Those who listen actively on calls typically either need something from the call or are required to lead, participate in or follow up on the discussion.

The research also found that the majority of respondents (58%) believe technology enables leaders to communicate with their teams easily and quickly, and almost half cite additional benefits, such as flexibility for teams to work anywhere/anytime (47%) and increased accessibility (46%).

Accessibility, however, is seen as both a help and a hindrance to effective leadership. More than six in 10 women (62%) and more than five in 10 men (54%) view technology as "overextending" leaders by making them too accessible. All respondents agree that among the top challenges facing leaders today are information overload (55%) and rapidly evolving technology (52%).

Additionally, more than 7 in 10 respondents (71%) believe the number of women chief technology officers will grow by 2030. And, more than half of respondents (52%) say that their companies are preparing more women for senior management this year than they did last year.

Country research highlights

Note: Global percentages are compared to some country percentages, where a difference was worth noting.

Listening has become more difficult in today's digital workplace

- More than half of all respondents (56%) spend half their workday multi-tasking [Philippines 79%, South Africa 68%, US 66%, Switzerland 66%, Singapore 62%, UK 60%, Germany 60%, UAE 60%]
- The top three interruptions to the workday for most are phone calls (79%) [Italy 50%] and unscheduled meetings or visitors (72%) [South Korea 60%], and, to a lesser extent, email (46%); instant messages (30%) and text messages (28%) were lowest among interruptions [overall and across countries]
- Four out of five (80%) respondents multitask while on conference calls [India 95%, Indonesia 93%]
- Most read emails while on conference calls:

- Work emails (66%) [US 85%] IM (35%) Indonesia 59%]
- Personal email (34%)[Taiwan 60%]
- Social media (22%) [Saudi Arabia 49%]

- Reading news and entertainment (21%) [Switzerland 44%]

- Those who actively listen on conference calls typically either need something for themselves from the call (53%) [China 80%] or are required to lead (42%) [US, India, China 55%], must participate (41%) [US 61%] or have to follow up on the discussion (49%) [China 80%]
- Good listening skills are important according to respondents. In particular, thinking before speaking (54%) [Indonesia 71%], asking questions (49%) [US 65%, South Africa 64%] and taking notes (49%) [South Korea 73%, Malaysia 70%, China 66%,] are the most important listening skills

Learning opportunities are valued by employees and considered an opportunity rather than a requirement. Many get promoted or expand their role as a result of company training.

- Most agree, on-the-job training is the most effective form of learning in the workplace (80%) [US 95%, South Africa 93%] followed by technical training (68%) [Thailand 84%].

Technology both helps and hinders leaders

- Just under half (47%) cite additional benefits such as flexibility in where the team can work [South Africa 59%, Mexico 58%] and accessibility (46%) [Switzerland 56%]
- Many say the same flexibility, however, overburdens leaders, making them
 - Too accessible (58%); [India 74%, South Africa 68%, Philippines 68%, US 67%]
 - Forcing them to multi-task (50%); [Indonesia 69%, China 65%]
 - Distracting them from team culture (40%) [Thailand 56%]

To advance in their careers, leaders need to develop their soft skills

- According to most respondents, leaders today need to
 - Have effective communication skills (55%); [South Africa 75%, US 75%, China 68%]
 - Manage change (47%); [South Africa 66%, US 63%]
 - Inspire others (45%); [South Africa 61%]
 - Provide role clarity (45%);[South Africa 63%]
 - Make tough decisions (45%); [US 60%]
 - Have interpersonal skills (44%); [Indonesia 62%]

Companies are preparing more women for senior management; more women CTOs expected in the next 15 years

- Most respondents (71%) believe more women will hold CTO positions in 2030. [Brazil 83%, India 90%, Mexico 86%, Philippines, 85%, South Africa 84%, Canada 58%, Norway, 54% Italy, Japan 46%]

Job satisfaction is on a slight decline as people cite being underpaid, a lack of opportunities for growth and long hours coupled with a heavy workload.

- Globally, only 44% of respondents are satisfied with their current job and not looking for new job opportunities - [Job satisfaction is higher in US 59%, Canada 55% and Switzerland 54%; lowest in Indonesia 24%, Hong Kong 29%, UAE

31%, Thailand 35%, and Singapore 35%]

- Those who are not satisfied with their job cite:

- Being underpaid (37%); [Singapore 54%, and Japan 50%]

- No opportunities for growth in their position (35%) [China 71%, India 58%, Hong Kong 56%

- Long hours/heavy workload (31% this year compared to 20% in the two prior years) [Switzerland 52%, Hong Kong 44%, Japan 41%]

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