

Office Chatter Named Biggest Productivity Killer by UK Workers

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A new survey from office supplies retailer [Cartridge People](#) has revealed that nearly half of UK office workers (47%) say colleagues stopping by to chat is their biggest distraction during the working day — more than emails, meetings, or social media.

The 2026 Office Distractions & Workplace Habits Survey highlights how office working environments can be difficult for employees to maintain focus.

While digital distractions remain a challenge, the findings suggest that people-driven interruptions seem to be the biggest barrier to productivity.

Interruptions are constant

The research found that distractions are a regular part of working life for most employees:

- 37% say they are distracted several times a day
- 32% experience interruptions hourly or more
- Just 13% say they are rarely or never distracted

Crucially, these interruptions come with a hidden time cost. The majority of respondents said it takes between one and ten minutes to regain focus after being interrupted. While it seems like a low number, the more distractions during the day, the harder it is to maintain focus.

As a result, more than half (57%) report having to work late or outside normal hours at least sometimes to

make up for lost productivity.

‘Quick questions’

When it comes to specific office habits, small interruptions can have the biggest impact. For example, half of respondents (50%) said that “quick questions” that turn into longer conversations are the most disruptive behaviour, followed by unnecessary conversations nearby (43%) and interruptions without warning (36%).

This suggests that while collaboration is essential, a lack of boundaries around communication is contributing to reduced efficiency.

The impact on wellbeing

The survey also highlights the emotional toll of constant distractions:

- 21% feel behind on work
- 20% feel frustrated or irritated
- 17% feel mentally exhausted
- 10% feel stressed or overwhelmed

These findings point to a broader issue, where employees are not only losing time but also experiencing increased pressure and fatigue as a result.

Balancing collaboration and concentration

Despite the challenges, the research suggests that workers are not calling for collaboration to be reduced entirely.

Instead, they are asking for more structure:

- 25% want fewer interruptions from colleagues
- 18% want quieter workspaces
- 16% want more flexible working options

This indicates that the solution lies in better managing how and when communication happens, rather than eliminating it altogether.

A spokesperson for Cartridge People said: “Distractions are an inevitable part of modern working life, especially as businesses place greater emphasis on collaboration and accessibility. However, our research shows that without clear boundaries, these everyday interruptions can quickly add up—impacting both productivity and employee wellbeing.

“It’s not about stopping communication altogether, but about helping teams find the right balance between being available and being able to focus.”

Supporting more productive workplaces

Creating a productive environment goes beyond managing behaviour, it also requires the right tools, supplies, and workspace setup.

Cartridge People supports businesses across the UK with everything from office supplies and printing consumables to catering, cleaning, and packaging solutions, helping teams stay organised and focused throughout the working day.

Businesses looking to streamline their operations can apply for a Cartridge People business account to access tailored support, competitive pricing, and a wide range of workplace essentials.