

The Art of Looking Busy

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. unnecessary (adjective) /ʌnˈnɛsəˌsɛri/: Not needed or essential.
Example: The additional paperwork seems unnecessary and burdensome.
2. pretend (verb) /prɪˈtɛnd/: To act as if something is true when it is not, often for fun or to deceive.
Example: Children often pretend to be superheroes during imaginative play.
3. conduct (verb) /kənˈdʌkt/: To organize and carry out a particular activity, experiment, or process.
Example: The scientists will conduct experiments to test their hypothesis.
4. collaboration (noun) /kəˌlæbəˈreɪʃən/: The act of working together with others to achieve a common goal or task.
Example: The collaboration between the two companies resulted in a successful product launch.
5. phenomenon (noun) /fɪˈnɒmɪnən/: An observable event or occurrence, especially one that is remarkable or extraordinary.
Example: The northern lights are a natural phenomenon that many people find awe-inspiring.
6. impression (noun) /ɪmˈpreʃən/: A feeling or understanding that is formed in one's mind as a result of an experience or observation.
Example: The candidate's confident demeanor left a positive impression on the interview panel.



We often try to look busy at work, even if we're not. It's like a performance, and it's a common thing, even for bosses. For instance, we might walk around the office with papers, write **unnecessary** emails, or **pretend** to be busy by taking notes on paper we don't need. People call this "performative work."

A survey **conducted** by Slack, a business messaging app, in **collaboration** with the research company Qualtrics, found that a significant amount of time at work is spent on activities that make people appear busy rather than performing useful, productive tasks. It's essentially like putting on a show. Derek Laney from Slack points out that this "performative work" can manifest as meetings where teams discuss their achievements but spend less time making decisions or solving problems.

The survey looked at over 18,000 office workers in nine countries. It found that workers in India spent the most time on performative work, about 43% of their work time. Workers in Japan were also high, at 37%. On average, people in these countries spent 32% of their work time looking busy. In the US and South Korea, people were more productive and spent only 28% of their time on performative work.

Laney describes this **phenomenon** as "wasted effort," and he suggests that employees engage in these behaviors to create a favorable **impression** in the eyes of their superiors. He suggests that companies should think about how they measure how much work people do and offer more flexible working hours to make employees happier.

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think people engage in "performative work" at their jobs, even when it doesn't contribute to productivity?
2. Have you ever witnessed or personally engaged in behaviors associated with "looking busy" at work? Share an example.
3. How do you think "performative work" impacts the overall work culture and job satisfaction of employees?
4. Can you think of any other examples of "performative work" that weren't mentioned in the article?
5. In your opinion, what are more meaningful ways for employers to measure and encourage employee productivity?
6. Do you believe that offering flexible working hours is a practical solution to reduce "performative work"? Why or why not?