EMPLOYEE PAIN POINTS

Taiwanese workers are uncomfortable at their desks, but don’t have the tools to address these physical problems.

A new survey from Microsoft finds that today’s employers shouldn’t just be worried about job satisfaction or employee turnover when they think about managing their staff. A startling majority of the computing workforce* is uncomfortable on at least a daily basis, with current desk setups and office accessories partly to blame. Comfort at the office is a top priority for workers, especially because it will make them better at their jobs and happier in their personal lives. But unfortunately, ergonomic accessories are absent from many workplaces. What’s more, workers don’t feel that their employers are invested enough in relieving their pain – but they’re not making strides of their own to get better either.

*Online survey of Taiwanese who work full-time or part-time and spend at least three hours on their computer for work each day
Regular Pain. Almost all (95%) workers report that they experience discomfort at work. And more than one in ten (14%) of these workers reveal that this happens to them for at least half of each day, if not more often.

Thinking Ahead. And many of these sufferers are concerned about what this might mean for them in the long run. More than eight in ten (84%) worry more about the impact of these aches and pains on their long-term health than simply having to deal with it on a regular basis.

95% of workers are uncomfortable on the job.
**Pointing to Pain.** Workers cite the top two sources of their physical distress as spending numerous hours sitting at their desks (45%) and staring at computer screens (70%). Other culprits include typing for long periods of time (28%) and repeatedly using an external mouse (21%).

- Spending a lot of time behind a computer screen is more commonly seen as a cause of discomfort by women than men (77% vs. 64%) and 18-34-year-olds vs. those who are 35+ (76% vs. 67%).

**Setting Themselves Up for Failure.** More than one in ten (11%) workers who encounter discomfort at work are apt to blame their current setup at work, such as the accessories they use or how things are arranged on their desks.
Not About Time. Additionally, nearly three in ten (28%) say that their discomfort is far more likely to be caused by their current setup at work or the specific office accessories they use than the number of hours spent at the office.

Hurting All Over. This may be why many report that their discomfort has impacted the areas that tend to be most affected by a poorly set up desk area: shoulders (63%), the neck (43%), wrists (36%), upper back (27%) and hands (19%).

- Workers in the 18-34 age group are more likely than their 35+ elders to report that their work-related discomfort occurs in their hands (23% vs. 16%).
- Female employees are more likely than males to encounter such pain in their shoulders (71% vs. 55%).

Body parts affected by discomfort at work*

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work

- Eyes: 67%
- Shoulders: 63%
- Neck: 43%
- Wrists: 36%
- Upper back: 27%
- Lower back: 24%
- Hands: 19%
- Legs: 11%
- Feet: 9%
- Other: 2%
SEEKING RELIEF

Most employees value comfort at work, and know that it would make them more productive and happier.

At work, is it more important that you are...?

- Comfortable: 71%
- Stress-free: 29%

High Priority. There’s one thing that Taiwanese workers value more than peace of mind at the office. Seven in ten (71%) employees – regardless of whether they encounter discomfort on the job now – admit that it’s more crucial for them to be comfortable than stress-free at work.

#1 Choice. In fact, nearly nine in ten (86%) employees would place comfort as a top priority if they were in charge of selecting the office accessories where they work.

Easy Sacrifices. More than half (55%) of those who experience discomfort would be quick to give up their company holiday party to be comfortable all of the time. And 23 percent would choose constant comfort over free food at the office.

Pain Relief Over Perks. What’s more, almost one in five (17%) of all workers would prefer comfort at work in the place of an office with a window.
Building Better Employees. Many workers know that more comfort equals more productivity. Almost two-thirds (63%) of employees believe they’d complete most tasks faster if they never felt any work-related pain. Another 17 percent say they would come in to work earlier than they usually do.

Personal Profit. A more comfortable workspace is likely to yield some benefits outside of the office, too. A majority think they’d have more energy (57%) and feel better when the workday ends (55%). Forty-eight percent might even sleep better.

Worth the Investment. This is likely why three in five (60%) workers would be willing to chip in some of their own money to ensure constant comfort at work if their employers weren’t willing to take care of them in this way. On average, this proactive group would spend NT$624 each month to make this happen.

- To take comfort into their own hands at work, male employees would shell out more monthly money than their female counterparts (NT$670 vs. NT$584).

If workers were more comfortable on the job...

- 63% would complete tasks faster than usual
- 57% would have more energy
- 55% would feel better when they get home
- 48% would sleep better
MISSING PIECES

Even though discomfort repeatedly gets in the way of work, ergonomic accessories are being overlooked.

Undesirable Effects. Just as more comfort would bring productivity, discomfort is dealing a serious blow to job performance right now. Because they’ve been uncomfortable at work, three in five (60%) workers admit they’ve been unable to focus and almost half (46%) felt like they weren’t doing their best at work.

- More 18-34-year-old workers than their 35+ colleagues (68% vs. 55%) own up to an inability to focus as a result of their discomfort.

Putting in Fewer Hours. What’s more, close to two-thirds (64%) report that they take breaks from their work to deal with their discomfort in the moment; more than one in ten (14%) confess they take longer breaks due to their pain. And 25% are apt to leave work early when discomfort strikes at the office.

64% take breaks the moment they feel uncomfortable at work

14% take longer breaks because of discomfort at work
Unfortunate Obstacle. Clearly, a lot of time is wasted in the face of discomfort. More than two-thirds (67%) of workers say they have difficulty doing their jobs at least once a month for this reason. On average, this lasts for five hours each month.

No Support. Yet, close to two in ten (19%) report that not a single ergonomic item can be found at their current workstations. And 27 percent say that outside of their chairs, ergonomic accessories are not present where they work.

Uncomfortable Items. What’s more, fewer than two in five are able to say that their external keyboards (39%) or external mice (39%) are ergonomic, or designed to minimize discomfort or fatigue.

Which office accessories of yours are ergonomic?

- 61% Chair
- 39% Mouse
- 39% Keyboard
- 30% Desk
- 30% Computer
- 25% Monitor
- 19% Nothing
ACHING ALONE

Many workers aren’t getting the support they expect from their employers.

Regular Pain. Perhaps because of the obvious impact of discomfort on efficiency, more than four in five (81%) workers believe that their company should be responsible for addressing this issue when it appears, and not the workers themselves.

- This belief is shared by more female than male workers (85% vs. 77%).

Who is responsible for ensuring employee comfort?

- My company: 81%
- Employees: 19%
Not Enough Support. But unfortunately, fewer than a quarter of workers feel that the company they work for truly cares about the health (24%) or comfort (24%) of its employees.

No Outside Help. And more than one in five (22%) don’t think this would change even when they encounter discomfort. They believe instead that they’d be the ones to suggest more comfortable office accessories, rather than any of the powers that be – including human resources and IT – or their colleagues.

Unwilling to Ask. Yet, a minority of workers would actually feel assertive enough to request new office accessories from their employers, such as a new mouse (15%), monitor (14%), keyboard (13%), or chair (13%). Far more employees would be quick to ask for better health benefits (36%), more flexible hours (34%), and extra vacation time (30%).

Not Consulted. Many employees probably feel this way because the current items they use were simply handed to them. Around three in ten report that their keyboards (32%) and mice (26%) were selected for them without their input.

I would feel comfortable asking my employer for a new...

- Computer: 30%
- Mouse: 15%
- Monitor: 14%
- Keyboard: 13%
- Chair: 13%
An Issue Worth Watching. Whether it’s a normal occurrence or not, nearly nine in ten (88%) workers who have experienced discomfort believe that it should be addressed. And 76 percent of this group sees workplace pain as a standard job hazard.

- More women than men feel that pain in the office needs to be addressed (93% vs. 83%).

Discomfort at work should...*

- Be addressed 88%
- Not be addressed 12%

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work
A Reason to Take Action. More than one in three (36%) also claim that a moment of pain would motivate them to ask for more accommodating office accessories – more so than even a doctor’s recommendation (30%).

No Follow-Through. Yet, less than a quarter (23%) have requested new office accessories to address their long-term discomfort.

Lack of Faith. Many of these workers might not be taking the initiative because they don’t think their need will be fulfilled in a timely manner. Fewer than one in five (17%) would describe their employers as a company that addresses employee requests quickly.

Actions taken to address long-term discomfort at work*

- Spent own money on office accessories: 30%
- Spent less time at desk: 29%
- Consulted a doctor: 25%
- Brought office accessories from home: 25%
- Requested new office accessories: 23%
- Got a new job: 13%
- Requested a new setup at work: 11%
- Moved to a new department: 5%
- Worked remotely more often: 4%
- Other: 1%
- Nothing: 14%

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work
About The Survey

The Microsoft PC Accessories Survey was conducted between 11 July and 22 July, 2013 among 540 Taiwanese workers (full-time and part-time) ages 18 and over who spend at least 3 hours a day on their computers for work, using an email invitation and an online survey.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4.2 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.

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Margin of Error = +/- 4.2 Percent
Sample = 540 Taiwanese Workers Ages 18 and Over Who Spend at Least 3 Hours a Day on Their Computers for Work