

Wanna bet? March Madness and a dozen other office games of chance



As if Facebook weren't enough of a pull for daydreaming office workers, March Madness makes working hard even harder.

Starting at noon today, many of the NCAA basketball games take place during the workday. The annual hoops hysteria saps productivity as employees spend countless hours filling out tournament brackets, monitoring scores on the web and talking trash across cubicles.

The consulting firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas has estimated that lost productivity during the 19-day tournament can top \$1 billion. And although [NCAA tournament pools are on the knife's edge of legality](#), try finding an office without one.

But March Madness isn't the only reason workers are signing up for office pools. Workers will bet on anything to break up the boredom of the workday.

Employees told online job-search site CareerBuilder.com that people in their workplaces had placed wagers on:

- How long someone could keep binder clips attached to his body.
- What time during the day a co-worker would fall asleep at her desk.
- The number of words a manager would say in a meeting since he was very quiet. The winner was a co-worker who guessed 11 words.
- The measurement in inches around a pregnant co-worker's belly.
- What a co-worker would use as his next excuse to call off work.
- How many people would call in sick the day a new video game came out.
- How late a co-worker was going to be to a meeting.
- Who would be the next pope.
- Who would win the National Spelling Bee.
- Blood alcohol results on drunk patients.
- How long two co-workers would date.
- Who could grow the best mustache.

So who do you like to be standing at the end of the big dance? Not that I'm the betting type, but I'm putting my money on Kansas to cut down the nets. Rock, Chalk, get back to work!

March Madness: Productivity buster, morale booster or both?

All this interest this month on March Madness may not necessarily be a bad thing. Diane Swanson, a management professor at Kansas State University, says the Madness can boost the spirits of fans in cubicles as well as in the stands—as long as it's done in moderation.

Swanson said participation in such office pools can, in fact, act as a counterweight to the cost and productivity issue. Pools can instead increase employee morale and output, she said.

“Such activities at work do create a bond among employees and increase their interest in being at work and foster a climate of solidarity,” Swanson said. “Instead of people sitting solemnly around and not connecting, these kinds of things can help to connect people and create bonds around a focal point of interest. This is desirable in a climate where employees by the thousands have lost jobs due to outsourcing and whopping misconduct at the top of organizations.”

For HR pros, the go-to source on whether or not to condone office pools is the employee handbook.

- Check to see whether any policies prohibit such pools.
- Be prepared to enforce your rules if your policies forbid employees from organizing activities in which money changes hands. Explain what the consequences could be. Some employers cite discipline up to and including termination for employees who engage in illegal activities.
- Make sure employees understand that betting on sports is against the law in every state except Nevada.