

CUTTINGS...

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

This time last year was my first reference to hybrid working. Since then it has started to emerge as the new normal. And the Chartered Management Institute seems to agree - their latest magazine is a full issue on the subject. So, I quote from a couple of their articles in this edition of Cuttings.

Also, a timely annual report from the CIPD surveys the state of employee health and wellbeing, and the organisation responses. Whilst there are some significant positives here, there are still concerns around the levels of workplace stress - and the lack of line management's skill and ability to help.

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Enjoy, and stay healthy and safe...

Geof Cox

Hybrid Working Challenges

Anne Franke, CEO of the CMI has these observations on the emerging management challenges associated with hybrid working:

1. Your people – especially new starters – are missing out on the benefits of impromptu workplace interactions. Over time, they won't develop the "peripheral vision" that the best team members bring to the job
2. People are under-managed and, over time, run the risk of developing potentially toxic habits.
3. At the other end of the spectrum, people are sometimes micro-managed and don't feel trusted to do a good job.
4. Establishing and maintaining high levels of trust without false metrics emerging – for example, how quickly someone replies to an email – is an important but difficult task.
5. Reimagine the office/workplace so that it represents an "experience" and offers the possibility for the kind of creativity that isn't available elsewhere
6. Make sure your organisation is, and remains, inclusive. I feel very strongly about this one. There's a real danger of new biases and in-crowds developing in a hybrid model, and managers must be aware of these.

In this edition

Hybrid Working - the challenges

- Comments by Anne Franke, CEO of the Chartered Management Institute

Five Big Questions to ask about Hybrid Working

- some core considerations from the CMI research on the emerging hybrid style of working.

Health and Wellbeing

- survey results from the CIPD on the continuing issues on employee health and wellbeing, including the COVID effects

Plus, a collection of **Snippets** to further provoke your thinking and reflection and details of **Book Sales** from our online shop

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

"All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service of others"
Mahatma Gandhi

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."
Walt Disney

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."
Albert Schweitzer

"Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have 24-hour days."

7. There's the risk of mild anarchy as people impose their own working schedules and preferences over and above the needs of the organisation. This is where a powerful shared sense of purpose comes in. Having clear and ethical ground rules are also important.
8. Sheer management capability is, as ever, key. Do your existing managers really have the empathy, social sensitivity and emotional intelligence that define the good modern manager?

There's one approach that can address each of these challenges, and that's the power of "small moments" (a phrase coined by McKinsey). As a leader, every interaction matters, whether you're talking to a new starter about their career ambitions or to a Cabinet minister about what should be on their agenda for the year ahead. Small moments can have big impacts. It only takes a few seconds of good management to switch a project from promising to spectacular. Good management and leadership really can make the difference.

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Five Big Questions to ask about Hybrid Working

1 What are the downsides

The upsides of remote working are fairly clear. For a lot of people it improves the efficiency with which they do certain tasks, as well as their work/life balance. One of the primary critiques is that over time it erodes the relationships that glue organisations together – a particular problem for new starters to the organisation and to work. It is difficult to build rapport and judge how comfortable everybody is. Even seasoned employees can find communication a problem without those moments of impromptu interaction that happen outside a meeting room. It is easy to develop paranoia when someone sends an email and people read things into it. And there's the increased risk of under-management – and its evil twin micro-management – in remote teams. Out-of-sight can very easily turn into out-of-mind. And an instinctive reaction is to over-compensate; if you can't see someone, then they must not be working - so we swing from under- to micro-management.

2 Wouldn't it be easier to get everyone back to the office

Not necessarily. Just because managing remotely is hard, it doesn't mean it's impossible. Managers need to find the virtual version of MBWA - Managing By Wandering Around. As well as virtual coffee breaks, some organisations are exploring ideas such as a team dialling in at specific times of the week, cameras on, while working on their own projects to give space for informal connection and free-ranging discussions that would occur across the office. Regular, off-script checkins that aren't about monitoring progress, but simply to see how someone is, are other ways to do virtual-MBWA. Developing trust

Zig Ziglar

"When you talk, you are only repeating what you know. But if you listen, you may learn something new"

HH Dalai Lama

"Improvisation is setting out to solve a problem with no preconception as to how you will do it"

Viola Spolin

"Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things."

Theodore Levitt

"Do not fear mistakes. There are none."

Miles Davis

"Action is the foundational key to all success."

Pablo Picasso

Health and Wellbeing

Another aspect of organisation life in the spotlight is employee health and wellbeing - so the 2021 CIPD report on UK workplaces offers some perspectives in this area. In the continuing backdrop of uncertainty, the survey identifies a number of priority actions for organisations, including the need to develop a strategic and holistic approach to people's health, safety and wellbeing, which focuses on prevention as well as providing support.

The survey findings are encouraging in that there is a significant increase in the proportion of senior leaders who have employee wellbeing on their agenda. There seems to be a recognition by leaders to show compassion and actively foster a culture that engenders trust. A common thread running through an effective wellbeing programme is the role that line managers play, but there are still far too few organisations equipping line managers with the knowledge and skills to support people's health effectively.

Stress continues to be one of the main causes of short and long-term absence. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of respondents

is the solution to avoiding micro-management – and for managers to trust people, they need to see the advantages of flexibility, focusing on results rather than how quickly someone replies to an email. There still may be benefits to some office time, but mandating attendance is illogical because it destroys the main benefit of this new way of working: the freedom to choose. So, if you need to convince people to want to come in to the office some of the time – so the office has to be as attractive, comfortable and appropriate for collaborative work as possible. People aren't going to commute for an hour or more each way to work in a rabbit hutch when they can just do that at home. We need to create the energy of a social office, the buzz of being around colleagues again.

3 Does it matter if some people come in more than others

The short answer is yes, unless you're careful. While some roles clearly need people to be in more often than others, there are inclusivity implications. On one level, the advent of widespread flexible working ought to be an excellent development for inclusivity and gender equality in particular. The risk, however, is that an “in-crowd” develops – people who come into the office more often, who have those important, informal conversations that characterise office life, and who (intentionally—or unintentionally) don't bother to include people who are working remotely. Those people, are still disproportionately likely to be women, which may have implications for their career progression and development. Stopping “in crowds” forming is easier said than done as it involves challenging deeply ingrained biases. We've got to design those biases out, and one way to do that is to build inclusivity into the culture, so that if anybody's out of the room – man—or woman – it's more likely that people will remember to include them, like defaulting to video calls even if almost everyone on the call is in the building.

4 How do we coordinate if people choose where they work

Giving people flexibility doesn't mean abandoning structure altogether. Indeed, if you don't pay attention to the practical considerations of co-ordinating people, freedom can soon turn into anarchy: Noisy video calls disturbing others in the office, finding there is no desk available for you, finding it difficult to arrange a suitable time to meet up... One way is to impose rules, rotas and core hours. But this can have the same disempowering effect as telling people where they should be working. Structure needs to emerge more organically. Certain ground rules can make sure that managers and team members alike are sensible and considerate in their decisions like planning further ahead, being very open and transparent about when you are coming in and what times you are working. These ground rules shouldn't be imposed, but negotiated – at best by the whole team together.

5 What's the most important thing I can do to make it work

In the end, a lot of this comes down to skilled management. The hybrid model requires a line manager who can build teams where some are in the office and some are working substantially from home, according to Professor Cary Cooper. And this kind of line manager does not typically exist now, because managers in the pre-remote working world tended to be promoted based on their technical expertise, not their people skills. They are used to measuring inputs not outputs. They lack the empathy, social sensitivity,

report some stress-related absence in their organisation over the last year, rising to 91% in organisations with more than 250 employees. Workloads remain by far the most common cause of stress at work, followed by management style. The COVID pandemic has created additional causes of stress, which also feature among the top causes of stress at work.

‘Presenteeism’ - people coming into work when unwell - remains widespread, even taking into account the rise in home working during the pandemic. Only 16% of respondents had not observed any form of ‘presenteeism’. ‘Leaveism’ is also commonplace. This is the use of allocated time off, such as annual leave, for sickness or to catch up on work. 70% of respondents reported some sort of ‘leaveism’. The recent increase in home-working and the use of digital technology has the potential to enable an ‘always on’ culture, so there's a concern that the boundaries between work and home life can be increasingly blurred, making it more difficult for many people to switch off.

In managing stress at work, the effectiveness of actions being taken, even in organisations addressing the issue, are not seen to be effective. Only half of organisations that are taking steps to tackle stress believe that they are effective at reducing workplace stress - figures which show no improvement on previous years. It's possible that organisations' efforts are exacerbated by the pandemic, however, the findings imply that many organisations need to address deeper organisational factors that have an adverse impact on health, such as workloads and management style.

Research by the CIPD on the impact of COVID on UK working lives shows a range of worsening mental health effects in many people, particularly those with an existing condition. Many people are experiencing a range of mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms and burnout, and the effects are anticipated to be long-lasting for some.

participation and collaborative skills, and the emotional intelligence needed for their developing role. And the change has been too rapid for evolutionary development. So we need to think more carefully and differently about how we select people for management roles in the future, and need some rapid management development actions to help the incumbent managers to adapt and develop the social skills needed for their new role of managing a hybrid workforce. Some tools might help, such as daily pulse surveys to measure wellbeing, weekly global all-hands meetings to raise and answer questions, virtual MBWA and cameras-on remote working - but these won't work if managers can't cope and revert to under- or micro-management.

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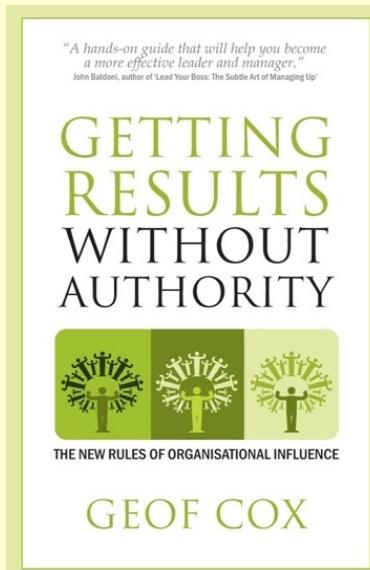
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The last few years has seen an increasing proportion of organisations taking steps to support mental health at work. This year shows that more have stepped up their efforts, with the biggest increases in the provision of employee assistance programmes and training staff to build resilience, as well as in the promotion of flexible working options. There is a continuing growth in the use of mental health/wellbeing champions and first aiders, although it's disappointing that more organisations are not training managers to support staff with mental ill health given the critical role they play in identifying issues and pre-empting threats.

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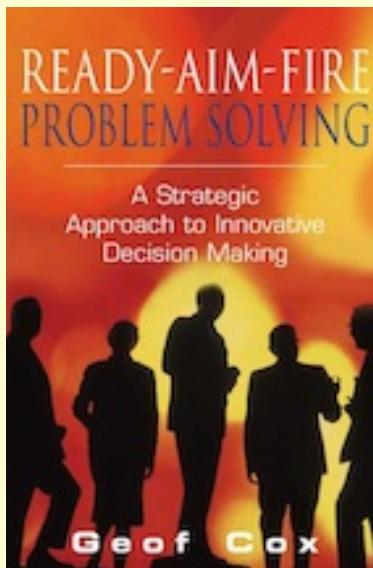
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Cuttings

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