IS SMART WORKING CONTRIBUTING TO RISING LEVELS OF EMPLOYEE UNHAPPINESS AND DISSATISFACTION?

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According to a survey by the Personal Group, there has been a 20% drop in workplace happiness over the past three years.

The percentage of people who are happy most of the time at work has reduced year on year from 51% in 2017 to 43% in 2018, and now only 41% in 2019. Many report being so dissatisfied that they struggle to get out of bed to go to work, and 79% percent of those surveyed can't recall anything from the last month that has made them feel positive about their working life.

Meanwhile, the 2019 Deloitte Millennial Survey has revealed that young people are becoming increasingly disillusioned about work, sceptical of business motives, and pessimistic about economic and social progress

Should we be surprised? Well a traditional argument is that even before getting to work, the commute for many is often ridiculously expensive and thoroughly exhausting, while the office that awaits them at the other end is frequently a dull, characterless place reflecting the uninspiring culture of the employing organisation, and the technology solutions and support on offer are at best functional.

Yet the alarming speed at which levels of workplace happiness are dropping in fact coincides with rapid change in the way we work through growing adoption of Smart Working over the last five years. The question is, therefore, does Smart Working actively contribute to employee unhappiness and dissatisfaction?

Recent fundamental changes in work styles and patterns have emerged and been enabled through the wider distribution of mobile technologies and remote access to digitally stored information. These advancements have facilitated a demand for more flexible working arrangements and adaptable contracts that reflect personal ambitions or family responsibilities.

The impact of these changes on the traditional office is such that organisations of all sizes have had to recognise that demand for space has changed and its utilisation has steadily reduced. Smart business leaders have understood that they were paying for space and services despite shrinking headcounts and changing work styles - space could often be unoccupied for up to 60% of the core working week.

As a result organisations have sought to reduce their operating costs, and property overheads have been high on their agenda - along with the introduction of Smart Working.

A key benefit of Smart Working is driving better use of space and technology - an important requirement for these aforementioned forward-thinking leaders. However, the essential driving component behind Smart Working is people. Whilst you could hire a contractor to tick the initial boxes by redesigning your office space and enhancing your technology provision, the desired performance of these changes is dependent on people who, on the whole, don't passively just do what is demanded of them.

"SMART BUSINESS LEADERS HAVE UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE PAYING FOR SPACE AND SERVICES DESPITE SHRINKING HEADCOUNTS"

And that is because, while it's easy to accept that the way we work is changing, the reasons for why we work are as complex as they always were. Aside from the money we need to earn for our basic survival, there are many other reasons why we go to work that are all-too-frequently ignored in the rush to implement Smart Working. Yet conversely the success of its implementation depends emphatically on people accepting change.

The messaging that accompanies Smart Working often downplays these benefits, and the simplistic language used can be rigidly imposing, implying that large amounts of time must be spent working away from the office and when back in there is the need to hunt out a desk because everyone is now desk sharing. However well-intentioned such messaging might be, it directly challenges the non-financial benefits that people want from their workplace experiences

"THE SUCCESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SMART WORKING DEPENDS EMPHATICALLY ON PEOPLE ACCEPTING CHANGE"

So should we stop Smart Working?

No. The Smart Working genie is truly out of the bottle. What we need to do is recognise that we are in a transitional period - from the traditional ways of working that were embedded in our workplace culture for many years to a new and quickly evolving way of working. We have to acknowledge that place is still hugely important, and that whilst we can no longer afford to maintain large volumes of under-utilised property, what we can afford needs to represent more than just a shrunk-down version of a traditional office.

We are social creatures at heart, and working from home only suits us for part of the time. When we want the additional benefits of stimulating company, learning from others, the use of exceptional technology and the buzz of social interaction, we need to be in a modern and adaptable workplace that is designed to facilitate these very things - not simply a superficial and generic place to do 'work'.

Find out how PLACEmaking can help you to successfully implement Smart Working in your organisation. Get in touch at placemaking.co.uk or email us at info@placemaking.co.uk.

SMARTER WORKING: IMPROVING EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE

Dr Shahnaz Hamid, Programme Leader at Interactive Pro, tells us how smarter working improves employees' performance

The massive growth of technology and globalisation processes have led businesses to break borders and find new ways of improving their employees' performance. In this context, the concept of "smarter working" has been developed as a response to recent changes in work processes and employer expectations in relation to outcomes and productivity. Although organisations have only started to implement the principles of smarter working, this approach can be considered an effective way of improving employee engagement, motivation, performance and productivity at both individual and organisational levels.

WHAT IS SMARTER WORKING?

Smarter working is a complex approach of managing individuals' work by offering them more flexibility, autonomy and means for collaboration through the innovative use of information and communication technology. At the organisational level, smarter working can be regarded as a managerial strategy to establish effective work processes and communication between employees.

Thus, the key features of this approach are the provision of a level of flexibility depending on the productivity or specific needs of employees, less dependence on workplace and office areas and the active use of technology to promote communication and collaboration. Consequently, the application of the principles of smarter working in an organisation leads to arranging offices according to employees' needs to provide them with opportunities for working alone or in a team, as well as using flexible working hours and remote work options.

Smarter working is associated with organising employees' work in a way that most suits their own needs and capacities. While being provided with opportunities to choose flexible working hours and the place to work, an employee can decide what schedule to follow and whether to work in an office or from home in order to be more creative and productive. The result of this approach is the increase in employees' autonomy, enthusiasm, productivity and engagement.

Smarter working can be applied by managers to improve performance, but this may require some changes to their corporate culture. This approach is more suitable for organisations that follow a people-centred culture, are agile and can easily create dynamic teams of empowered employees. This way, employees with different work styles can utilise their potential and successfully contribute and collaborate to achieve individual and organisational goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING SMARTER WORKING

To achieve the principle of smarter working for improving employee performance, follow these recommendations:

- Managers should change their focus from evaluating work through "presence or absence at the workplace" to evaluating the outcomes. Therefore, employees should be allowed to select the number of working hours and the place of work depending on their goals and deadlines.

- It is necessary to share schedules of all employees and provide proper channels for contacting one another. Collaboration is an important component of smarter working and should be facilitated despite the presence or absence of employees within a single office.

- Organisations must guarantee the availability of suitable technology to conduct virtual meetings and enhance online communication. Access to electronic documentation and other tools should be provided to all employees and they should not be limited in this area.

- If the employees are working from the office, they should not be limited to assigned workspaces for completing their tasks and should be allowed to use other spaces as well. It is good to be aware of the specific conditions that make the employee more productive and motivated, including preferences to work in quiet spaces, at the office or at home.

- Managers can determine peak hours of productivity for every employee in order to set a schedule that will contribute to enhancing their performance. This way each employee will be able to reach their highest level of productivity and achieve the desired goals.

ENHANCING ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE THROUGH SMARTER WORKING

If employees work at convenient locations and choose appropriate working hours, they will certainly become more focused, stimulated and motivated to achieve their goals. As a result, their performance improves and distractions and mistakes are greatly eliminated. Technology has contributed to making cooperation and communication simpler and dynamic, so team members across borders are able to communicate and work effectively. Therefore, it is possible to save on valuable resources, decrease costs and steer employee energy in the right direction to achieve organisational goals.

> **"SMARTER WORKING IS A COMPLEX APPROACH OF MANAGING INDIVIDUALS' WORK BY OFFERING THEM MORE FLEXIBILITY, AUTONOMY AND MEANS FOR COLLABORATION THROUGH THE INNOVATIVE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY. AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL, SMARTER WORKING CAN BE REGARDED AS A MANAGERIAL STRATEGY TO ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE WORK PROCESSES AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES."**

Organisations should appreciate the fact that smarter working is associated with more flexibility, independence and freedom for employees to become more responsible and deliver the desired outcomes. This approach leads employees to be better motivated to become more productive. Smarter working is being actively applied in modern organisations to recognise employee needs, address their talents and improve their productivity. The realisation of this principle is associated with accepting the presence of various work styles that should be taken into account while managing employees.

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We're here to help you implement smart working

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