

FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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FUTURE OF WORK

Changing the very nature of employment

With remote working now the model of choice for many, will the concept of being employed change and is the nature of employment being challenged?

Peter Crush

Tower Hamlets Council has bought 2,063 mobile devices since the coronavirus pandemic hit. So when even cash-strapped local authorities are spending big, kitting out staff with laptops and iPads, it's clear the expectation is mass working from home is set to stay for some time yet.

But in equipping employees, are councils and many other employers actually firing the starting pistol for a potential future problem, eroding the very essence of what it is to actually feel employed?

"Everything about the structure of working – getting up, getting dressed, the commute, the building, where you sit, sharing ideas with colleagues and socialising – is all subtly reinforcing status," says Rohit Talwar, editor of a new book entitled *Aftershocks and Opportunities: Scenarios for a Post-Pandemic Future*.

Workplaces are an undervalued factor in defining who we are. Work undeniably gives people a sense of who they are; it's an anchor and reinforces that they are a professional person, deserved of a professional environment, he says.

"If we're not careful, ignoring this and assuming people will get this same sense of employee experience at home, juggling at-home distractions could be a mistake," says Talwar.

According to Dr Stephen Pereira, cognitive behaviour therapy specialist, it's no coincidence that office buildings have big lobbies. "They're creating a sense of belonging. Entering is a badge of honour; it reinforces to people they've 'made it'," he says. Strip this away and problems will soon start emerging.

Pereira has just compiled research with neuroscience and wellbeing company Helix Resilience on the impact working from home is having on City professionals, who are well known for getting their affirmation from their place of work. Shockingly, it finds 85 per cent say they're already struggling mentally with working at home.

"It won't just be City workers suffering. I foresee staff struggling to work in environments unsuited to their work and unsuited to conveying a sense of personal identity," he says.

Tim Oldman, founder and chief executive of workplace effectiveness data firm Leesman, argues that employers aren't yet even considering this element of employee experience as a future issue, when they should.



Unsplash, YSincerely Media

"The problem is the fairy dust sprinkled on people when they cross the threshold of the workplace isn't something that has distinct return on investment and at the moment employers are enjoying perceived efficiencies. Staff seem to be working hard and being proficient. Mostly though, this is because employees are worrying if they'll still have a job," says Oldman.

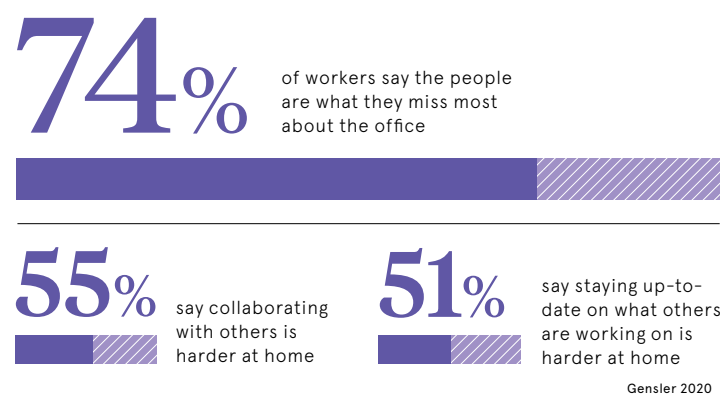
He worries things may soon start to slip, as mission creep sets in, and quality and innovation begin to decline. "That's the result of staff losing sight of who they are and where they fit it," he adds.

Guillaume Chesneau, Nespresso's head of UK and Ireland, is already noticing creativity is suffering, with staff not physically coming together. "We will be going back to face to face because, even with technology, I don't feel we have the same level of connection and people's mindsets are not

there 100 per cent," he says.

When people are at home all the time, they don't get their all-important "third space" that isn't home and doesn't feel like work, says Chesneau. As Nespresso UK's offices gradually open, he is perfectly comfortable with the space conferring some other form of identity. "It's highly likely we'll shift to a 'hospitality' type model, where the workplace is for meeting people and having interactions, like a hotel lobby, rather than having fixed desks," he says.

Employers who don't recognise the "fairy dust" factor could not only suffer future problems, but they could be compounding them if they've already started divesting themselves of real estate in the interim. Fujitsu, for example, has just announced it will need just half its current office space within the next three years, although some experts argue shedding space could be a mistake.



"Quantity and quality of ad hoc dialogue between people in an office cannot be replicated at home, when you physically have to phone or Zoom someone," says Richard Fox, founder of The Learning Corporation and author of *Making Relationships Work at Work*. "While those motivated by task completion might enjoy working from home, extroverts certainly won't get what they need by not being 'at work'."

Whether employees themselves will demand to get back to the office and regain their sense of self is a moot point, but employers could well find themselves needing to face up to it. It's certainly what outsourced receptionist firm Moneypenny is thinking about.

Pre-coronavirus its 91,000sq-ft purpose-built head office acted as a place for staff to come together as a community, says chief executive Joanna Swash. After months being at home, people are desperate to get back, she says.

"This question of whether workplaces give people a sense of self has really resonated with me," Swash says. "The office is a manifestation of our company; our whole ethos is we are a team."

"We have 100 back already, for mental health reasons, out of 750 seats. From what I've heard, most do want to come back because we have professional people feeling like they're not doing things at home in a professional way."

Analysis by the Advanced Workplace Institute of 750 academic papers into the impact of home working due to COVID-19 has found that when not together, trust and cohesion between staff is damaged, which can lead to loss of self-belief and identity. But managing director Andrew Mawson argues it's simplistic to say all workplaces were always wonderful and had a morale-boosting role.

"Not all workplaces were frictionless, easy places to be or operate in," he says. "Anecdotally, what I'm actually finding is many remote workers say they're feeling more connected and feel good about themselves precisely because managers are having to reach out more, communicate and do all the things they probably took for granted while everyone was on-site."

"What's clear is that while identity and personal status doesn't always have to come from a building, as employers maintain this virtual world for longer, what they will have to do more and more of is get the remote employee experience right." ●



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MENTAL HEALTH

Compassion now vital as mental health crisis looms

Now, more than ever, companies must ensure they are looking after their employees' wellbeing, following an uptick in those reporting a deterioration of their mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic began

Oliver Pickup

Is there any wonder, in this eerie and uncertain period, which began abruptly and has destabilised social and economic structures, the mental health of people is collapsing? With millions across the country struggling to cope at the dawn of the coronavirus epoch, and prospects appearing bleak, what can organisations do to support employees?

Worrying stats abound. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), published on July 17, indicate almost two thirds (65 per cent) of Britons "feel worried about the future". Mind, a mental health charity, found in late June that almost a quarter of adults (22 per cent) with no previous experience of mental health say it is now poor, or very poor.

Worse, the numbers are increasingly dispiriting. In the week ending July 5, for instance, 27 per cent of us thought that the current situation was "making my mental health worse", according to the ONS. The following Sunday, on July 12, it had risen to 30 per cent. In the same timeframe the percentage of people "feeling stressed or anxious" jumped from 58 to 68 per cent, alarmingly.

A lockdown lasting over a third of 2020 has tested the emotional limits of everyone, and broken many. Isolation from friends and family, coupled with a dark cloud of doubt stretching to the horizon, have taken their toll. At the end of June, the Mental Health Foundation revealed that one in ten people in the UK "reported having had suicidal thoughts or feelings".

"The stressors for people during lockdown have been extensive," says Dr Samuel Batstone, a consultant clinical neuropsychologist. "As such, you would expect a general increase in mental health issues and greater severity of symptoms."

Dr Batstone argues because our brain anatomy is "essentially the same" as it was thousands of years ago – when fight, flight or freeze responses were short term and typically concerned with physical threats – our minds are failing to deal with "more abstract threats, like a pandemic".

He continues: "In the developed world we seldom face a physical threat. However, we have replaced this stressor with numerous other, more abstract threats such as deadlines, money, peer pressure, relation-

ships, social media and 24-hour news channels. The problem is that our biological evolution – regarding brain structure and function – has not kept up with this social evolution."

Sir Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology and health at Manchester Business School, concurs that our brains have failed to keep pace with the helter-skelter of modern life.

"The issue of mental health was a big one in the workplace before the coronavirus outbreak," he says, pointing to a Health and Safety Executive study that showed 57 per cent of working days lost between 2017 and 2018 were due to "stress, depression or anxiety". More recently, in January, Deloitte calculated that poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion each year.

And then the exponential spread of coronavirus began. Businesses that previously realised the importance of employee wellbeing, and had established support systems, have been better placed to help employees with the coronavirus fallout. Others have improvised well, and technology has enabled frequent contact, despite mass home working.

"Good organisations have ensured that line managers have direct contact on a one-to-one basis with each of their direct reports, from shop floor to top floor," Professor Cooper says.

Many companies have sought out digital solutions. For example, American startup Humu uses artificial intelligence to sift through employee surveys to discover behavioural aspects and improve their overall wellbeing, while Kooth Work and Rightsteps offer good – and inexpensive – options for businesses to assist the mental health of staff.

Dave Lewis, principal at employee health and wellbeing specialists Rightsteps, says: "We've seen a surge in businesses – particularly SMEs – turning to us during lockdown as they've sought urgent support for their employees. Getting access to scalable, affordable and effective wellbeing solutions sooner rather than later is key to preventing the escalation of issues and minimising the impact on the business."

Renate Nyborg, general manager in Europe of meditation platform Headspace, agrees. "The pandemic has forced organisations to expand their staff support rapidly," she says. "Since mid-March, we've seen a 400 per cent increase in requests from companies seeking support for their employees' mental health."

While all employers have a duty of care to protect the health and safety of their employees, Lynne Connolly, global head of inclusion and diversity at investment company Standard Life Aberdeen, believes organisations should go above and beyond for their staff. "Irrespective of legal obligations, as an ethical employer we want to help colleagues deal with mental health issues and have a range of interventions and resources at hand to provide active support," she says.

“

Access to counselling services, meditation programmes and physiotherapy are impactful investments in your people

65%

of UK adults over 25 with an existing mental health problem reported worse mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

22%

with no previous experience of poor mental health now say that their mental health is poor or very poor

25%

of people who tried to access NHS mental health services were unable to get support

Mind 2020

"These range from the traditional – such as having someone to talk to – through to an app that tests a user's emotional wellbeing and takes them on a journey to help them take control of their emotions. That same app acts as a pathway to professional counselling."

Indeed, Moneypenny data shows that it's good to talk: the average length of a call increased by 22 per cent during lockdown. "We crave human contact," suggests Joanna Swash, chief executive of the outsourced-communications company.

Chinwagging aside, she showed impressive innovation to keep team morale high at the start of the pandemic. "We quickly introduced new initiatives, such as online yoga, meditation and exercise classes, as well as virtual lunches – with food delivery vouchers sent to employees' homes – and much more," says Swash, hinting at an evolution of wellbeing perks.

Similarly, at global workforce communications platform SocialChorus, co-founder and chief strategy officer Nicole Alvino implemented "distancing days". She explains: "We decided that one day a month would be a company holiday, for the rest of 2020."

In the coming months – possibly years – with a global recession looming, Alvino believes "empathy needs to be the foundation" of an organisation's support for employees. "And this doesn't require a capital investment," she says. "For companies who can allocate resources, access to counselling services, meditation programmes and physiotherapy are impactful investments in your people."

This sentiment chimes with Nyborg of Headspace. "Getting the best out of a workforce is difficult if leaders don't empathise with employees and strive to understand pressures they might be facing," she adds. "Moving forward, employers need to manage with compassion, transparency, and flexibility." ●

OPINION

‘Coronavirus has exacerbated societal gaps and unpicked improvements in equality in the workplace’

Employee experience could hit the employee pay buffer hard in the coming months. It is rare for employers to link pay policies with employee experience, because money does not create experience. Think about how we make each other feel by exchanging gifts as opposed to cash during special celebrations. Where it does come into play is when pay is perceived as being unfair or not enough for the work done, in which case the experience is not a good one.

There is plenty of forecast data, including the Reward & Employee Benefits Association (REBA) June coronavirus snap survey, showing huge swathes of employers have implemented, or are planning to implement, pay cuts, are delaying pay reviews and deferring bonuses.

How employers manage the pay versus experience dichotomy, once we pass the “we’re all in this together” phase, will be telling.

I interviewed dozens of reward directors at leading global and UK companies over the past four months. They are very aware of the need to avoid a perception of “us and them” in their workforces. So REBA was not surprised to see research data showing pay and bonus reductions have been, and will be, more common at executive level in 2020.

There is a rising desire to see a more responsible approach to executive remuneration as well as a desire for a greater focus on the reward experience for those employees lower down the pecking order who are struggling financially or on the frontline at greater risk.

The world is in a state of flux; everything has to be put on the table to work out what will get us through this. The role of pay within the employee experience needs to be part of this rethink if we want workers to productively engage in the major changes and innovations that will need to be put in place by all organisations over the coming months and years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted dials in both positive and negative ways. In the positive direction, many of those working from home have experienced the humanisation of work. We now know the names of workmates’ pets, can recognise colleagues’ children by sight, know who lives alone and

who is caring for vulnerable or elderly relatives.

This humanisation of the workplace has also meant acknowledging the rich differences between us. Sadly, the negative coronavirus dial has exacerbated societal gaps and unpicked improvements in equality in the workplace that have been hard won over decades.

Employers did not have to report on gender pay gaps this year due to the pandemic, although thankfully a number of employers who truly care about gender pay equality still did so on a voluntary basis. Let us hope these vital regulations will be back in place in 2021 so we do not lose more ground.

Ethnicity pay reporting has still not been legislated for, despite the consultation having closed in January 2019. The death of the African American George Floyd by a white police officer in Minnesota and the subsequent rise of the Black Lives Matter movement globally has increased pressure on employers to act on ethnic inequality in the workplace. The excuse that ethnicity data in the workplace is too complicated is not a good enough reason to do nothing when the result is pay inequality and discrimination.

Pay gaps and reward unfairness down to gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability and age create an appalling employee experience.

Employers who choose to use the sweeping changes of 2020 to be agile, creative and risk new ways of thinking will be the ones most likely to thrive. This will include reworking fundamental employee experiences, such as fairness and responsible reward, to achieve a more engaged and productive workforce at all earnings levels. ●



Debi O'Donovan
Director, Reward & Employee Benefits Association



Breaking new boundaries

The coronavirus pandemic has underlined the need for businesses to make use of digital technologies, opening the way for better decision-making and improved employee experience

Digital transformation has been part of many organisations’ strategy, but the events of the last few months have seen a rapid acceleration in the adoption of such technologies by businesses and individuals.

“We’ve probably seen a couple of years of digital transformation take place in three months, all driven by necessity in the coronavirus crisis,” says Marko Perisic, chief technology officer at human resources and payroll provider Zellis. Both the depth and breadth of services now accessed over digital channels has increased, he adds, as people have been forced to find new ways of living and working.

This has seen organisations finally overcome their reluctance to invest in digital programmes for back-office functions and to make use of public cloud computing systems. “We’ve moved from companies not wanting to do things to having to do them because they haven’t a choice and we’re now seeing them making rational choices around embracing digital as a transformative investment for their business,” says Perisic.

In HR, embracing digital technologies is having a significant impact. Greater use of automation means less reliance on manual processes, leading to greater efficiency and the elimination of human errors that have the potential to impact negatively on the experience of employees, such as around furlough pay and minimum wage calculations.

The use of data and predictive analytics, meanwhile, is helping transform the function from one seen as a back-office, operational function into a strategic partner, enabling more informed decisions about staff.

Data gleaned from payroll is a good

example. “Having access to more accurate and insightful data, broken down into different pay elements, brings a completely new level of insight,” says Perisic. He gives the example of being able to access data around historic pay rises and identifying how this correlates with how people have been hired, educated or trained, or the impact of the people they work with.

HR and payroll professionals could also explore the relationship between factors such as length of service, hours worked, age, gender and historic pay rises with rates of employee absenteeism and attrition. This could indicate whether those who work a certain number of overtime hours have a greater chance of leaving the business or taking more sick days. Such insight can then be used to determine policy, with the aim of improving retention or reducing absence.

Effective use of such information can not only help HR and the wider business make better decisions around its people, but can also improve the

employee experience, something that will be vital as organisations look to rebuild after the COVID-19 crisis. Up to now, this has often been the neglected part of the digital experience.

“We all think about our shopping experience, our social media experience or even the experience with the software we use to do our work. But what is our experience with our employer? People need a single pane of glass through which they can look at everything that relates to their experience with their employer,” says Perisic. From a business point of view, engaged employees are likely to be more productive and loyal, and ultimately deliver a better service for customers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined just how important it is for businesses to have access to technologies that can help them respond to unforeseen events. “Using those insights to establish where the world and organisations are moving, the HR function can make better long-term decisions on where to place resources, what kind of skills to hire and which employee benefits are likely to incentivise and motivate staff,” says Perisic. “Having accurate and reliable people and payroll information is an essential part of that.”



The use of data is helping transform the payroll and HR function from one seen as back-office into a strategic partner

To find out more about how Zellis can help your business digitally transform its HR and payroll functions please visit www.zellis.com





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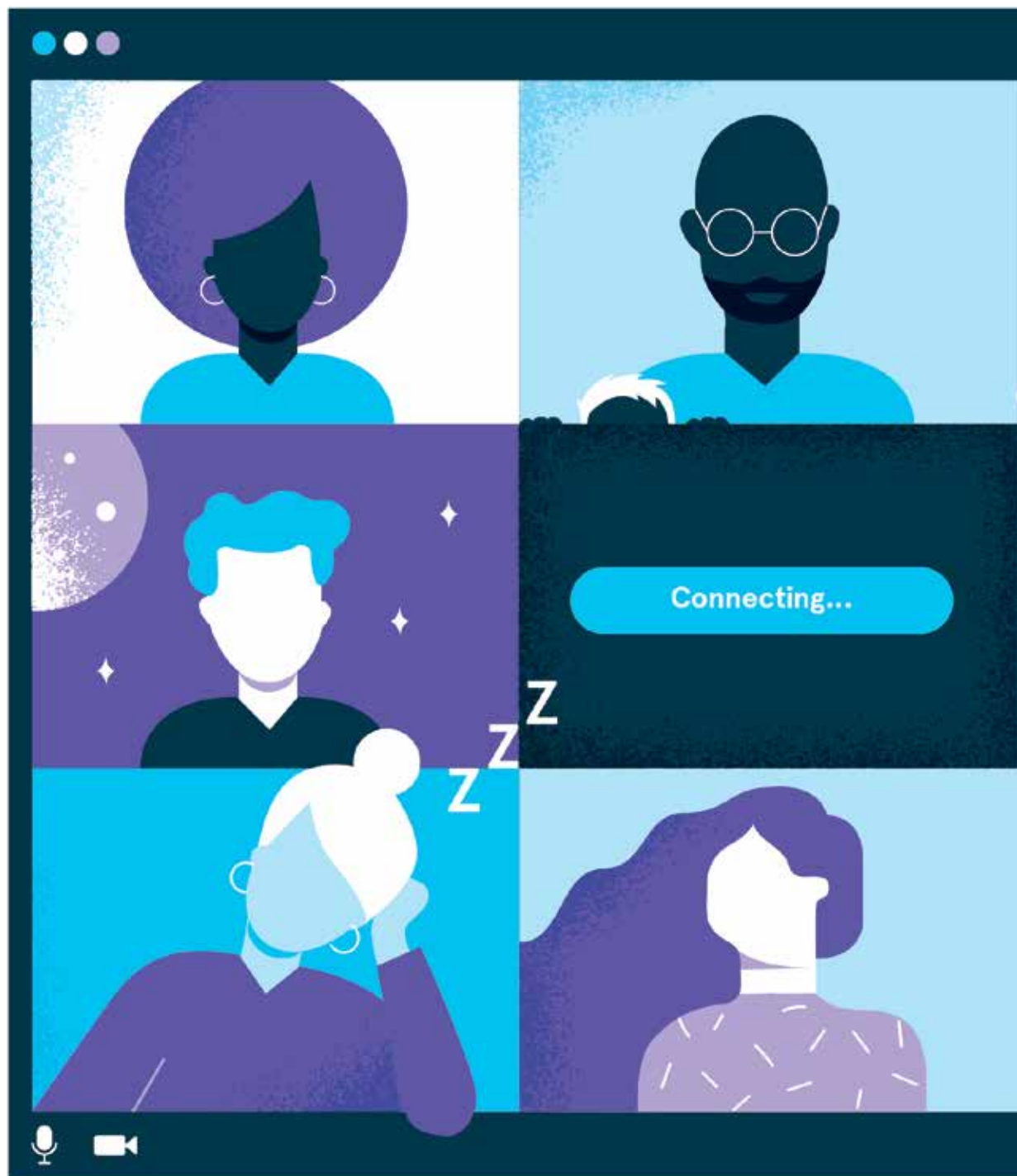
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COMMUNICATIONS

Seven reasons why we're sick of video calls

When the world went into lockdown in March, video conferencing quickly went from something we technically could do to something we had to do multiple times a day. Within weeks, Google searches for "Zoom fatigue" rocketed, as we struggled with internet, and human, connections during our video calls. Here are seven reasons many of us are now sick of working via video

Amelia Tait

Endless internet connection issues

"Can you all hear me?" "Can you see the screen I'm sharing?" "Carol, Carol, you're on mute." If your Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangouts call doesn't start with at least one of these sentences, you're losing at video-conferencing bingo and winning at life. From "Mark has emailed to say he can't get into the room" to "I think someone has forgotten to mute themselves", at least ten minutes at the start of every video chat will involve wasted time sorting out technical issues. We don't just have to worry about logging on, however; signing off can also be an issue. Melisa Woollard, a 31-year-old account manager, explains how she once thought her colleagues had ended a call so

started playing My Chemical Romance and dancing around her room. "I realised and hastily slammed my laptop down," she says.

1



Screen-to-screen is less natural than face-to-face

2 Andrew Hines, director of research at the School of Computer Science at University College Dublin, has been investigating precisely why we feel Zoom fatigue. Hines explains that the actual audio of a video call can be exhausting – because the verbal cues on video can sound slightly “off”, our brains work harder to concentrate. “When we talk on a video chat, anything that sounds ‘off’ – including network delays, unexpected silences or unnatural sounding voices – cause our brains to start paying attention to why it sounds wrong as well as what the person was saying,” Hines explains. When the technology (or our laptops) aren’t up to scratch, we may also struggle to interpret one another. “Natural communication skills include body language, eye gaze focus and non-verbal sounds such as coughs to indicate you want to speak,” Hines explains, “These do not translate well into a video call.”

Living rooms become conference rooms

Is that a swimming pool behind your boss? You thought your colleague was on the same salary as you, so how can he afford an AGA oven? Video conferencing offers us unprecedented insight into our co-workers’ living environments, which can heighten feelings of social inequality. It can also be difficult to find the best space in your home to point your camera at, not to mention time-consuming to move your artwork into frame (and your old takeaway

containers out of frame) in order to look professional. Comparing spaces with colleagues is distracting but almost unavoidable. One Twitter account, “Bookcase Credibility” has gained 100,000 followers in just three months by analysing the bookshelves behind people on video calls. Its most popular tweet scrutinises *MasterChef* presenter Gregg Wallace, whose bookcase is undeniably buckling under the heavy weight of 20 encyclopaedias.

3

You keep making eye contact... with yourself

In real life, it would be frowned upon to take out a mirror to keep an eye on what you look like during office chats. Yet most conferencing apps have “self-view” features, making it difficult to avoid looking at your own face. Hines says looking at yourself during a call is “multitasking without realising it”. “It gets us thinking

4

Video chats capture everything on camera

Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Hangouts calls can be exhausting because – much like the camera – you’re always “on”. On a traditional phone call, you can fold clothes or prepare a snack without the person on the other end knowing, and you can also stay in your PJs and/or forgo a bra. On video, everything is visible. Not only do you have to stay sitting up right instead of having a mid-call lie down, you also have to

about three things at once: what we are saying, how our audience is reacting and what our own face looks like as we speak,” – in short, it heightens Zoom fatigue. You can hide yourself from yourself in most apps, but Hines warns “it is a good idea to check what your camera sees” before a call. “As Irish MEP Luke ‘Ming’ Flannigan found out, the iPad camera shows a different view depending on which way you hold it. His committee colleagues were surprised to see he had no trousers on as he had just returned from a run!”

go full pantomime hero and keep an eye on what’s behind you. Eleanor Margolis, a 31-year-old writer, earned an unfortunate nickname after making a cameo on her partner’s video call. Margolis – who has short hair – brought her girlfriend a cup of tea unaware her camera was on. “The woman she was speaking to was like, ‘Wow, I wish I had a tea boy’. So now I’m ‘tea boy’,” she laments.

5

Introverts are under extra pressure

Video conferencing is a one-size-fits-all solution to remote work, which can be particularly exhausting for introverts or those with neurological difficulties such as autism. A 2019 paper from researchers at Microsoft found that without coping strategies, autistic individuals “experience more stress, have less capacity to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues,

6

Awkward conversations become even more awkward

Even with a decent internet connection, important discussions can often go awry when conducted via video. Brenda Wong, a 27-year-old training lead, had a redundancy meeting via video chat mid-lockdown. Around eighty people were on the call as her managers discussed who was at risk of redundancy. “I spilled an entire cup of water on myself and my desk,” Wong recalls. “I thought I closed my

and feel less empowered to participate” during video calls. Introverts may struggle in video chats because it is almost mandatory to speak over others in order to get your voice heard. Hines explains that in real life, people with hearing impairments are often drained after big events where they strain to hear. On video calls, we’re all straining in some way. “If you are mentally stressing your concentration with too many parallel tasks, your body floods with cortisol and adrenaline to keep you ready to react. This drains us mentally and physically.”

video, but I didn’t, so my boyfriend and I were frantically trying to mop everything up.” Wong says her colleagues at least had a laugh at her expense, although it was “only one of the most serious meetings ever.” There are endless opportunities for similar mistakes when the heady mixture of home-working and webcams are combined – who can blame us for feeling anxious that we’re next in line for a faux pas?

7

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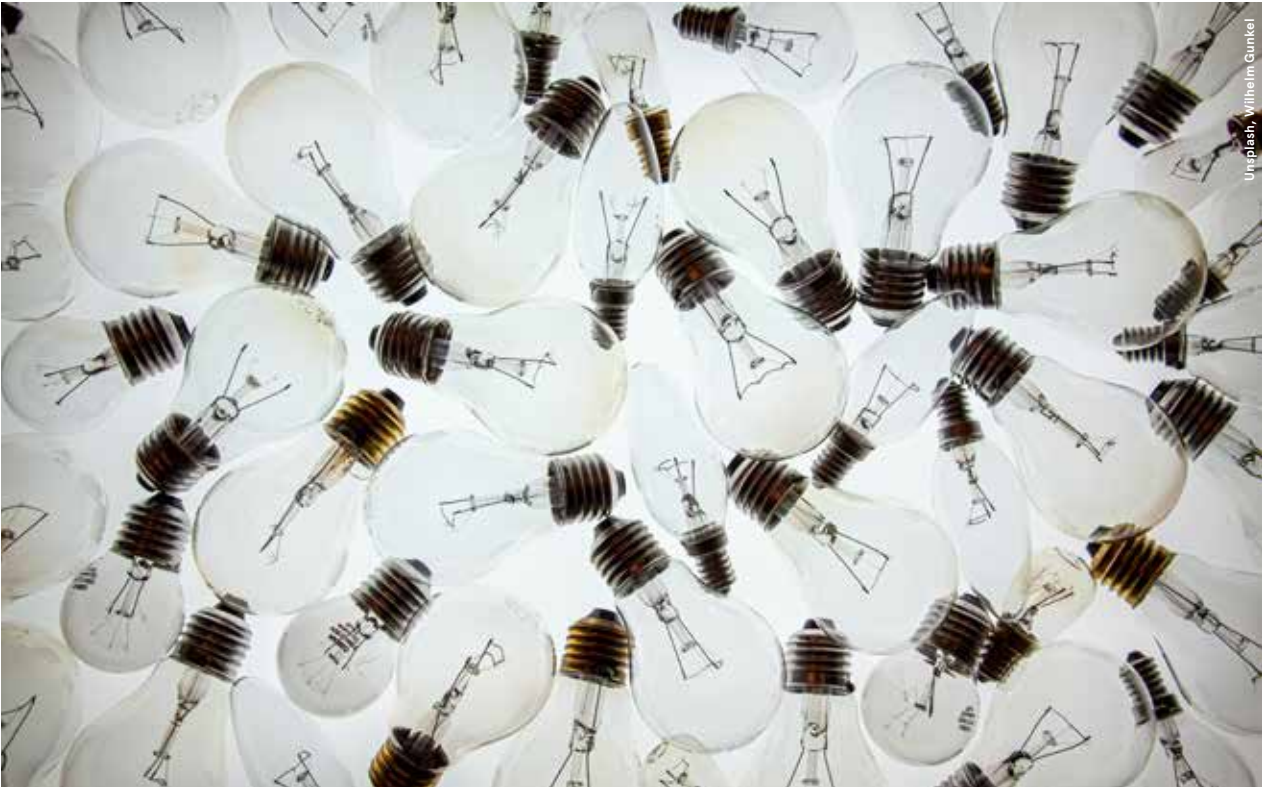
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INNOVATION

Management of ideas comes of age

An emerging class of software promises to help businesses generate and evaluate ideas that drive innovation, but can technology really engage employees around ideas?

Nick Easen

Generating innovative ideas and turning them into real opportunities is challenging for businesses, especially big ones, and particularly now with dispersed workforces. A pandemic of Zoom and Teams has seen digital collaboration and employee engagement on a scale unheard of a year ago. It's no surprise then that in a coronavirus-conscious world, idea management software is also booming.

"This feels like a zeitgeist moment for our sector. When the whole globe suddenly started working from home, those with the online tools to collaborate seamlessly across borders and locations were more prepared for the new world order," says Simon Hill, chief executive of collaboration software outfit Wazoku.

The sector's come a long way. At the turn of the millennium, rudimentary digital idea management tools began to appear, evolving from the traditional employee suggestion box. The 2008 financial crash and subsequent recession instilled a healthy fear of disruption in large organisations, fuelling accelerated evolution in the sector. Now the market's worth nearly \$1 billion, growing at 13 per cent a year, and for good reason; the Dragons' Den of early ideas can become business winners.

"One of the most important differentiators between idea management

and other social collaboration tools is it allows companies to quantify and measure all aspects of innovation, from engagement to user activity and return on investment," says Eran Tsur, vice president of marketing at Qmarkets.

With the stand-up team meeting, water-cooler chat, live workshops and bustling hackathons paralysed by the coronavirus pandemic, the wisdom of the corporate crowd is now being orchestrated online. Idea management software has also been used as a crucial employee engagement tool in lockdown, as some companies try to recalibrate and pivot their whole business model. As the economic fall-out ensues, the software is proving invaluable.

"Right now, there's a real need to invest in structured programmes that accelerate change and create more resilient and flexible companies, as

“The tech allows companies to quantify and measure all aspects of innovation, from engagement to user activity and ROI

well as fostering reinvention in a systematic way," says Diana Carvalho, chief executive of Exago.

However, idea management software doesn't build a culture of business innovation; that's the job of real people. Creativity also demands a level of human spontaneity and time to think, rather than a chatbot telling staff how to innovate.

What software is good at is digitalising and formalising the process. It collates thousands of ideas, tests and discusses them at scale, then gathers the human, financial and logistical means to make the best ideas come to life and eventually impact the bottom line.

"Culturally, it can sometimes require some effort to get employees and idea communities to buy into using software for innovation, but on the whole people really embrace it. They feel empowered that their opinion is sought and engagement levels can be very high indeed," says Wazoku's Hill.

"John Lewis & Partners has been using our software for several years now and has seen more than 4,000 staff ideas submitted, many from the shop floor, with innovation realising £10 million in annual cost-savings. This technology really works and can make a tangible difference."

HSBC, Waitrose, Hyundai, Nestlé, Intel and the NHS are just some of

the employers using this class of software; the list is diverse and the size of organisations varies. What's consistent with many is COVID-19 has been a rallying call for crowdsourcing fresh ideas from engaged employees.

"Some of our customers' COVID-19 challenges have brought the highest-ever number of employees on board, one of which gathered more than 400 ideas in just 24 hours," says Doug Williams, principal innovation consultant at Planview.

"Crowdsourcing employee ideas right now and post-pandemic is essential, since staff are on the frontline with customers, partners and company processes."

One of the greatest strengths in deploying a digital innovation platform, of which there are a good handful, is their ability to get many more employees actively involved. Everyone likes to be asked about their ideas. Many find it flattering and it makes workers think they're not just a small cog in a big wheel.

"Millennials and generation Z expect employee engagement initiatives like these; it ensures their retention," says Carvalho at Exago.

Idea management software is also starting to engage employees with a new layer of tech: artificial intelligence (AI). It can help match the most relevant worker to a challenge or identify duplicate ideas using natural-language processing,

as well as improve efficiency. AI also helps make innovation management more efficient. It can feed algorithms enabling businesses to analyse and interpret complex information; that way employees can detect trends and customer expectations faster.

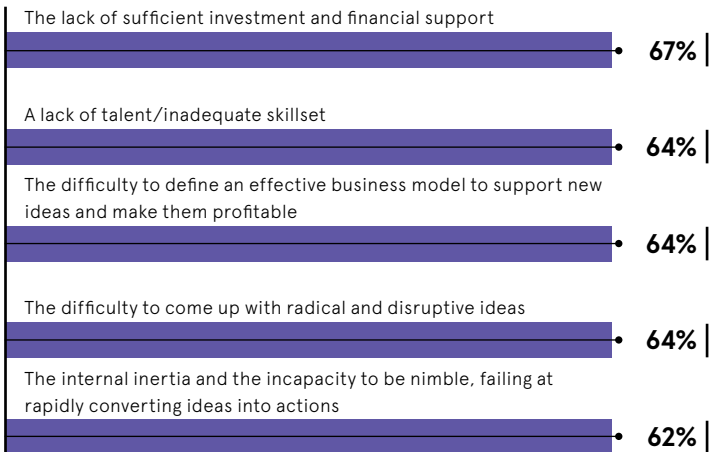
Expect greater augmentation going forward, though the future is mostly uncharted. "AI mainly helps people save time, however in the future we see it having an increasingly prominent role to play across the entire spectrum of innovation management activities," explains Qmarkets' Tsur.

Beyond AI, the next frontier is an increased willingness for organisations to look externally for ideas and inspiration. Digital platforms can assist in this process providing structure. It's why Bristol-based Wazoku just acquired InnoCentive, a US firm with a global network of 500,000 expert problem-solvers, including chief executives, PhD students, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, retired technologists and business leaders.

"Those firms adopting open ways of working, both inside their organisational walls and in the way they use outside talent to augment change and innovation, will adapt quicker and change faster," Hill concludes. Amazon-like marketplaces for innovative thinking might just engage a lot more of us. ●

CHALLENGES TO INNOVATION

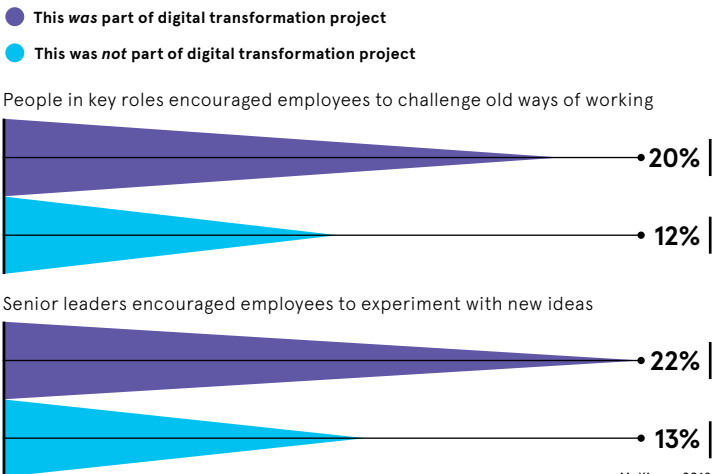
Business executives were questioned about the key challenges restricting their businesses' ability to innovate efficiently



General Electric/Edelmann 2018

SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS RELY ON GREAT IDEAS

Percentage of digital transformation projects that were rated a success, based on key factors involved



McKinsey 2018

Agility at the heart of employee engagement

Human resources leaders who can bring together employee engagement, performance and learning will be best placed to develop agile and people-driven strategies to get the most from their workforce

Traditional employee engagement strategies, in which companies survey their workers once a year or not at all, have been left without key information and insights during the coronavirus pandemic. Though these more rigid approaches have been outdated for years, the sudden shift to mass remote working since March has left organisations struggling to understand how their staff are feeling.

Research from Glint, the people success platform that tracks engagement levels through real-time people data, has found that companies that are people driven, with regular staff conversations and surveys, are sustaining the challenging times more effectively than those with less agile approaches.

Using natural language processing, Glint analyses phrases and sentiments used in surveys and aligns them to certain key topics. If somebody says "I'm so exhausted that I just can't be productive", the system will flag it as an employee who might be experiencing burnout. Among the 150 topics it observes, such indicators of burnout have doubled during the crisis. Companies not getting regular feedback from their staff are unlikely to be fully aware of this issue or how to address it.

"In an environment of overwork, which has been confounded by redundancies and furloughing, the potential downstream impact is more burnout, which can also drive dips in productivity," says Justin Black, senior director of people science at Glint, which advocates for agile employee engagement strategies.

"Instead of an annual, 55-question survey, get feedback when you need to. Regular cadence is so important because we know the likes of recognition, career growth and empowerment vary on a quarterly basis. We see it in our data and we know that changes in those scores impact employee engagement.

"Achieving agile employee engagement requires small and frequent interactions with staff, focused on what the organisation needs today and getting feedback right away. If it takes weeks to get the results of a survey, it's just not timely enough to be useful. We also need to move away from the survey as the silver bullet. The survey cadence is in service of a regular conversation process and approach, not the other way around."

Glint has observed four ways that companies have successfully intervened to improve employee engagement during the pandemic: insights and feedback through surveys, regular conversations, adaptable goals tied to organisational success, and prioritising continuous improvement of learning and growth over simple engagement scores.

Through analysing three million datapoints, which it has collected since early-March, Glint has found that employees who are made to feel more connected to their organisation are 3.5 times more satisfied with the degree to which their employer cares for their wellbeing and 4.5 times more likely to feel supported. In further research of what LinkedIn members want more of now than they did in the past, the number-one desire was for greater flexibility.

The shift to remote working has given human resources leaders the opportunity to review whether their systems, tools, approaches and processes still serve the needs of their workforce. A common mistake is putting measurement at the core of employment engagement strategies. Though important, measurement should be seen as a tool, not a purpose, and failing to understand this sees organisations focusing on habit-building and point-scoring, rather than action-planning and using data to sustain continuous improvement.

"I'm not convinced companies need an engagement programme at

OVERALL, EMPLOYEES FEEL POSITIVE AND GRATEFUL ABOUT HOW THEIR COMPANY IS HANDLING THE CRISIS



EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL THAT THEIR EMPLOYER IS HELPING THEM FEEL CONNECTED ARE:

3.5x

more likely to feel their company cares about their wellbeing

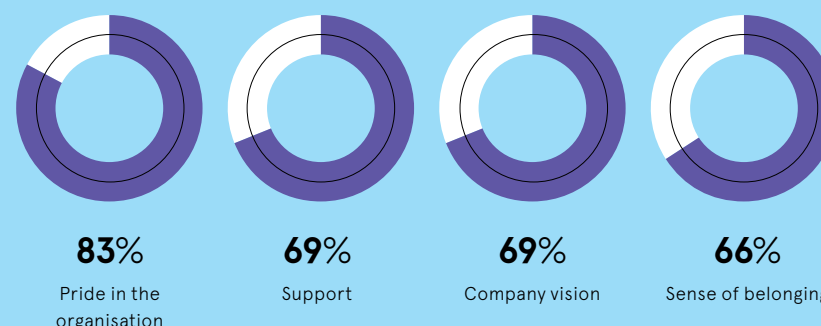
4x

more likely to report feeling well-supported

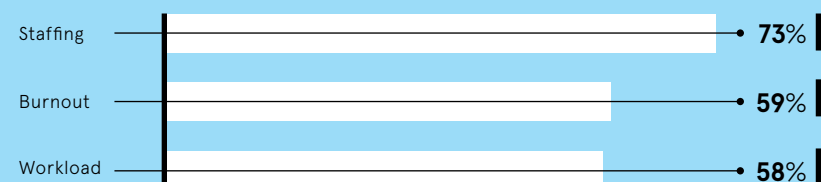
1 in 5

feel their employer isn't doing enough to help employees feel connected to each other

COMPANY CULTURE IS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND POSITIVITY FOR EMPLOYEES. HERE ARE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS THAT EMPLOYEES FEEL MOST POSITIVE ABOUT:



COMMENTS ABOUT BURNOUT HAVE DOUBLED SINCE MARCH, WITH THE MOST NEGATIVE CALL OUTS REGARDING:



all," says Black. "In some ways, in the new world of work, it can be counterintuitive because employees don't think in terms of the engagement programme. To put people at the core, they need to bring together what they've traditionally called employee engagement, performance management, and learning and development. With a unified people success strategy, employers can better serve the overall objective of happiness and success of their employees."

TomTom navigates towards greater employee engagement

Like many organisations, employee engagement at TomTom, the location technology specialist, was limited to a one-time survey and static report. The results would be cascaded and

a response plan would be devised. But the time it took to complete the analysis meant the data lost relevance and managers struggled to keep momentum.

To support its desire to offer a working atmosphere where staff can be themselves, have fun and do their best work, TomTom wanted to adopt a more continuous and interactive approach to employee engagement that could be embedded into day-to-day routine. Requiring a tool that enables deep analysis into what its employees are voicing, feeling and expressing, TomTom turned to Glint's People Success platform.

"We wanted our managers to be able to own their team's engagement metrics and be the ones who are the drivers for change," says Bart Bolger, vice president of HR brand and locations at TomTom.

"With Glint, they get a more meaningful and impactful experience by receiving faster and more focused insights, a user-friendly platform and customised action plans as soon as the results are released to them. The platform translates results into actions, offering analyses and showing how to improve and what is influencing our business."

TomTom is now able to tailor its initiatives based on the employee engagement results that are easily accessible

through the platform. With the analysis provided, it can see clearly and in depth what engages its employees and where and how it needs to improve its employee life cycle. The solution has also supported TomTom's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling it to roll out regular check-in surveys with staff.

"Employee wellbeing has been top of mind during these unprecedented times, so knowing how we can help staff with things like emotional support, work-life balance and IT set-up from home, and respond to their concerns, has been very beneficial for us as a company," Bolger adds.

"Based on the results of our COVID-19 check-in surveys, we've been able to understand where our staff need us most. We always refer to the Glint insights now when we need to make decisions. We will continue doing our surveys as often as we can to make sure we are keeping our connection to employees."

For more information please visit glintinc.com

GLINT



With a unified people success strategy, employers can better serve the overall objective of happiness and success of their employees

DITCHING THE 9-5

Making the case for a four-day week

Just a decade ago, the idea of moving to a four-day work week would have seemed unrealistic and doomed for failure. But with many governments rolling out trials and the pandemic prompting companies across the world to adopt more flexible working patterns, the argument to move away from the traditional nine to five has begun to gather speed. Whether our future working lives will be completely flexible, confined to four days a week or spread out across seven, remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the tried-and-tested 40-hour work week is at risk of becoming obsolete

A TIME FOR CHANGE?

60%

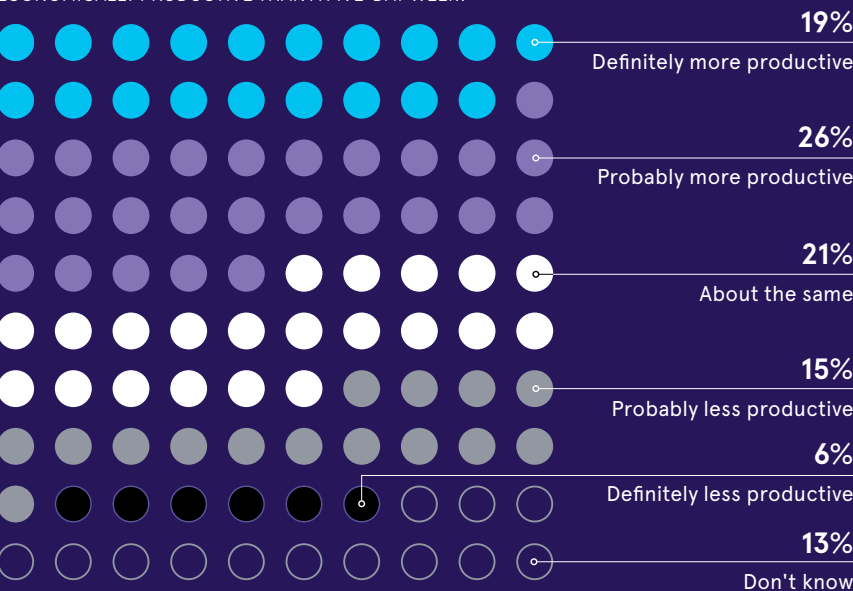
of UK employees say that the traditional nine to five no longer works for them as they try to balance life in and out of work

Wildgoose 2019

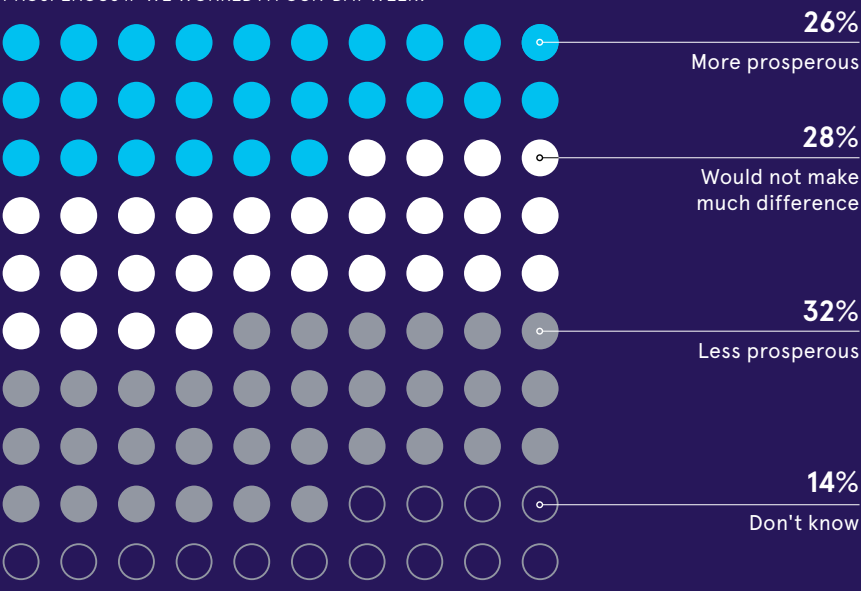
HOW THE PUBLIC FEELS ABOUT A FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

Survey of adults in the UK

DO YOU THINK A FOUR-DAY WEEK WOULD BE MORE OR LESS ECONOMICALLY PRODUCTIVE THAN A FIVE-DAY WEEK?

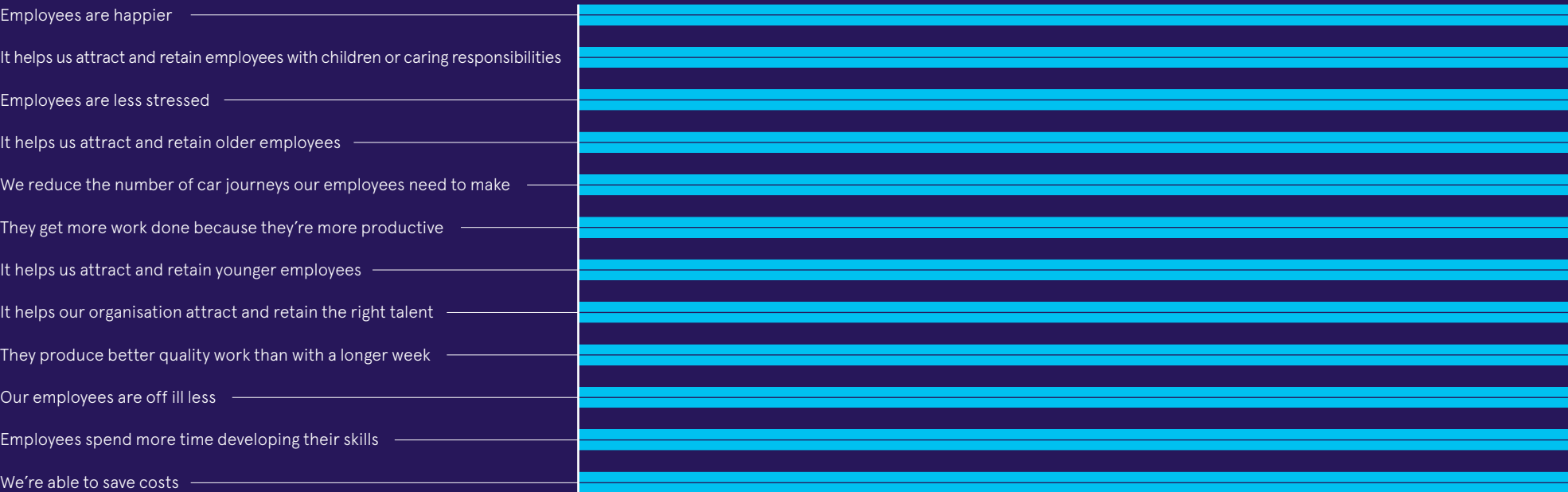


DO YOU THINK AS A NATION WE WOULD BE MORE OR LESS PROSPEROUS IF WE WORKED A FOUR-DAY WEEK?



BENEFITS OF A FOUR-DAY WEEK

Survey of UK employers that have trialled a four-day week



57%

of UK adults would support introducing a four-day working week, while 28 per cent would oppose

YouGov 2019

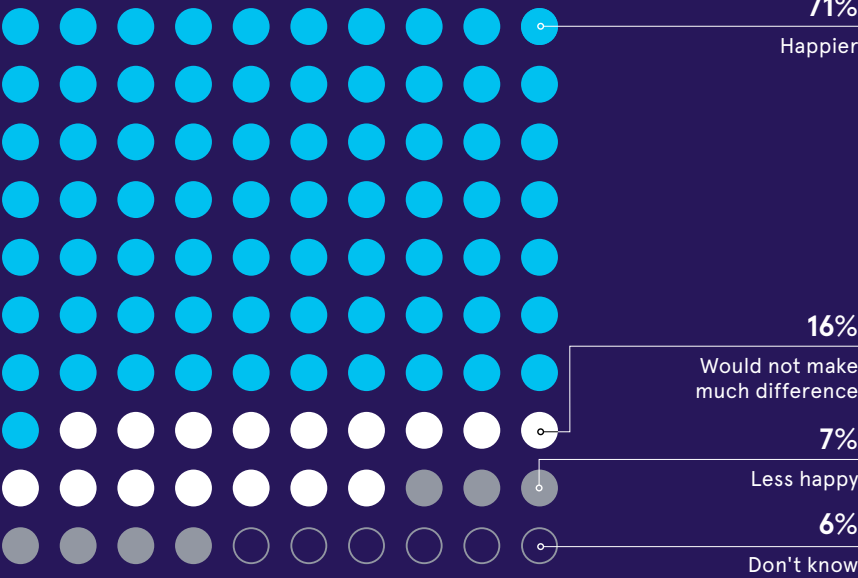
28%

of employees are content with the standard five-day work week

Kronos Incorporated/
The Workforce Institute 2018

YouGov 2019

DO YOU THINK AS A NATION WE WOULD BE MORE OR LESS HAPPY IF WE WORKED A FOUR-DAY WEEK?

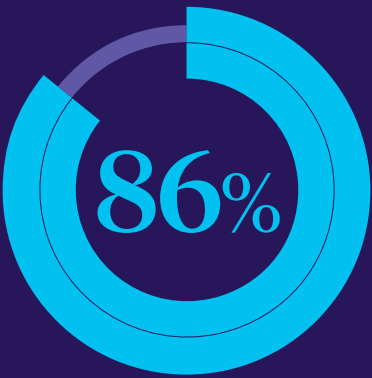


Henley Business School 2019

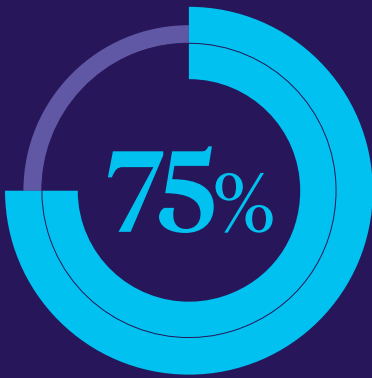
78%
71%
70%
70%
66%
64%
64%
63%
63%
62%
59%
51%

THE 40-HOUR CONUNDRUM

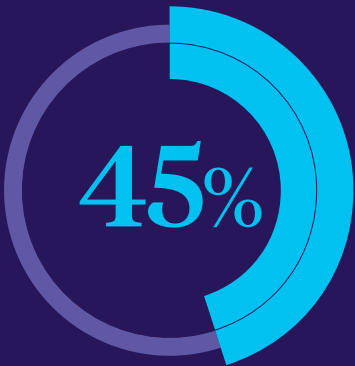
Survey of full-time employees across eight countries



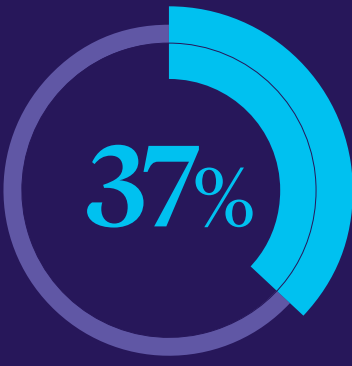
say they lose time each day on work-specific tasks unrelated to their core job



believe they have enough time in the workday to finish their major tasks



estimate it should take less than five hours each day to do their job if they worked uninterrupted

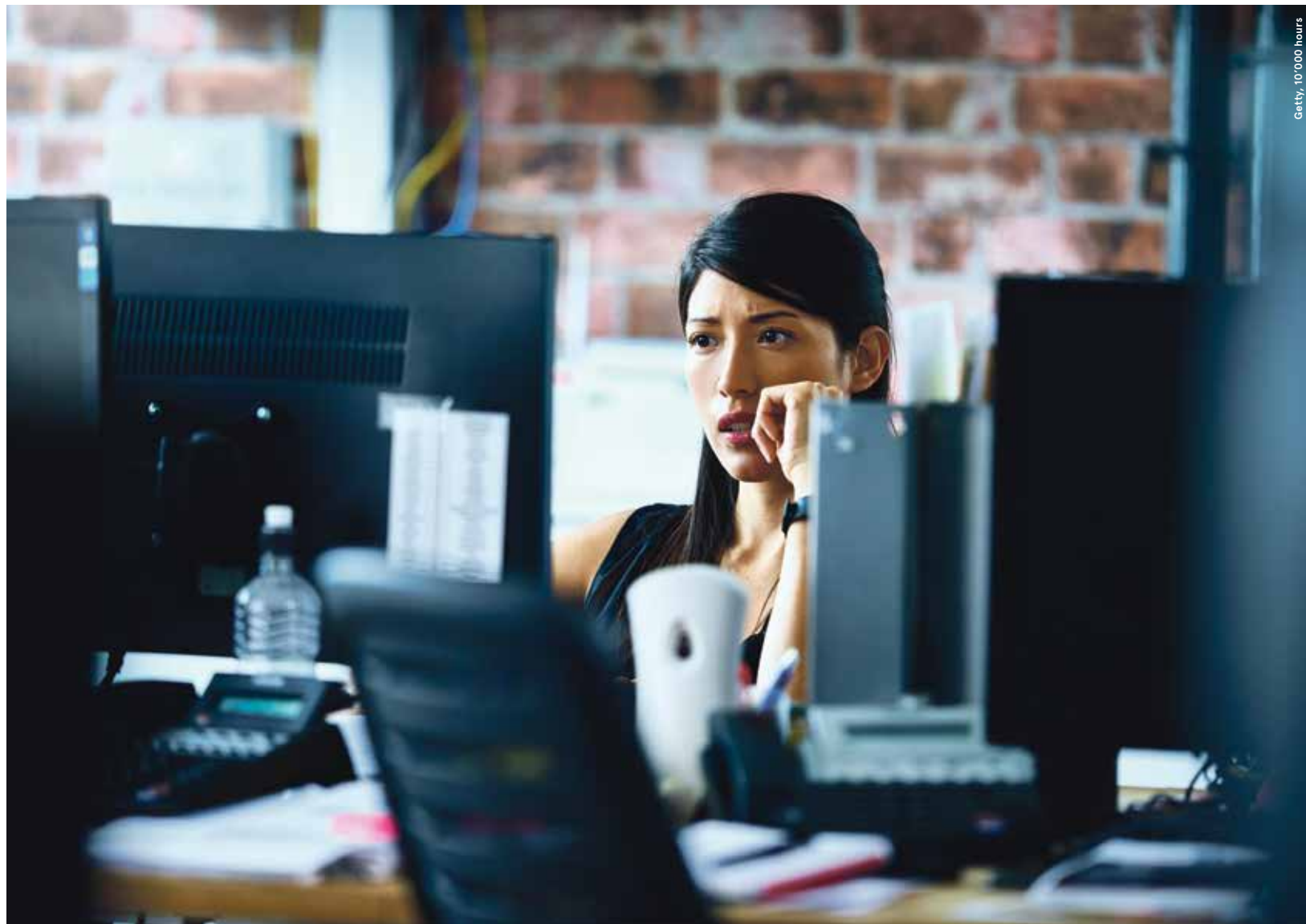


work more than 40 hours each week

Kronos Incorporated/The Workforce Institute 2018

FOUR-DAY WEEK TRIALS

- New Zealand-based estate planning advisory Perpetual Guardian embarked on a four-day work week trial in 2018, during which staff worked 30 hours but were paid for 37.5 to deliver the same amount of output. After eight weeks, engagement among its 240 employees broadly improved: the percentage of staff feeling stressed fell by 7 per cent, while those feeling committed to the company jumped 20 per cent.
- A five-week trial by Microsoft Japan in the summer of 2019, where all 2,300 staff were given Fridays off without a payout, resulted in a 40 per cent jump in productivity. The company also reported a 23 per cent drop in electricity usage and a 25 per cent fall in the amount of time taken off by employees.
- Medical communications outfit Synergy Vision formalised a four-day week after a six-month pilot last year, which resulted in an across-the-board increase in reported happiness and productivity levels among its workers in London, Dublin and Sydney. Employees reporting a positive work-life balance rose from 23 per cent to 48 per cent, while those working overtime fell from 65 per cent to under 50 per cent.



Getty, 10,000 hours

“For people who’ve been furloughed, they’ve had a loss of routine and there may be some reparation required in terms of trust and their perceived value

MENTAL HEALTH

Managing return-to-work anxiety

While workforce re-entry includes logistical and operational planning, returning to work from lockdown carries with it heightened anxieties and uncertainties regarding such a significant transition

MaryLou Costa

The impact of work-related stress on mental health, particularly anxiety about going back to work after coronavirus lockdown, is concerning some employers more than the physical aspects of creating a safe working environment.

Mental health charity Mind has warned of an impending mental health crisis, as two thirds of people say their mental health has deteriorated, prompting a watershed moment for how emotional support is provided in the workplace.

Emma Mamo, the charity’s head of workplace wellbeing, describes key drivers as the impact of isolation, fear and mistrust in the decision to lift the lockdown, anxiety over commuting and mixing with others, workload stresses, plus nervousness over employment status.

“For people who’ve been furloughed, they’ve had a loss of routine and there may be some reparation required in terms of trust and their perceived value in the organisation. Then there are concerns around whether the company is stable and their job is secure,” she says.

“Out of the 16,000 people we surveyed, around 36 per cent said their mental health was poor or very poor, but then if you look at people whose employment status had changed, this was higher. For example, 48 per cent of people who were unemployed said their mental health was poor.

“It’s made employers acknowledge how work is delegated, managed and delivered, how information is managed and what drives positive, and negative, mental health.”

Whether it’s returning from quarantine with heightened concerns or coming off furlough with reduced confidence to grieving lost loved ones and burnout, employers have been compelled to deploy an armoury of digital resources so no one falls through the cracks.

Supporting advertising agency Ogilvy’s 1,200-strong workforce has been part of the “spinning plates” act chief people officer Helen Matthews has found herself in throughout 2020. But an expansion

of the company’s Thrive wellbeing programme, plus a timely new partnership with workplace mental health platform Unmind, have been invaluable, so much so that the launch was brought forward.

“We’ve had a higher engagement rate with Unmind than I thought, showing people are finding it helpful,” says Matthews.

Employee coaching companies have stepped in with digital

resources to support the increasing anxiety about going back to work, from the Comeback Community online platform to the ebooks and webinar launched by Confidence to Return founder Sandie Dennis.

Matthews has also turned increasingly to specialist consultants, who are on standby to support a potential further demand for support. “We’re putting more emphasis on this than the practical stuff; that’s actually the easy bit versus the wellness and psychological side of things,” she says.

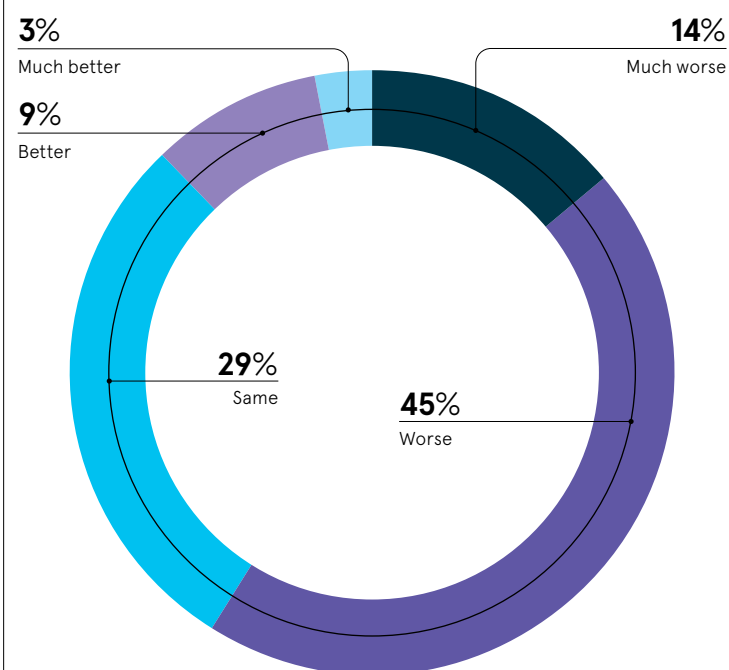
“We’ve contracted with our coaches to be flexible if we suddenly needed to ramp up, which I think we will need to in the summer, when I think even the people who have been chomping at the bit to get back will start to need some help too.”

Coaches, Matthews adds, have been particularly helpful with grief and bereavement. These could be a serious trigger for mental illness, Confidence to Return’s Dennis cautions, due to the trauma of COVID-19 and the effect of delayed grief, and employers should be vigilant.

“There are many things affecting the normal grieving process, which could lead to longer periods of absence, and employees feeling unable to cope,” she notes. “There is

BRITONS’ MENTAL HEALTH HAS SUFFERED DURING LOCKDOWN

Over 14,000 adults were asked in June 2020 how their mental health changed in the past two weeks



also a lot of anger with how the government has handled this, as well as survivor's guilt."

Such feelings are manifesting in workload burnout. Mind's Mamo cites statistics from the Mental Health Foundation that found people have been doing an average of 28 hours' weekly overtime during lockdown.

"People have gone above and beyond to deliver in very challenging circumstances. That's not sustainable. Employers need to be realistic about what needs to be done and how that matches their current resourcing," she says. "Even if going back to the workplace is at a reduced pace, because we've been in such a pressure cooker, people need to be able to decompress."

Confidence to Return's Dennis is hearing how this challenge is becoming more common at many firms. She knows of a financial manager at a large company who was signed off for a number of weeks with burnout after working 12+ hour days with a child at home.

"I've had to bring a lot of the resilience work forward that I was planning with some employee coaches to

help deal with the anxieties and stress of this time," she says. "Employees are reluctant to admit they have burn-out or to book leave, as they want to reprove their commitment and value after having been 'off'."

The point on empathy, as Ogilvy's Matthews has already suggested, alongside inclusive career progression, has been a core pillar of the advertising company's strategy to relieve anxiety about going back to the office.

"We've broken down our manager training into the pillars 'regroup', 'refocus', 'inform', 'include' and 'respond'. We want to make sure inclusion is at the heart of any return, as one of the things people were concerned about is choosing not to return to the office, but then the risk of that hampering their career progression," says Matthews.

Reviewing how management processes impact workplace mental health is something Mind's Mamo says is a positive step forward. "There will be tough times ahead, but getting employers to view their staff as an asset to be invested in, rather than a resource to be used, is a big shift," she concludes. ●



Jessica Chivers

Supporting the returning workforce

Online return-to-work support platforms, such as the Comeback Community, are shaping future corporate culture, according to founder Jessica Chivers (pictured), chief executive of The Talent Keeper Specialists and author of maternity return guide *Mothers Work!*

Via the Comeback Community, leavers can upload their leave plans and have relevant content pushed through to them while they're off. They can also take in practical and inspirational multimedia content, guides and professional progression webinars, supporting both employees and line managers.

"We've adapted our offering to meet the needs of people coming back from leave in this period," says Chivers. "Obviously, sick leave and furlough have not been planned, which can leave residual problems in the mind of the employee: things not tied together, not closing things down properly, stakeholder relationships not carefully managed or cut off."

To improve support for the wider returning workforce, Chivers has conducted in-depth interviews with chief people

officers and heads of learning and development, and wellbeing, to understand the most pressing current themes. These include hybrid working at home and in the office, structure and certainty, Zoom exhaustion, and reconnecting teams.

The results will be released in August, to be followed up with a survey of leave returners. Maternity returners, in particular, are feeling overwhelmed and isolated, anxious about "getting in" with a new team, feeling pressure to reprove themselves while "looking amazing" and concerned about being next in line for redundancy, Chivers notes.

This resonates with Kathryn Imrie, managing director at Sky, who has returned to work from her third maternity leave.

"The pandemic has undeniably increased that pre-return anxiety," she says. "You think, will the world have moved on without me? Do I need to build up my credit in the business and reprove I can do it? But you soon realise these are all doubts you put on yourself. Through multiple training and support programmes provided by Sky, I'm able to cope with those fears better."

Listen to build for the future

Organisations need to nurture a listening culture to harness their employees' trust, energy and creativity to weather the coming storm

Let's not pretend this is going to be easy. The past few months have been difficult on a range of levels. But now the world is opening up for business again, what can you do to ensure your employees are motivated and energised to capture the different opportunities that lie ahead?

It's critical to understand the different ways in which staff might be feeling the challenge, says Arjen Swank, senior employee engagement specialist at Effectory, Europe's leading provider of employee listening solutions.

Some will have been working flat out, perhaps taking on extra work to cover for furloughed colleagues. Others will have had months of inactivity, potentially dealing with illness or even death. Some will be desperate to get back to work. Others may have learnt to enjoy the lack of nine to five and be returning in a very different frame of mind.

If your company has had to make redundancies, people may be worried about their own future and feeling insecure and unengaged.

Leadership's role

Swank believes it is the job of a leader to refocus all these disparate responses, bringing people together into a team and creating a clear vision so everyone is contributing to the same end-goal. "This is a moment to reset corporate objectives and rebuild trust," he says.

Employees perceive...

28%

more performance enablement when they can keep the right balance between work and relaxing (also when working remotely)

Employees perceive...

32%

more performance enablement when they can effectively work together with their colleagues (also when working remotely)

Results of Effectory COVID-19 Workforce Pulse Surveys among 123,000 employees worldwide



Agile strategies

Employee listening surveys, carried out by Effectory for global clients and with responses numbering more than 120,000, show companies are focusing less on long-term strategies at the moment; the horizon is one to two years, instead of the next decade. The coronavirus pandemic has brought to the fore the need to be flexible and agile, a mindset much needed in employees as well as employers.

Employee listening

Don't ignore your staff if you are reformulating corporate strategies, says Swank. Employees are on the frontline of customer service; they see at first hand how your customers are feeling and can monitor what could be very rapid changes in sentiment. If you want a snapshot of customer attitudes, listening to your staff could be the quickest way.

"Staff are also ambassadors for their company," he adds. If they know they will be listened to, they will be more likely to ask for and feedback comments from customers: valuable data for an agile organisation.

Remember that the way your organisation interacts with employees says a good deal about corporate culture. Staff who are stressed and apprehensive need to feel safe and secure if they are to re-engage with corporate goals, and this may be best achieved through smaller teams and local leaders who know individuals personally.

Swank says: "Informal, collaborative leadership will help develop the kind of 'all in it together' mentality that ensures a high level of trust."

Trust works both ways. The past few months have shown that many of us can achieve as much or more by working at

home; offering staff the opportunity to re-engineer their work-home balance could do a great deal to help engage those who are struggling with issues such as childcare. Trusting staff with the autonomy to make decisions that best suit them, as well as the company, can lead to a high level of motivation.

But for such a shift to be sustainable, it needs a corporate culture that allows for disparate working hours; staff may be putting in the hours at times outside the traditional working day.

Now is the time to engage with the brightest minds in your company. "Organisations will need to innovate faster than their peers and you will be missing out unless tapping into the creativity of your staff," says Swank.

To make sure you hear all voices and not just those who shout the loudest, you need a level of objectivity, without the emotion that can come from stressed people in a fast-moving situation.

Questions need to be well thought through to prevent a tsunami of negativity; it's human nature to spot the downsides before the upsides. Responses need to be analysed and followed up, with the outcome being a clear, practical action plan.

Only then will your listening culture ensure the organisation has the flexible and agile mindset needed to cope with whatever the future holds.

For more information please visit www.effectory.com

Effectory
Listen. Learn. Lead.

Driving employee engagement with internal mobility

Internal mobility not only engages staff and retains top talent, it gets the best from an organisation's workforce without time-consuming and costly recruitment

As organisations consolidate their resources as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly important to do more with less. With furloughing and hiring freezes currently commonplace, many businesses have started looking inward to identify how best to use the talent already at their disposal.

Equally, the shift to remote working has accelerated digital transformation plans that have been in the pipeline for years. As workers have been asked to rapidly adapt to new circumstances and technologies, the conversations around employee engagement and reskilling the workforce have moved to the fore.

Against such a backdrop, getting internal mobility right has arguably never been more important.

At its core, internal mobility is a strategy that enables organisations to nurture and retain key talent by matching employees with internal opportunities in which they can optimise their skillsets, helping both the employee and the business grow.

Benefits of such a strategy are vast, but perhaps the most important is double-sided: internal mobility improves employee engagement and, in the process, grows the bottom line.

"Companies that are able to put in place a mobility programme that works are going to definitely be able to adapt to change much quicker," says Agustin Donati, director of product marketing at human capital management software business Avature. "Those that do will be in much better shape because they're going to have the key resources in the right places at the right time."

Where to start

Ascertaining the lay of the land is critical. Human resources directors should review existing internal mobility programmes, starting with the elements that have worked previously, and identifying those that require an overhaul.

As part of this review, HR professionals must consider how well they know their workforce. What are their employees' skills and strengths? How do they perform? Which elements of their role do they most value and why? What are their career aspirations?

The effectiveness of internal mobility technology is determined by the accuracy of this employee information, so it is imperative HR professionals support line managers in

gathering as much qualitative data as possible about their team members' skillsets and job requirements, as well as future career goals.

This data can be gathered through multiple touchpoints, including employee surveys, regular virtual check-ins between managers and employees, and via job portals, all of which can uncover vital insights into workforce sentiment.

These insights can help businesses better engage employees and tailor development opportunities. LinkedIn's 2018 *Workforce Learning Report* found that 94 per cent of employees would stay at an organisation longer if it actively invested in their careers, while a recent survey by The Harris Poll found a lack of career progression is one of the biggest reasons employees quit their jobs.

Internal mobility is an ideal avenue through which to engage and retain talent, granting access to new opportunities across job roles, projects, programmes and short-term gigs, which is vital during the current period of disruption and rapid change.

"We had seen many of our customers focusing on internal mobility even before COVID-19, because companies were starting to see mobility as an asset that would foster career development within the company, as well as attracting key talent to stay in the company for longer. But now with COVID this has changed from being just a nice to have to a must have," says Donati.

It is, therefore, critical that employers review their systems and processes, particularly those with legacy applicant tracking and talent management systems, which Donati says have so far struggled to efficiently match employee skillsets with ongoing opportunities, including new job roles and temporary projects, and subsequently negatively impacted employee engagement.

"Technology created not only a barrier but a black hole," says Donati. "The company was throwing jobs into the black hole and employees were doing the same with their interests and career aspirations, all because the two were not being matched."

Unlocking mobility with technology

Employers need to assess the ease with which existing employees can change jobs and find other opportunities within their organisation. For example, where can they find information about relevant opportunities within the business? Who



are the key points of contact for each role? What is the process for applying for a new opportunity?

"The right technology will allow the company to engage and communicate with its employees, and allow them to provide transparency and visibility," explains Donati, who cites L'Oréal as a business doing things right.

Employee surveys and exit interviews conducted by L'Oréal revealed 50 per cent of employees wanted more visibility into career opportunities within the organisation, while 56 per cent of former employees who regretted leaving the business

identified a lack of visibility into career choices as a key factor behind their departure.

Taking input from global HR leaders across the business, L'Oréal launched its POP (Positions Open Portal) in August 2018 across 70 countries, which is an Avature-built platform that offers employees greater visibility and agency around internal opportunities.

The results, says Donati, speak for themselves. L'Oréal now posts 81 per cent of job openings internally in the first instance, with three quarters of those posted on the career site filled by existing employees. The business has seen a 40 per cent increase in the number of roles filled by internal candidates against external applicants, ensuring those entering new roles are already a proven cultural fit, reducing onboarding costs and the likelihood of future attrition.

Walk don't run

Yet HR professionals must be mindful of the challenges involved in creating a successful internal mobility strategy.

These include securing buy-in from their executive board for an ongoing commitment to internal mobility, whether in the form of an

organisation-wide programme or ad hoc mobility projects involving short-term resourcing, because the strengths and aspirations of employees change over time, much like the strengths and demands of a business.

"Now is a good time to get alignment on what the company needs and its vision, and what the employees need and their vision. That's why communication and an engagement strategy is key," says Donati.

Organisations of all sizes need to consider that employee engagement is likely to look a lot different in the "new normal". Ongoing, meaningful communication with employees is more important than ever and savvy people leaders are taking a proactive approach to internal mobility, placing this critical strategy at the top of their agenda.

For more information please visit www.avature.net/internal-mobility



Companies that are able to put in place a mobility programme that works are going to definitely be able to adapt to change much quicker



Getty, 10 000 Heures

LEARNING

Why future workers will crave L&D

Post-pandemic learning and development will be about fostering flexibility as much as upgrading skills

Hugh Wilson

Employees of staff management software provider RotaCloud get an annual personal budget to spend on learning and development (L&D). While some of them use it to upgrade skills in applications crucial to their role, at least one has used it to learn how to brew beer.

RotaCloud doesn't mind exactly what employees spend their allowance on, as long as it's something new. Denise Jennings, head of human resources, says other members of staff can now crochet, drive and produce amazing family videos thanks to the company's largesse. And she thinks it's all entirely worthwhile.

"Paying for someone to learn how to brew beer might not seem like a valuable use of funds on the surface, but schemes like this keep people engaged and motivated, and fostering a mindset of discovery and learning in a team is vitally important, now more than ever," she adds.

Coronavirus has certainly upped the ante for employee L&D programmes. But long before the pandemic, Gallup research found that L&D was the most important factor in retaining millennials. And in pre-pandemic research by City & Guilds Group, a lack of in-work learning meant two thirds of respondents felt negatively about their career prospects.

Imagine how they feel now. With COVID-19 making jobs more fragile than at any time for at least a decade, and the threat of automation hanging in the air, employees understand that the knowledge they obtain, rather than the company they serve, is their true guarantee of security.

But what knowledge is most useful, now that COVID-19 has sent a series of seismic shocks through the world of work? Businesses face a rolling programme of local lockdowns. Remote work is here to stay, with teams split between those who have to be at work and those who don't. Other trends that have been set in motion or accelerated by the pandemic, including the uptake of artificial intelligence and downsizing of offices, are likely to continue. Inevitably, jobs will be lost.

"There are several periods of adjustment ahead and organisations will need to support employees at each step, taking into consideration, for example, the different needs of workers who have been on furlough and those who have worked continuously," says Lynsey Whitmarsh, chief experience officer at L&D company Hemsley Fraser. "We are likely to experience a series of 'next normals' rather than one 'new normal'."

COVID-19 is just the start. Climate change and the need for a greener economy will usher in fundamental changes to life and work. Many employees already live with the growing threat of automation.

Adapting to a world in a constant state of flux is like trying to hit a fast-moving target. Skills quickly age and, even before COVID-19, the half-life of a job skill had been calculated

at just five years. Businesses naturally want to equip employees with knowledge that makes them more productive. But post-COVID-19 L&D has to be about more than updating technical knowhow. It needs to nurture the ability to adapt.

Dr Simon Hayward, chief executive of leadership, talent and engagement specialists Cirrus and honorary professor at Alliance Manchester Business School, says: "Situations like COVID demonstrate that detailed long-term plans simply don't work in a world that is constantly changing." He advises that organisations and employees alike prepare themselves to adapt to the new reality of ongoing change.

For employees, traits like creativity and curiosity will be key. Greg Orme, founder of London Business School's Centre for Creative Business, believes organisations that help to nurture these traits will be rewarded with employees who are loyal, adaptable and contribute a continual drip feed of good ideas.

"COVID-19 has accelerated technological and societal trends already in play," he says. "Research shows bosses prize creative thinking because they know it's the only way to mitigate the risk of change." For employees, he adds, creativity "is the human superpower to future-proof careers".

Talent development has to adapt to this new reality. The next five or ten years are so shrouded in uncertainty that for many employees nurturing psychological strengths will be as important as updating skills.

"Many companies may not know what roles will be needed in terms of skills and knowledge, so people's capabilities need to be built to help them prosper in any role, things like critical thinking, collaboration, communication, adaptability and resilience," says Peter Carlin,

“Schemes like this keep people engaged and motivated, and fostering a mindset of discovery and learning in a team is vitally important, now more than ever

managing director of digital learning provider Logicearth.

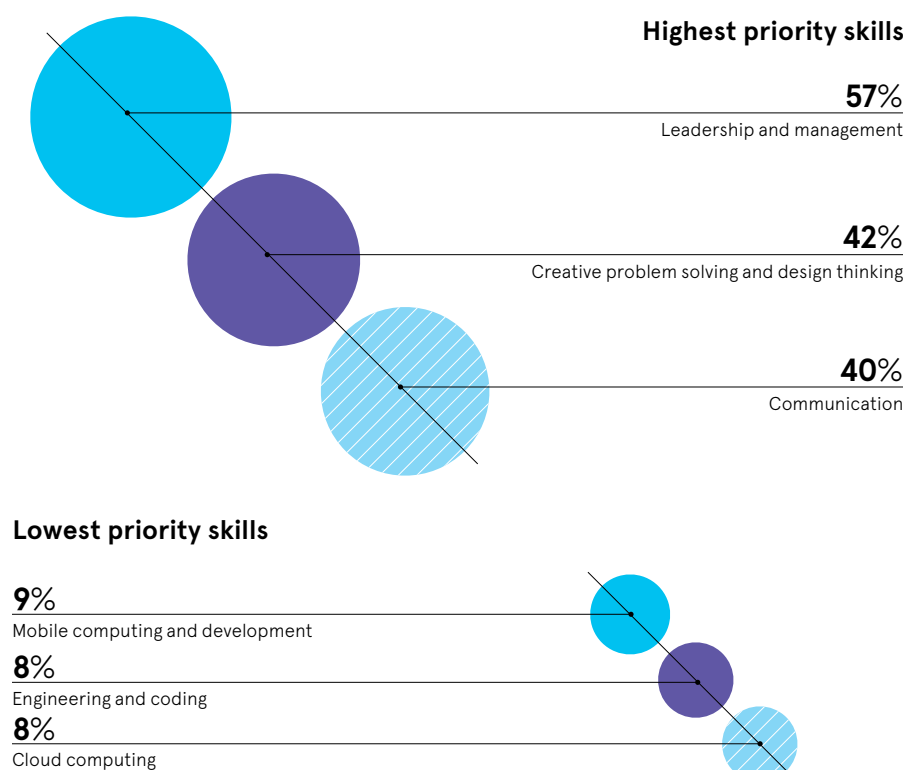
Which is all very well, but how does a corporate L&D strategy take nebulous concepts like creative thinking into account? That's where the beer brewing comes in, explains RotaCloud's Jennings. Learning new stuff, any stuff, can help nurture curiosity and promote creativity.

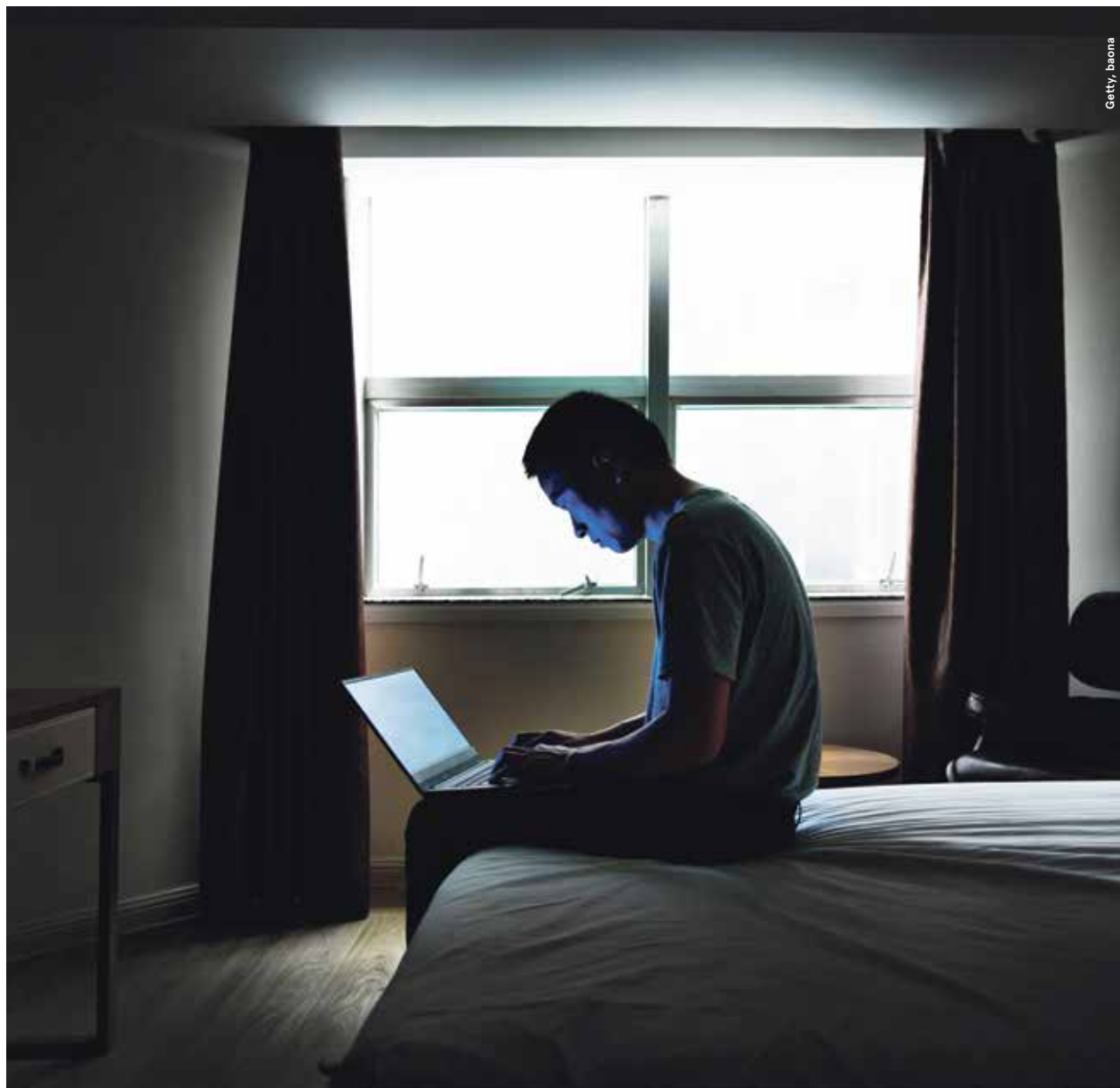
Companies should endorse continuous learning as both an employee benefit and a fast track to career security. In return, "the business gets an employee who is agile, who has the mindset to quickly embrace change and the skills to adapt", she says.

Workers in a post-pandemic world still need the skills to exploit the latest iteration of Salesforce, Slack or Zoom. But COVID-19 has brought the uncertainties of a rapidly changing world into sharp focus. Employees crave opportunities to equip themselves with the means to adapt. As such, lifelong learning strategies are not a cost to be cut in a post-pandemic squeeze, but a path to a more engaged, creative and flexible workforce. ●

SOFT SKILLS TRUMP HARD SKILLS IN 2020

The percentage of L&D professionals who are focused on developing these skills





Getty, bona

HUMAN RESOURCES

Getting fired over Zoom

Exploring the handling, and mishandling, of lockdown redundancies from the employee's perspective can offer insights into how to tackle the sensitive situation of remote job termination

Marianne Eloise

As the coronavirus pandemic has unfolded, the nature of employment has changed rapidly. Lockdown procedures mean employees are working from home, with workers in many sectors finding, for the most part, it's entirely possible to work away from the office. Tools like Zoom, Slack and Teams enable staff to communicate and collaborate effectively at a distance, leaving many questioning the need for offices at all.

On the flipside, however, is that every aspect of the people management process now happens over Zoom, including being made redundant.

Hit by COVID-19, many companies have found themselves flailing financially and hundreds of thousands of jobs have already been lost, with many more employees furloughed. Employers have been left needing to cut positions and video calling may seem like the most personal option of breaking the news.

But bad internet connections, poor communication and a lack of eye contact are just a few things that have left employees in the firing line feeling as if they don't have any closure.

It doesn't look like we'll all be back in offices anytime soon, which means employers may need to continue letting people go over video

chat. But how does being made redundant remotely affect employees? How can employers and human resources leaders manage feelings with empathy while still making the decisions they need to?

Making someone redundant over Zoom doesn't excuse employers from the difficult job of having to manage the complex emotions involved. In fact, it may mean they need to make more of an effort. Deborah, 54, was working for a Silicon Valley tech company after being headhunted by the chief executive. When COVID-19 hit, she had no fear of losing her job until her company called a last-minute emergency meeting. With no warning, she acci-

dentally missed the Zoom meeting, watched the recording and then had to wait three hours to be told she was being laid off.

"When we finally spoke, my boss, whom I considered a friend, was obviously so upset. I felt in that moment like I had to manage her feelings," says Deborah. "If a CEO has to do these layoffs, I think they should offer a chance for the employee to sit and think about what has just happened. If the employee responds with, 'are you OK?', they should say, 'I'm not the one losing my job; you don't have to manage my feelings'." She found the lack of eye contact in particular difficult: "There's a true connection that's forged by eye contact."

A shared experience by people who have been made redundant over Zoom is they all felt they weren't given enough time, either as a warning or to process. Dan, 39, was working in medical research when he was let go. "It was a Zoom call, with no topic in the meeting other than, 'to discuss the end of your furlough'," he says. "I was on video, neither HR nor manager were. It was all very civil and lasted about ten minutes."

That lack of communication, perhaps a result of the employer's awkwardness, is common. Charlotte, 29, was working as a sales developer. "I had no idea. I was asked to attend a meeting with an hour's notice, alongside my colleague who did the same job. I had no idea this was coming," she says.

Danielle, 25, who was working in public relations, did not realise there would be redundancies. "We all received a Slack message on the main channel that there would be an important team meeting after lunch. At that moment I had a gut feeling that it had to do with job cuts and it turned out it was a Zoom meeting with everyone in the company for the chief executive to say that we've all been made redundant."

Jessica, 36, was also not warned. Since the start of the pandemic she had been working remotely to take care of her partner and was told on a Friday in a Zoom meeting with her chief executive, boss and the co-founder. "The meeting started without me having a clear idea of what the meeting was. They did not explain what the situation was and I was asked to speak first. I was in tears by the end of the meeting and

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I was asked to attend a meeting with an hour's notice, alongside my colleague who did the same job. I had no idea this was coming

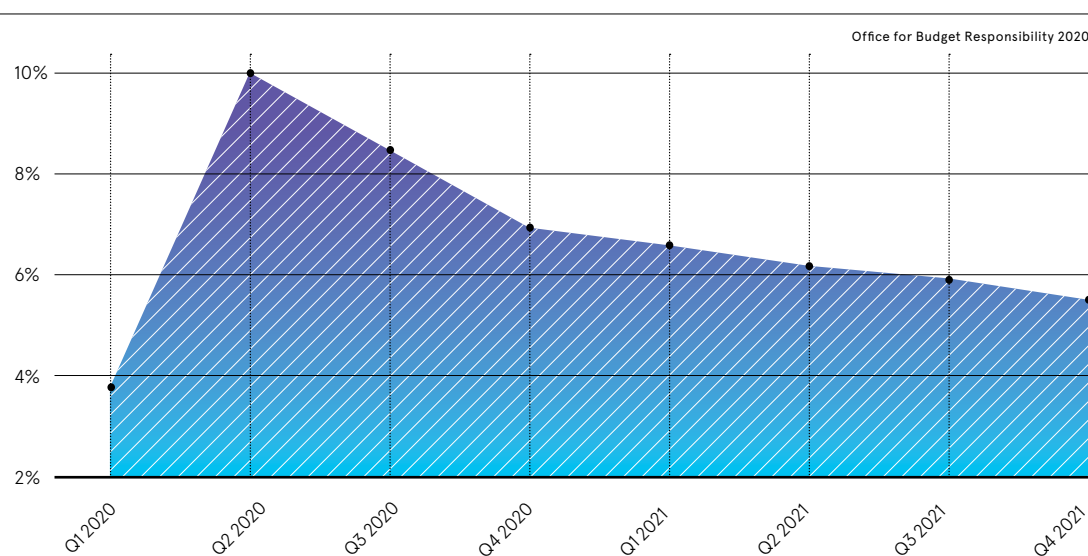
a little in shock," she says, adding she just wishes they had been clear about what the meeting was about.

These stories paint a bleak, inhumane picture of being fired or made redundant in the grip of COVID-19. However, crucially, they can offer important lessons for employers looking to inject empathy into a necessary process. First of all, employees need fair warning, an understanding of what a meeting will be about, so they can go into it emotionally prepared. "I feel that employers need to be transparent and open with their staff and give them as much information as possible if they have to terminate someone," says Charlotte.

Danielle agrees that transparency is key. "It would have been better if we were given prior notice of the possibility of being made redundant or individual meetings could have been arranged to give us a heads-up due to a decrease in cash flow," she says. "They should be open and honest at all times about the rate to which the company is losing its clients. I understand no employer wants to see their company crumble and it can be painful to have to explain this to employees, however the COVID-19 situation is not the employer's fault."

We are all, employer and employee alike, adapting to a new world. There will be complications and growing pains, but what's important is that we remain adaptable and do everything, whether it's hiring, working or firing, with humanity and in keeping with employment law, especially as employees are sent out into an unstable job market and economy. Redundancies are inevitable, but letting people go with empathy is a choice, even over Zoom. ●

UK UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FORECAST TO REMAIN HIGH THROUGHOUT 2021



Understanding the keys to reskilling

Businesses and their staff may need help to identify the talent they possess

Take any assessment of the world of work and the conclusion will be the same: decades-old dynamics have crumbled practically overnight, change is the "new normal" and the only certainty is uncertainty.

But nowhere will the impact of the coronavirus pandemic make the biggest difference than in the supply and demand of labour. Predictions are that the UK economy will this year shrink by 14 per cent, a level that would signal the largest contraction for 300 years, with unemployment conservatively expected to double to 10 per cent.

Job vacancies in May were already at 60 per cent of their levels in March, enough to cause the largest quarterly drop on record, and no one is quite certain what will happen when the current nine million-plus furloughed workers stop being supported by the state. With some academics suggesting unemployment could touch 15 per cent by the end of the year, the usually balanced equation for demand and supply seems drastically out of kilter.

Taken together, the likelihood is the UK economy will move from previously suffering skills shortages to having the people employers need, who might well possess the necessary skills, but are either in the wrong roles or run the risk of redundancy.

This is a parlous position, not just for employees, but for employers, who risk shedding people who actually have more competencies, or propensity to learn, than they might actually be aware of.

As a resetting of the economy takes place over the next 12 months, what employers really need to do is take responsibility. It's well researched that many organisations have little or no idea of the latent talent and skills in their employee pool.

Talent in sub-optimal roles is defensible when times are good, but now employers need to take a much more insight and intelligence-led approach to the skillsets their people possess. Otherwise they run the risk of losing people only a training course or skills update away from being a key employee.

Ultimately, organisational agility and competitiveness depends on speed

to market and quality of execution, so the skills and capability of staff are an important part of this equation. So employers will need to recognise what staff were already worrying about before the COVID-19 outbreak: that in a world likely to feature greater automation and digitalisation, their once-solid skills will need constant refreshing for them to stay employable and agile.

Last year, the annual *Edelman Skills Barometer* found 45 per cent of staff were already concerned their jobs could be obsolete in the next three to five years, with 59 per cent worried they wouldn't have the necessary skills and training to adapt. COVID-19 will only heighten employees' sense of their job being precarious.

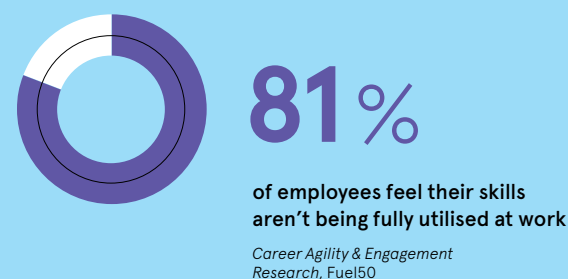
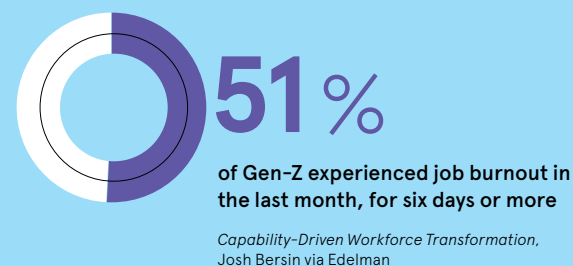
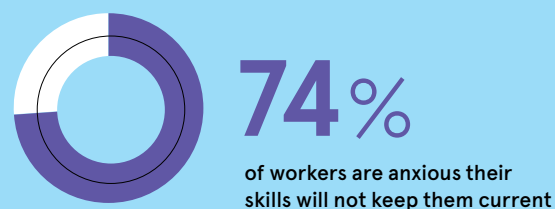
But responsibility around skills must lie with organisations themselves knowing precisely who they have in their organisations. Only then can they identify those with the sorts of skills needed to take on new challenges or who have already demonstrated a learning mindset.

Organisations armed with this data can not only plan, upskill and optimise their workforce so they are more resilient to change, but by having a digital skills platform for staff to see for themselves, they can be huge creators of engagement too.

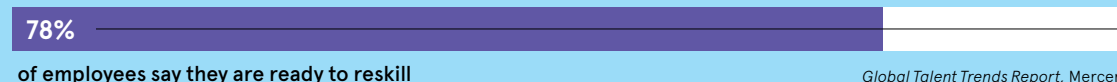
According to LinkedIn, globally there has been a huge groundswell among workers to feel "current": 74 per cent are anxious their skills will not keep them current. Employee activism and demand for help is growing. So the experience staff want now is one where they feel empowered and enabled to take control of their own skills journey.

Fuel50's Talent Marketplace platform enables just this. Staff can not only create their own skills "fingerprints", but they can also see what other internal opportunities might match their capability, or do gap analyses of the skills they need to acquire to be considered for new, potentially different roles or projects.

Staff can also use the platform to see the sorts of skills that are currently most in demand. In short, staff can spot and prepare themselves for the sorts of opportunities that will keep them relevant.



Executives believe that



Global Talent Trends Report, Mercer

FACTORS IMPACTING THE WORKFORCE

- 1 Increasing job automation** PwC
- 2 Decreasing talent availability** OECD
- 3 Decreasing mobility of skilled labour** PwC
- 4 Ageing talent** World Bank Group

TOP CAPABILITIES FROM THE FUEL50 CAPABILITY TRENDS REPORT JULY 2020

- 1 Talent agility**
- 2 Cultural competence**
- 3 Managing remote teams**
- 4 Information transparency**
- 5 Human quotient-empathy for personal experience**

Capability Trends Report, Fuel50



With the right technology, it is clear skills development can develop a momentum all of its own

It's providing this supportive, care-taking role that all successful future organisations will need to transition to. In the uncertain future we now live in, organisations have to do better by their people if a chasm between employers and employees is to be prevented from opening up.

If both are to thrive, it's employers who need to provide the tools for employees to understand how their skills need updating or for human resources leaders to see which skilled people need redeploying.

Further upsides to this are that in providing such technology, organisations can only ever be transparent and inclusive, and promoters of roles

awarded on merit, not skin colour, race, religion or any other sub-conscious biases.

Anne Fulton, founder and chief executive of Fuel50, says: "Through good quality data, talent can be placed on a level playing field. Talent-decision transparency creates fair organisations. In a world where all people need to feel included and are treated equally, the only thing that should drive business strategies going forward is capability."

It's only through good talent and skills data that proper human capital management can flow. It's data that's needed to provide accurate assessments of whether organisations already have the capability they need, or whether they should upskill their existing employees to get it or hire new people.

It can sound like a Herculean task. But technology is now so intelligent it is able to bring a user experience that encourages staff to engage with learning. Experience among our clients reveals typical engagement levels of 85 per cent, with around 74 per cent of staff coming back at least once a month.

With the right technology, it is clear

skills development can develop a momentum all of its own. A robust skills architecture is also needed and FuelArchitecture™ and TalentBlueprint™ methodology help fast track this critical piece of the reskilling puzzle.

The most significant benefit though is that when done correctly, there is a huge opportunity for organisations to become the sort of employer they truly want to be: fair, equal and meritocratic. Talent systems have long been due a reset. Now the reset is here.

But in times like these, it truly is the case that the organisations most likely to prosper will be those that are clear about the capabilities they need to drive themselves forward, while acknowledging the genuine needs of their people in the wake of current world events.

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ACTIVISM

Turning customers into activists

Raconteur spoke to Ben & Jerry's US activism manager, **Jabari Paul**, about the ice cream maker's approach to its advocacy work and how it engages its workforce with a greater corporate purpose beyond profits

Benjamin Chiou

Because white people occupy a disproportionate number of positions of power in our society, it comes at the expense of people of colour."

It's not the traditional messaging you'd expect to read on the website of an ice cream brand, but Ben & Jerry's is unlike most ice cream brands, or most companies for that matter. Known for its unapologetically bold stance on polarising issues, the brand has been an outspoken advocate of the Black Lives Matter movement and a prominent corporate voice calling out the toxic institutional racism that continues to permeate business, government and wider society.

But while recent events may have prompted other brands to dip their toes into the world of corporate social consciousness for the very first time, these aren't new issues for Ben & Jerry's. Known for its humble, hippy beginnings in Vermont in the late-70s, the company now uses its platform as a household name to take an unwavering position on social injustice, and despite being bought out by consumer goods giant Unilever in 2000, is still able to drive its advocacy work independently through its own internal activism team.

Activism is not your typical corporate department, but it enables Ben & Jerry's to deliver on its social mission with more speed and authenticity than a lot of other businesses. And at a time when employees are increasingly demanding that their companies engage with, and campaign for, wider issues beyond the bottom line, Ben & Jerry's can serve as a useful role model for other corporates wishing to make a difference. After all, 73 per cent of working adults would not

apply to a business unless its values aligned with their own, according to a Glassdoor survey in 2019.

This culture of activism appears to stem from the very top. Former chairman Jeff Furman, who served Ben & Jerry's from the early-80s until his retirement in 2018, defined the company as a "social justice organisation that sells ice cream to be able to fuel its advocacy work".

It was this tagline that convinced Jabari Paul to join the Phish Food and

Half Baked manufacturer three years ago. "I was like okay, I never thought that I would be working for a corporation in my lifetime, but I think I can work for this one," Paul recalls in an interview with Raconteur.

Now the head of US activism at Ben & Jerry's, Paul explains that the company's partner-led approach makes it unique when it comes to its "barn-raising model" of activism. By partnering with NGOs, Ben & Jerry's is able to support movements and causes with its profile, ranging from simply supplying ice cream to events and festivals, to using digital media, advertising and marketing to raise awareness, or even amplifying causes directly through its products with branded flavours.

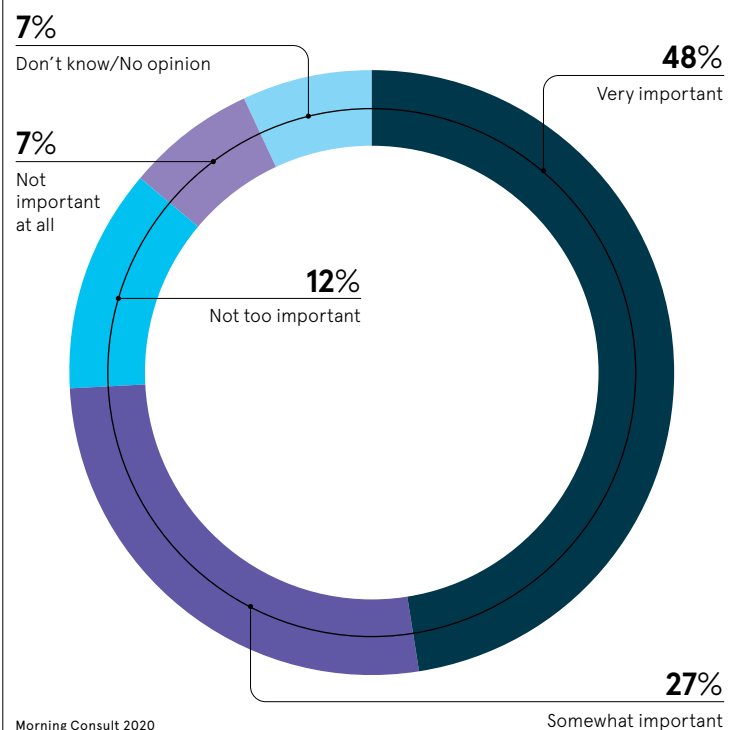
This was the case for limited-time flavour Justice ReMix'd, a cinnamon and chocolate ice cream developed in partnership with racial justice organisations Color of Change and the Advancement Project National Office, to highlight inequalities in the US criminal justice system. In addition to information about the campaign on an eye-catching label, a portion of the proceeds from each sale goes to the Advancement Project National Office to support its work.

The so-called 'land of the free' is home to the highest number of prisoners in the world, with a prison population rate – the number of incarcerations per 100,000 of the national population – of 655, compared to just 107 in neighbouring Canada and 133 in the UK, according to the Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research.

Paul explains that the Justice ReMix'd partnership centres around "fixing our broken criminal justice system, divesting from the prison industrial complex and investing into community programmes, whether that's mental health treatment or drug rehabilitation, but focusing on what could be a better use of funds by municipal

IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS LEADERS ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUALITY

According to US adults who are registered to vote





“
Know what
your values are and
be true to those
values. That's what
we strive to do every
single day through
our work

internal alliance and commitment to each cause. “There is ample opportunity for input from all parts of the business, and they really celebrate the progress that we're able to make from an activism standpoint, because they all have something to do with it at some point along the line.

“All along that process people in various teams are constantly inputting and giving feedback... One of the things that everyone is clear about is that we're all aligned around wanting to affect positive social change in the world.”

Paul says it's important for brands such as Ben & Jerry's to show that they're living up to their values, both through its external work, but also internally. In the company's annual social and environmental assessment report, it laid out its own areas of improvement, such as increasing diversity within the organisation and ensuring racial and social equity across the business.

“I think that everyone has to recognise that the culture of white supremacy permeates every part of society, including corporate America, and so we want to make sure that we are actively participating and dismantling that culture, both outside of the company and inside,” he says.

Moving forward, as BLM protests become less frequent, or simply less visible in the news, and social media posts about racial discrimination are quickly diluted by sun-seekers enjoying their first holidays post-lockdown, many brands previously ‘fighting’ for justice have already moved on, pursuing other trending topics to align themselves with. But Paul remains hopeful that recent events may act as a turning point for more companies to take action in the future.

“Will that be everybody who's come out of the woods in the past few weeks? Probably not. But call me a hopeful optimist, I think there will probably be more brands who really stick to this and show they are true and sincere about their commitment.”

To other businesses who have previously been apprehensive about engaging in uncomfortable discussions about racial inequality, Paul advises one thing: “stay true to your values”.

“Whenever our company has taken a stance, it's not that we hadn't received pushback. But the positivity in the end has always been greater than any sort of negative repercussions. So my advice is, know what your values are and be true to those values. That's what we strive to do every single day through our work.” ●

governments that would keep people out of jails and prisons in the first place.”

Another cause the company has supported is the Close the Workhouse Coalition, an organisation that has been campaigning for years to close down St. Louis's infamous Workhouse jail, part of a wider movement to bring an end to money-based bail practices in the US. The jail, known for its poor living conditions and alleged violations of human rights, is housed predominantly by inmates awaiting trial who are unable to afford their high cash bails, 90 per cent of whom have never been convicted of anything. What's more, nine out of ten of those incarcerated are Black, while less than half of the city's population is Black.

“We've supported [the organisation] by supplying ice cream at community events as a way of helping them to draw people in and have a conversation with them... helping them raise awareness about the issue with local voters in the area through paid advertisements on

social media and billboards in the community,” Paul says.

A bill was passed in early July to defund the Workhouse and reinvest those budgets in community programmes across St. Louis, with plans to close the jail altogether expected by the end of the year. In a statement, Ben & Jerry's labelled the announcement as a “huge victory for community building and criminal justice reform in St. Louis”, adding: “when people mobilise and demand an end to a brutally racist system, change comes”.

Paul, an ordained Baptist minister with an extensive background in the NGO, human and civil rights space, is infectiously passionate about Ben & Jerry's potential to drive real change. He says recent events, in the aftermath of the police killing of George Floyd and the resurgence of the BLM movement, haven't changed the brand's stance when it comes to fighting for racial justice, “but they have accelerated it”.

The 2014 protests in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police killing of unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown, ignited Ben & Jerry's campaign work surrounding this issue, and in 2016 it took the stance to support the BLM movement officially. “That's when our company became very intentional about focusing on issues of racial justice, wanting to engage and work with our partners on dismantling white supremacy, and ending systemic racism,” Paul says.

When it comes to engaging Ben & Jerry's own employees in activism, Paul explains that the cross-functional nature of the projects – campaigns touch each department, from marketing and social media to the people on the ground serving customers – drives an

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that everyone is
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