

Press release
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We need to reassess how we manage teams in future hybrid workplaces.

The ever-present use of technology within corporations and the shift to a more hybrid form of work, demands a critical change in management strategy warns behavioural scientist and marketing expert.

With the end of the furlough scheme looming, managers need to reassess and adapt their leadership style as they continue to embrace the shift in the use of technology within the workplace. Ignore this and corporations face a growing battle to retain staff; a decline in the mental well-being of team members; a detrimental impact on company culture; a fall in productivity and an increase in corporate stress and burnout.

This stark warning comes from Cybercology managing director Carolyn Freeman. As a CyberPsychologist – a specialist in the “psychology of technology” in the workplace - Freeman looks to understand the impact the use of technology has on corporate productivity and individual worker behaviour.

“Covid changed the corporate landscape forever,” says Freeman. “The work-from-home mandate led to a technological tsunami with most workers having to fast-track remote working skills. Even with the end of the furlough scheme, we’re unlikely to ever fully return to the days where all staff are sitting together under one roof. Hybrid working, even partially, is here to stay which will only facilitate a greater reliance on technology.”

While recognising the flexibility that remote or hybrid working offers, Freeman warns that this necessary technological dependency has opened the door to an onslaught of potential issues, such as falling staff retention, lower engagement with team and managers, increase in corporate stress and burnout and a detrimental impact on mental health and disillusionment.

“The old, traditional management strategies may have worked when managers were overseeing staff in the office, face-to-face from nine-to-five. But now these strategies and tools are less effective when managing remote and hybrid teams. Styles must adapt to what is now the new ‘on-screen/in-person’ norm. Companies are facing a worrying surge in new forms of mental wellbeing and behavioural issues among staff if they are not managed and addressed before they occur,” she says.

As a consequence of the pandemic, Freeman identifies a rise in the ‘always-on, always-available’ culture within corporations, in which staff feel they constantly need to be logged on to signal to managers and team members that they are working in order to prove their worth, because their managers are not physically seeing them at their desks.

Likewise, since staff no longer have to move between meetings, there seems to be an increased obligation to attend every meeting online, leaving staff physically, emotionally and cognitively exhausted. What's more, staff have lost that social time to bond with team members, as well as the face-to-face time where brainstorming, quick problem solving, and general work mentoring occurs.

Furthermore, team members working from home are now increasingly setting their own timetables in order to juggle work and home commitments and what works for one member may not work for another. For example, sending or receiving emails at 10pm may be liberating and empowering for some but detrimental and pressurising for others. "While recognising all the benefits of technology, at the same time it has the potential to make staff feel overwhelmed with guilt, insecurities and feelings of isolation. This has to be managed from the top."

This is where the services of Cybercology come into play, with Freeman helping managers identify, develop and implement new management strategies in order to effectively manage working teams going forward.

As the only CyberPsychologist in the UK focussing exclusively on Technology in the Workplace, Freeman completed her Research Master's in mid-2021 at the University of Buckingham – the only institution in the country offering a CyberPsychology research programme. Through extensive research, her dissertation analysed the impact of the use of technology among remote working parents, specifically how they used both personal and work-based technology during traditional private time. As a trained psychologist, this qualification and new speciality adds to more than 15 years corporate marketing experience working for the likes of Coca-Cola, Kimberly-Clark, Nestle and Colgate.

"I've combined psychology with marketing and noted how technology is changing who we are and how we engage with it as adults at work and at home. This includes how we navigate the working world around us and manage our lifestyle choices, how we interact with colleagues, friends and family and how our worldview and interaction with 'others' is shifting along with technological innovation.

"My primary aim is to take CyberPsychology out of the world of academics, forensics and mental health and make it available, relevant and useful and implement it into the workplace and management," says Freeman. "If ever there was a time to address the impact of technology on behaviour in the workplace it is now."

Freeman's hybrid management working tips:

- If you tend to send emails outside of working hours, include a caveat in your signature to say you are not expecting an immediate reply
- Set team expectations around what is or isn't expected of team members working during private time
- Aim to reduce micro-management, as this can reduce feelings of autonomy and competence

- Aim to increase overall information communication as less latent work information is picked up by team members when working remotely
- Encourage employees to use separate devices for work and home-based activities. Doing so reduces the temptation to 'quickly check e-mails'
- Insist on time out during the working day and encourage team members to shut-down completely from work each day. Rumination reduces the ability to recover the mental energy needed to be productive the following day.

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