

Productivity, Innovation & Creativity – The Paradox of Remote/Hybrid Working

There has been much said about productivity when looking at Remote/Hybrid working with employees believing that productivity has increased whilst many employers believe that it has diminished. Furthermore, some employees believe that their workload has increased. Is there, perhaps, a fundamental reason for this line of thinking?

In her book 'Redesigning Work', Lynda Gratton highlighted that when we commute from home to work, we cross from one identity (home) to another (work). We are deactivating our feelings about home and replacing them with feelings about work. When this doesn't happen, we experience 'role spill-over' and this can create stress at home and when working due to home related distractions. Lynda went on to point out that 'toing' and 'froing' between home and work commitments can have a detrimental effect on concentration and focus leading to poor performance. Could this also create the need for people to work into the evenings to catch-up giving a false impression of increased workloads? How does it affect communication?

According to research carried out by HR Review, 48% of Millennials reported that they have had difficulty in communicating with colleagues; whilst research undertaken by Forbes showed that early careers professionals haven't had the benefit of the professional conference networking that is critical for them to build their professional networks and, in doing so, learn the ropes. Much of this will come down to implicit learning (the unstructured learning that would normally be picked up in the workplace) that is no longer spontaneous and so requires good communication between workers in order for such learning to be passed on to others. Could the paradox, mentioned above, be the reason why there is a problem with communication?

Boundaries really matter and it is for the employer to make clear when people should be available in order to undertake the communication & collaboration required to support the innovation and creativity required to support growth for both the employee and the organisation. Their people should be aware of what constitutes the 'normal' working day – in many cases this will already have been outlined in the contract of employment and this commitment to the organisation doesn't change because people are working remotely. Employees also need to find a way of 'shutting out' home life distractions during this period. But what about workloads?

The employer needs to ensure that their staff are not being overloaded with work. The work needs to be 'shared' across the workforce in a fair and consistent manner – whilst ensuring that it is both of value and provides the employee with an opportunity to develop new skills; possibly taking them out of their comfort zone but not to a point where they are put under undue stress. This may also require the employer to put in place a scheme of mentoring (another reason why staff availability and communication are so important) - this will be dependant upon the individual's capability (How much do you know about your employees regarding their capability?). There are some additional thoughts with regard to productivity.

In remote working the employee needs to take control of their work and be aware that, as they now have autonomy over their own work, they are accountable for ensuring that it is adding value to all stakeholders (their colleagues, the customer, investors and the organisation) and for maintaining a customer-centric focus. For this to happen there needs to be mutual trust between the employee and the employer. One area that tends to be forgotten is the need to include the employees in change processes.

By listening and acting upon input from the workforce, employees are encouraged to own the process of change. This has two outcomes. Firstly, it can assist in ensuring a successful outcome

and, secondly, it can provide the agility needed for the organisation to react to changes in the external environment with speed and scale. It may also have a positive effect on productivity. In addition, if employees are to be engaged, employers also need to give thought to whether they have an employee-centric culture as well as a customer-centric culture where employees are supportive of one another – thereby ensuring that people do not become isolated or feel disconnected.

How are you managing productivity, innovation and creativity in a remote/hybrid setting?