

Wellbeing is not a separate policy or program. It has to be built into the leadership culture... it's looking more closely at the way people are managed to see where the problem starts

The smartphone, tablet, laptop and other mobile technologies have allowed people to work outside the office and outside 'normal' hours. This should have given freedom to individuals to manage their own lives and choose when and where to work. In practice it has invaded their private lives and employees are under a subtle pressure to keep in touch 24/7. They are inundated with emails and have to clear down the inbox each day to ensure they've not missed anything important. So what can be done about email overload?

One reaction from employers has been to turn off the email servers out of hours. In 2012, Volkswagen blocked all emails to employees' Blackberries after-hours and Daimler took the step of deleting all emails received by employees while on vacation. But, presumably, the VW employees just had the same full inbox when they came back the following morning and those that wanted to work flexibly were prevented from doing so. This is a good example of attempting to tackle the symptoms and ignoring the cause. It's also a perfect example of a command and control culture taking decisions away from individuals rather than empowering them.

Banning email use 'out of hours' also reflects a culture that assumes work is only performed in the hours set out by the employer. But one of the benefits of digital technology is that it gives people the freedom to choose when they work and gain control of their lives. To create an agile organization which engages a modern workforce, we need a culture that genuinely empowers employees. That means they are able to decide when, where and how to work and most importantly when not to work. It also means rewarding people on results.

In a genuine results-only environment it is not important how the job gets performed. People are not expected to turn up for fixed working hours to sit at a desk and look busy. They are not thanked for working late in the office or putting in extra effort. They are measured on results. If they are smart enough to get the results in half the time it takes their colleagues and spend the other half at leisure, then good for them: and good for the company as well. The best leaders are those who set the strategic direction and are clear on the outcomes but then trust their people to get on with the work using their own talents to the full.

As we move towards the AI driven world leaders will need to adapt rapidly. They will have to consciously manage the organizational culture or lose the best talent and end up with a low productivity workforce. They will need to understand the way technology can empower people and not overwhelm them. And they will need to maintain their human resource with the same care they apply to other key assets.



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